

**JOYCE MEYER**  
**A Critique of *Beauty for Ashes* and *Approval Addiction*, by Joyce Meyer**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Joyce Meyer has become extremely popular through her speaking and numerous books. Although she is not a psychologist, her writings often reference the abuse she suffered in her childhood, and her teachings are similar to the popular psychological "wisdom" about the effects of child abuse. This critique reviews two of her books: "Beauty for Ashes: Receiving Emotional Healing" (1994) ["BA"] and "Approval Addiction: Overcoming Your Need to Please Everyone" (2005) ["AA"]. There is certainly some truth in these books, but it is hopelessly intertwined with psychological error, and great caution is needed.

It is critical to emphasize that the abuse of children is a grievous sin and a real problem in our society. Christians need to respond with compassion, understanding, and hope. This critique is not intended to minimize the harm suffered or the seriousness of the problem, but rather to direct both the perpetrators and victims of such sin to God and His Word, and away from the unreliable theories and methods of modern psychotherapy that appear to offer help yet keep people in bondage.

Meyer's own troubled childhood forms the backdrop for much of her teaching. In *Beauty for Ashes*, Meyer points out the fact of her childhood abuse and expresses her belief that many people who appear "together" are inwardly quite troubled:

"Many, many people seem to have it all together outwardly, but inside they are a wreck. That was my situation before I learned that the Lord's main concern is my inner life. Matthew 6:33 states that we are to seek first the kingdom (remember, it is **within you**) and His righteousness, and *then* these other *things* will be added unto us." (7BA, bold emphasis added)

"I was sexually, physically, verbally and emotionally abused from the time I can remember until I finally left home at the age of eighteen." (12BA)

There is a victim mentality that runs throughout Meyer's writings.

It is **extremely** troubling to observe Meyer's view of her own authority to teach. She appears to affirm biblical teachings about submission to authorities established by God:

"The Bible teaches us to submit to authority.... If we will not submit to man's authority, we will not submit to God's authority either." (212AA)

However, she refuses to even receive **advice** from her own husband on the content of her teaching:

"I receive advice from Dave [Meyer's husband] in every area [of her ministry] except what I am teaching in our conferences and on television. I know I must receive that information from God's Spirit--and not Dave or others--if it is to be anointed. I am a mouthpiece of God, and as such I must be led by Him in what I teach." (211AA)

This attitude is quite dangerous, in that Meyer places herself beyond the reach of discernment, criticism, or authority. In light of man's sinful nature, no human being is a "mouthpiece of God" so completely beyond the realm of biblical authority, instruction, or correction.

## 2. REVELATION/SCRIPTURE

Meyer holds a distorted view of revelation and the manner in which God speaks to us, placing her own interpretations above others and often reading her psychological views into Scripture. As noted in the introduction, she claims direct revelation from God **beyond His revealed Word**:

"It is also important to realize that God has different calls on our lives. Since He has called me to teach His Word, it was better for me to receive the truth I needed directly from Him. However, that is not a rule for everyone." (44-45BA)

At the beginning of one chapter, Meyer describes an incident where she prayed with a woman who had described a particular bondage in her life. Meyer had a "vision" of the woman standing on a track, and a "message" she believes came from God (59BA), but there is no indication that she counseled this woman from Scripture. Meyer places her own supposed "revelation" from God on the same level as Scripture. This is a dangerous practice.

In teaching others about receiving God's guidance, Meyer acknowledges the power of Scripture yet relies more on **feelings** than on the study of God's Word and the instruction of ordained church leaders:

"God's Word has inherent power in it. When we release our faith in His Word, that power is released into our lives and situations to help us." (117AA)

"Sometimes we don't feel peaceful about a certain thing, and we don't have any idea why. The Scriptures teach us to follow after peace; it is one of the ways God leads us." (182AA)

She does leave some room for consideration of the views of others:

"We must not automatically reject what others think, but we must not let it control us either.... You are an individual, with individual rights. Don't let anyone steal from you what Jesus died to give you--which is the freedom to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit for you as an individual." (165AA)

Notice, here, that Meyer's claim about "what Jesus died to give you" is contrary to the gospel. *He died to free us from the penalty and power of sin.* Biblically, believers are to test what they hear, like the Bereans, to see whether it conforms to Scripture. This critique, for example, is intended to help Meyer's readers to carefully discern between truth and error in her teachings. Her view of revelation is tainted with feeling-oriented language and claims to divine revelation beyond Scripture, rather than the study of what God actually says in His Word.

**Eisegesis.** Meyer repeatedly engages in *eisegesis*, reading her own psychologized worldview into Scripture, rather than engaging in *exegesis* to draw out of the passage the message that God intended. Following are three examples of this practice.

1. In John 3:22ff, certain disciples brought a report to John the Baptist about the fact that Jesus was baptizing people. Meyer assumes, without support from Scripture, that these messengers were insecure and/or attempting to stir up jealousy:

"This message was carried to John in a wrong spirit; it was intended to make him jealous. The disciples who brought the report were obviously insecure and being used by the devil in an attempt to stir up some wrong feelings in John toward Jesus." (132BA)

Scripture is silent as to the motives of the messengers. It is possible they were jealous, but not "obvious" as Meyer claims. They might have been honestly confused and seeking clarification. Much of Meyer's teaching is focused around insecurity and its alleged effects, and she imposes this onto Scripture rather than seeking to understand what God intends to say. This particular passage emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ, as John the Baptist points out in his response (see John 3:27-36).

2. Meyer also reads her views about insecurity onto the well-known text (Matthew 7:24-27) where Jesus instructs us to build our lives on His Word, the "rock":

"The Bible encourages people to build their lives on solid rock, not sand.... If we try to build our lives on what people say and think of us--how they treat us, how we feel, or our past mistakes--we are building on sinking sand.... Before I experienced the healing power of Jesus Christ, my life was like a house built on shifting sand rather than solid rock. My foundation was weak. I was not secure, **I did not like myself**, and I was filled with guilt and shame from abuse." (187AA, emphasis added)

This passage is about building our lives on the solid rock of God's Word. Of course, it is wrong to substitute the opinions of other people for the Word of God, but Meyer reads a great deal more into the text, presupposing her own psychological views about self-hate and insecurity.

3. Meyers believes that Jesus practiced "tough love," because "whenever possible He helped them help themselves...He instructed them to take some particular action" (for example, the crippled man in Matthew 9:6, raising little girl in Mark 5:35-36, blind man in John 9:1-7):

"Instead of merely feeling sorry for these people, Jesus moved them to action. He helped them get their minds off themselves and their problems, and He motivated them to do something about them." (210AA)

The well-worn phrase, "God helps those who help themselves," is not a biblical concept. On the contrary, Christ died for us "while we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8), spiritually dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) and unable to resurrect ourselves. We do have biblical responsibilities to take action, and God has prepared good works for us to do as His redeemed people (Ephesians 2:10), but the accounts of Jesus' miracles have a completely different purpose.

Matthew 9:6 explains the purpose of Jesus' command to the paralytic to take up his bed and walk. It was so the audience would know that Jesus Christ had the authority on earth to forgive sins. Only **God** has such authority. Jesus knew the evil thoughts of the scribes, who accused Him of blasphemy, and He responded with the command to the paralytic. Nothing in the text indicates that the paralytic was being encouraged to "help himself."

Jesus command to the 12-year-old girl in Mark 5:35-43, to "arise" and walk, proved that she was not dead, as those from the synagogue official's house had announced (5:35). As in Matthew's account of the paralytic, the deity of Christ is at the forefront of the text. Christ demonstrates His power to raise the dead.

The healing of the blind man in John 9:1-7 is similar. Jesus explains that the man's blindness is not the direct result of his own or his parents' sin, but rather that the glory of God might be displayed. Jesus healed in many different ways, and this text says nothing as to why He used this particular method, applying clay to the man's eyes and instructing him to wash in the pool of Siloam. Like the miracles in Matthew 9 and Mark 5, this one highlights the deity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who has the power to heal the sick and raise the dead.

### **3. DOCTRINE OF GOD**

Meyer holds a deficient view of God and His sovereignty. Her view subjects God to the will of man:

*"No matter how many wonderful plans God has in mind for you, there is one thing you must know: God's ability to bring His will to pass in your life is determined by your faith in Him and His Word. If you truly want to be happy and successful, then you must begin to believe that God has*

a plan for your life and that He will cause good things to happen to you as you put your trust in Him." (92BA, emphasis in original)

"The Holy Spirit is grieved because He is sent to bring God's plan to pass in your life, and He never is able to do it without your cooperation." (95BA)

"Careful study of this verse [Isaiah 30:18] reveals God as One Who is literally waiting for an opportunity to be good to us, to bring justice into our situations. However, He can do that only for those who are expecting and waiting for Him to do so. Give up the labor of 'self-protection' and start allowing and expecting God to protect you." (160BA)

"It is not God's will for us to be controlled by anybody except His Holy Spirit, and even that decision He leaves up to us. God won't even force His will on us, so we certainly should not let anyone else do it." (207AA)

God's ability is not limited in this manner. Of course it is important to trust in Him, but nevertheless, He works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). His ability to do so is not limited by man. Moreover, even our faith is a gracious gift of God (Ephesians 2:7-9).

Some of Meyer's comments are a mixture of truth and error:

"Even though the Lord has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5), when we get ahead of God and begin to 'do our own thing,' we are in dangerous territory. Our heavenly Father is under no obligation to sustain us in bearing trials that were never a part of His plan for us." (49BA)

Yes, it is indeed dangerous to attempt to "get ahead of God" and "do our own thing." Yet while God is not **obligated** to sustain us in the resulting trials, just as He was not **obligated** to send Christ to die for our sins, He is gracious and compassionate and often does sustain us through the trials caused by our sins. The entire Old Testament is a witness to His incredible mercy and compassion, as He dealt with His rebellious people. Moreover, such trials are not outside of His plan for our lives; see, for example, Hebrews 12:5-6.

Perhaps one of the worst problems with Meyer's theology is a statement that borders on pantheism:

"Diamonds have many facets. God is like a flawless diamond, and each of us represents a different facet of Him. He has placed a part of Himself in each of us, and we corporately make up His Body." (96BA)

Yes, believers corporately are Christ's church, often referred to figuratively as His body. His Spirit lives in those who belong to Him. However, God has not placed "a part of Himself" in each believer. Meyer's statement is confusing at best, and it comes close to attributing deity to human beings rather than preserving the Creator-creature distinction found in Scripture.

Meyer's limited view of God's power and compassion is one that hinders the believer's growth rather than encouraging it.

#### **4. MEDICAL MODEL**

Meyer's view of how people change is grounded in the erroneous psychological "medical model" that confuses the distinctions between sickness and sin, and between healing and sanctification. Like the popular 12-step groups, the "recovery" movement, and psychologists in general, she views change in terms of "wounds" and "healing" rather than sin and sanctification:

"Our emotions are part of our makeup, and they can wear out or become sick like any other part of the anatomy.... If you have an emotional wound in your life, Jesus wants to heal you." (105AA)

Meyer's assessment of her own situation reveals the subtle shift in responsibility that results from squeezing sin into a medical model:

"My problems were not in my home life or my marriage, but in me, in my wounded, crippled emotions." (21BA)

"It never occurred to me that I was suffering from the years of abuse and rejection that I had gone through. I thought that all that was behind me. It was true that it was no longer happening to my physically, but it was all recorded in my emotions and in my mind. I still felt the

effects of it, and I still acted them out. *I needed emotional healing!*" (22BA)

Even when Meyer acknowledges personal responsibility, her comments are polluted by the medical model with its faulty views of causation and change:

"This book [*Beauty for Ashes*] will deal not only with the emotional pain caused by what others may have done to you, but also with your responsibility to God for overcoming those traumas and getting well." (11BA)

"God showed me that some people pray for healing and even say, 'I forgive those who hurt me,' so He begins a work, a healing process. But they won't allow Him to complete His work because they keep re-opening the wound." (115BA)

The medical approach colors Meyer's view of what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross:

"God has already sent Jesus Christ to come to earth and purchase your complete healing. Once that was accomplished, he sent His Holy Spirit to administer to you what was bought by the blood of His Son." (43BA)

"The 'healing package' purchased by Jesus with His blood is available to all who will believe and receive. That package includes the healing of the emotions as well as the body." (80BA)

While it is true that ultimately, in heaven, there will be no more sickness or sin, these two must be distinguished while we are on this earth. True illness is not always healed in this lifetime. Godly people may suffer, and contrary to Meyer's claims, they cannot always opt out. Believers continue to sin, but Christ has broken both the penalty and power of sin (see Romans 6), and we *can* expect increasing victory over sin. Moreover, it truncates the work of Christ to describe it as a "healing package" that fails to mention God's pardoning of our *sins*.

Like psychologists, Meyer focuses on the role of emotions. She rightly advises readers to "trust God to change your feelings," but goes on to say that:



"...feelings (emotions) are a major factor in the process of healing and the issue of forgiveness...His [God's] part is to heal your emotions, to make you feel well and not wounded.... Only God has the power to change your feelings toward the person who hurt you" (117BA).

At least, in the midst of the sin-sickness confusion, Meyer points her readers to God's Word:

"We must spend time reading and studying God's Word, because it has inherent power to heal. The Bible says we are to attend to God's Word because it brings health and healing to all of our flesh (see Proverbs 4:20-22). Our emotions and our mind are part of what the Bible calls 'the flesh.'" (242AA)

Even this statement must be read with caution, however. God's Word is powerful, but reading it does not guarantee (in this lifetime) the healing of what is truly disease. It does guarantee to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12) and to provide correction and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

## **5. VICTIM MENTALITY**

One of the most serious problems with modern psychotherapy, both secular and "Christian," is the tendency to view people as victims rather than sinners. This "victim mentality" runs through Meyer's writings.

Meyer claims that she used to perceive her own childhood abuse as a fault in herself rather than those who sinned against her:

"My father's abusing me was not a fault in me, but I saw it as one. It had to be dealt with. It had to be exposed in order for me to be an emotionally, mentally, spiritually healthy individual." (75AA)

"I had been abused, and that was not my fault. It was true that I had some problems that were a direct result of the abuse I had suffered; but what I needed was to stop using it as an excuse not to change." (131-132AA)

It is true that the sins of others are not an excuse for refusing to change, but Meyer confuses the issue when she attributes her own later sin to this early abuse:

"Having been hurt and not yet knowing God's ways of doing things, I ended up hurting my own children." (126BA)

### **CAUSATION**

It is this alleged causal link between early childhood abuse (the sins of others), and an individual's own sin later in life, that is so disturbing and unbiblical. Meyer makes sweeping pronouncements as to this causal link:

"If we start our life rooted in rejection, it is equivalent to having a crack in the foundation of our house." (186AA)

"I had no frame of reference other than the way I was raised. I had rotten, diseased roots, and therefore, I had bad fruit." (190AA)

Meyer proposes a chain of causation that impacts one generation after another:

"So often, troubled people marry troubled people. After they have destroyed each other, their problems are transferred to their children, who in turn become the next generation of troubled, tormented people." (144BA)

If this chain of causation is traced back far enough, we reach Adam and Eve, who had no earthly parents to blame--but tried to blame God.

Meyer's view of anger is a good example of where this path takes us. Scripture has much to say about ungodly anger (see, e.g., Proverbs 15:1, Ephesians 4:25-31, Colossians 3:8, Galatians 5:19-20), but Meyer traces it to the sins of other people rather than the angry person's own heart:

"...when we look at the root of excessive anger issues, they almost always find their seed in earlier problems." (143AA)

"A wounded person cannot receive emotional healing while remaining angry." (144AA)

"People who have been hurt not only get angry, but often they also seek compensation for injustices done." (147AA)

Following Meyer's path leads to the conclusion that an angry person's seeking vengeance is actually the fault of another. Rebellion, poverty, "approval addiction," inability to maintain good relationships, feelings of rejection, inability to express feelings, poor self-image, internalized shame, *but also positive accomplishment*, are all allegedly rooted in what others have done in the past:

"Rebellion is frequently rooted in rejection. Rebellious people have experienced the pain of rejection. These people are angry, and their anger is an inner rage that manifests itself in rebellion." (197AA, underlining added)

"A life of poverty can also be the result of rejection.... I know people who will never have much of anything simply because of the way they feel about themselves." For example, "I will never own my own home." (197AA, underlining added)

"When God brought light into my life, I began to realize I was uncomfortable with a strong male authority figure because my father who abused me had a strong personality." (243AA, underlining added)

"The root cause of an approval addiction is usually an emotional wound." (106AA, underlining added)

"Abuse leaves a person emotionally handicapped, unable to maintain healthy, lasting relationships. I wanted to give and receive love, but I couldn't. Like my father, I was controlling, manipulative, angry, critical, negative, overbearing and judgmental. All that I had grown up with, I had become. Filled with self-pity, I was verbally abusive, depressed and bitter." (21BA, underlining added)

"What form it [abuse] may take, abuse causes a root of rejection, which is a major problem in our day. God created people for love and acceptance, but the devil works hard to keep us feeling rejected because he knows how rejection injures us emotionally and otherwise." (9BA, underlining added)

"I believe that my inability to express my true feelings about what was happening to me, and my being forced to act as though I enjoyed it, left me with many deep-seated emotional wounds." (13BA, underlining added)

"People who have been abused, rejected or abandoned usually lack confidence...such individuals are shame-based and guilt-ridden and have a very poor self-image." (91BA, underlining added)

"Because my father sexually abused me, I felt shame, which I internalized... I became ashamed of myself because of it." (129AA, underlining added)

"I once heard that 75 percent of all world leaders have been abused and have experienced severe rejection. When I heard that statistic, I was amazed. It is simply because those who have been abused and rejected work harder than most people to accomplish something important so they will be accepted." (198AA, underlining added)

How does Meyer know for certain that those who have been sinned against, yet accomplish something important, are doing so in order to be accepted by others? How would Meyer explain the sins of those who have not been seriously abused, those who are raised in godly homes but turn away? What about people who accomplish great things but were *not* the victims of early childhood abuse? Where is personal responsibility for sin in this picture, where so many life problems are attributed to the sins of others?

### **MEMORY RECOVERY**

Focus on the past sins of others often leads to an emphasis on retrieving the memories of those sins and "dealing with" them:

"Such people [those in recovery from abuse] must get out of their denial and face the truth. There may be things they have forgotten because they are too painful to remember, things that will have to be recalled and faced during the healing process." (45BA)

Scripture is misused in order to support this theme:

"Personally, I will always believe that my mother's emotional collapse was the result of the years of abuse she had endured, and the truth that she refused to face and deal with. Remember, in John 8:32 our Lord told us: ... **you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.**" (16BA)

This particular passage in John is often cited by psychologists to support the memory-recovery theme, but the *truth*, in the context of this verse, is the *gospel*, not facts about past abuse. Nowhere does Scripture command us to recall, rehash, or replay the sins committed against us in the past, in order for our sanctification to proceed.

### UNMET NEEDS

The victim mentality also tends to emphasize unmet individual needs, rather than serving God and others:

"We all have needs, especially emotional needs...acceptance, approval, and enjoyment." (168AA)

Meyer, like many others, responds with the claim that God can fill the gap and meet those needs:

"Don't look to others to meet your needs, look to God. Anything people may do to you, God can fix." (148BA)

"...if while you were growing up you did not receive what you needed to make you sound and healthy, Jesus will gladly give it to you now." (23BA, citing Ephesians 3:17, Colossians 2:7, John 15:5)

"I believe the point is being well made [citing Jeremiah 17:6] that many are having trouble and are very unhappy, simply because they are looking to people to meet their needs when they should be looking to God." (146BA)

Does God meet our needs? Absolutely! Should we look to Him to supply our legitimate needs, according to His riches? Yes! However, problems occur in the self-focused defining of needs--acceptance, approval, and enjoyment--rather than, for example, boldness to speak the gospel or resources to serve God. Moreover, Meyer (along with others) is critical of those who set aside their own needs to serve others:

"People-pleasers quickly and regularly set aside their own legitimate needs." (166AA)

It can be a problem to set aside truly legitimate needs (e.g., health or sleep) to serve the sinful agendas of other people in order to win their approval. However, godly people are called to put God and others ahead of self, at times setting aside their own needs and desires for the sake of God's kingdom. Throughout history (and still today), there are martyrs for the Christian faith, who sacrifice even their own lives. How would these saints respond to the psychological teaching that their own "needs" for acceptance, approval, and enjoyment are more important than the gospel?

## **6. SIN - GUILT - SHAME - SALVATION**

Like many who accept the errors of modern psychology, Meyer holds a deficient view of sin that minimizes its gravity. She defends herself against the accusation that she has claimed to be without sin:

"I have received more judgment and criticism from some religious people over the one issue of righteousness than over anything else I teach. I have been accused of saying I am without sin, which I have never said. I know I do wrong things; I sin, but I don't concentrate on and continually fellowship with my sin." (40AA)

While this admission is encouraging, Meyer does not appear to grasp the seriousness of sin or define it correctly. In a section called "Accidental Sin" (citing 1 John 3:9), she says:

"I like to put it this way: I used to be a full-time sinner, and once in a while I accidentally slipped up and did something right.... I still make mistakes, but not nearly as many as I once did.... I do not deliberately, knowingly commit sin. I do not habitually sin.... I don't do everything right, but I do know that the attitude of my heart is right." (42AA)

Citing Romans 7, she also says:

"I am so glad God sees our hearts and not our sins!" (43AA)

The first quote seems to be a rough description of progressive sanctification, but also reflects a deficient view known as

Pelagianism, which defines sin as the voluntary transgression of known law, teaches that moral excellence is self-acquired by voluntary choice, denies the imputation of Adam's sin (thus destroying the analogy to the imputation of Christ's righteousness, taught in Romans 5:12-21), denies inherited depravity, and denies that regeneration and sanctification occur through God's sovereign grace. In short, Meyer gives too much credit to herself (and other sinful human beings) and too little credit to God for His vital role in salvation and sanctification. Both quotes ignore the biblical truth that sin arises out of the *heart* of man (Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 7:18, Matthew 12:18). Moral actions may not be abstracted from the "heart" from which they spring, the motives and moral character of the person. Yes, God sees our hearts, and He forgives our sins, but these two are not disconnected. Sin has its seat in the heart, which is the center of man's will, thoughts, emotions, desires. Scripture describes man's heart as deceitful and desperately wicked, fully known only by God (Jeremiah 17:9). Psalm 19:12 is a cry to God to forgive the psalmist's *hidden* sins.

Meyer's view of sin in the Old Testament recognizes man's inability to avoid sin originating in the heart:

"One of the Ten Commandments is, 'Thou shalt not covet.' (Ex. 20:17 KJV.) The Old Testament Law stated that a person had to earn God's favor by perfection and by continually offering sacrifices to make up for his imperfection. This was impossible! If people worked and struggled hard enough, they might be able to keep the first nine commandments. But that tenth one--'Thou shalt not covet'--they could not keep, because it had to do with the heart and desire of the individual." (129BA)

This quote, while acknowledging the link between sin and the heart, raises even more problems with Meyer's concept of sin. Those Old Testament sacrifices *pointed to Christ*. Justification is the same for both Old Testament and New Testament believers (Galatians 3:9, 13-14; Romans 4:22-24; Hebrews 13:8)--an act of God's free grace. No one ever "earned" God's favor by "perfection" (Romans 3:23), and it is appalling to see Meyer's claim that the people might actually be able to keep the first nine commandments if they worked hard enough. Note the descriptions of sin in Genesis 6:5 (where the Flood is announced) and 8:21 (after the Flood). Man's wickedness is extensive, total, inward (every purpose of the thoughts of man's

heart), exclusive (*only* evil), constant (every day, all day), and innate (from his youth, not learned or acquired later). (See also Psalm 51:5, Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:16-20, John 3:6, Ephesians 2:1-3 [by nature children of wrath], Romans 8:5-8.)

**Guilt.** Sin involves both guilt (needing God's forgiveness) and pollution (needing God's sanctification). Meyer, in sync with modern psychotherapy, repeatedly confuses the concept of guilt by equating it with a feeling (emphasis added through underlining):

"We feel we are earning God's forgiveness by feeling guilty. It is our fleshly way of 'paying' for our mistake." (40AA)

"Shame is not to be confused with guilt and condemnation. Guilt is a huge problem in our society today because most people experience plenty of it. The devil wants all of us to feel *wrong* about ourselves." (63BA)

"The Lord once gave me a great revelation about guilt. I had felt guilty as long as I could remember.... What is guilt? How does it feel? Guilt is a heaviness, an unbearable burden that depresses the spirit.... Guilt makes everything seem dark and heavy. It makes us feel tired and weary. Actually it draws our energy and saps the strength we need to resist sin and Satan. So the result is that guilt and condemnation actually increase sin." (65BA)  
(Meyer's "great revelation" had to do with acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice.)

"At that moment I knew that I could wait two or three days until I felt guilty long enough and then accept God's forgiveness, or I could receive that pardon right then." (66BA)

"Guilt, as a work of the flesh, declares that you are trying to pay for your sin." (66BA)

"It seems people feel they have to hide emotional pain and pretend it isn't real, or they may even feel guilty for having it." (105AA)

"I had felt guilty most of my life about one thing or another. I learned that I was a 'guilt addict.' I just didn't feel *right* if I didn't feel *wrong*." (134AA)



"...it is not God Who is making us feel that way [guilty and condemned]. He wants us to feel loved and forgiven. Guilt depresses us and makes us feel as if we are under a burden." (135AA)

"...I would spend hours and even days feeling guilty about each little thing I did wrong. I was literally tormented!" (37BA)

Scripture does not portray guilt as a feeling, but an objective fact, i.e., the transgression of God's law. A person may experience *conviction* for sin and a *sorrow* that can be either godly (leading to repentance) or ungodly (leading to despair) (see 2 Corinthians 7:10). Whatever emotional experience Meyer is describing in these quotes, it is not biblically defined *guilt*. She comes much closer to the truth when she talks about accepting Jesus' sacrifice and God's forgiveness. A believer's joy is restored by confession of sin (to God, and to others as appropriate), and receiving the pardon promised in Scripture.

**Shame.** In describing Adam and Eve before the fall, Meyer claims that:

"Besides the fact that they were not wearing any clothes, I believe it [their lack of shame although naked] means that they were totally open and honest with each other, hiding behind no masks, playing no games. They were completely free to be themselves, because they had no sense of shame. Once they had sinned, however, they went and hid themselves." (68BA)

Meyer's focus on being "open and honest" is misplaced. God created Adam and Eve to be morally upright. Prior to the fall, *they had not sinned*. Their "sense of shame," and attempt to hide from God, arose from the knowledge that they had disobeyed God's command and sinned against Him.

Meyer describes shame, in herself and others, in terms of feeling bad about *self* rather than any conviction of sin:

"I always felt defeated because no matter what I accomplished on the outside, I still felt bad about myself on the inside. *I was ashamed of me!* I didn't like who I was. I didn't like my basic personality. I was

continually rejecting my real self and trying to be someone or something I was not and never could be." (69BA)

"Shame causes self-rejection and, in some cases, even self-hatred. In more extreme cases, it can develop into self-abuse, including self-mutilation." (75BA)

"If you are prone to depression, it may be a sign of a deeper problem, a root of shame. Those who are shame-based think and speak negatively about themselves. Such wrong thinking and speaking places a heavy weight on the spirit." (72BA)

"Very often a person with a shame-based nature experiences depression. It is impossible for anyone to feel happy if he doesn't like who he is, or if he feels ashamed of himself." (133AA)

"People with a shame-based nature like to place blame. It diverts their attention from the way they feel about themselves for a period of time." (132AA)

This focus on self ignores the rupture between God and man that underlies our shame. The answer to shame, viewed biblically, is in the gospel, looking away from self rather than focusing inward in search of some elusive "real self." At points Meyer seems to recognize the problem:

"One of the problems with shame is that it creates a type of reverse self-centeredness. Shame-based people think about themselves most of the time; even though they are concentrating on what is wrong with them, their mind is still on themselves." (137AA)

However, as we will examine later, Meyer places an extraordinary emphasis on self-worth, self-love, and numerous other hyphenated "selves." For example:

"They [guilt addicts] look to others to give them what only God can give, which is a sense of self-worth." (135AA)

**Insecurity.** Another major concern about Meyer's doctrine of sin is her correlation of sin with insecurity, even to the extent that she proposes insecurity to be a *cause* of sin:

"What causes jealousy? I believe that one of its major causes is insecurity, a lack of knowledge of what it means to be 'in Christ.'" (129BA)

"Let us lay aside *jealousy, envy, competition* and *comparison*. Remember, these problems are rooted in insecurity. The good news is that we can be free from insecurity and therefore free from the problems it causes." (136BA, citing Isaiah 54:17)

Contrary to Meyer, Scripture teaches that our lusts and sinful motives are the cause of jealousy, quarrels, and conflicts (James 4:1-3)--not insecurity.

**Sin and Relationships.** In discussing approval "addiction" (better described as the fear of man), Meyer says that:

"A relationship is not healthy if one person is in control while the other struggles for approval, gaining it by being ready to do anything the other party wants, no matter what it is or how that individual feels about it personally. If we have to sin against our own consciences in order to have someone's approval, we are out of the will of God." (99AA)

Although the medical terminology ("healthy") is inappropriate, this quote describes the fear of man. Meyer also points out that: "Maintaining healthy relationships occasionally requires confrontation" (103AA). Yes, it is sometimes biblically appropriate to confront another person's sin in order to maintain *godly* (a better word than "healthy") relationships. It is important, in both instances, to define sin according to God's Word rather than the polluted values of modern psychotherapy (e.g., setting "boundaries" to protect self).

**Sin and Revenge.** At several points, Meyer connects sin with the desire for revenge against others:

"Unjust treatment, abuse of any kind, leaves an 'unpaid debt' in the spirit realm. Such 'debts' are felt in the mind and the emotions." (123BA)

"Have you labored in vain, have your efforts been useless? Are you worn out physically, mentally and emotionally from trying to pay back all those who hurt you or all those whom you have hurt?" (124BA)

"Turn the business of debt collecting over to the Lord Himself. He is the only One Who can do the job properly. Align yourself with His ways, and He will collect your debts and repay you for all your past hurts." (125BA)

Meyer's description of an "unpaid debt in the spirit realm" is questionable, or at least truncated. Our "unpaid debt" is first and foremost to God (Psalm 51:4). Christ satisfied divine justice on the cross, paying that debt for those who trust in Him for salvation. It is true that vengeance belongs solely to God (Romans 12:19-20). However, it is God's justice that must be satisfied. Meyer appears more concerned that God "pay us back what is owed us" (123BA, emphasis added). Her theology is man-centered, not God-centered.

## **7. SELF SELF SELF**

Meyer's extreme focus on self is a thread running throughout her writing: self-image, self-worth, self-acceptance, self-love, self-hate, self-confidence, self-trust, self-forgiveness, self-enjoyment. She proposed a "right" to "be yourself":

"You will lose sight of your right to be an individual--the right to be yourself." (95BA)

*"You have a right to be yourself! Do not let the devil steal that right from you!"* (99BA)

God created each of us in His image, and He has good plans and purposes for us (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:6). However, Meyer speaks in terms that encourage a rebellious attitude of autonomy, rather than a servant heart using God's gifts for His kingdom and glory. In a nutshell, the problem with all of these self-isms is that the emphasis is on *self* rather than *God* and His glory.

## **SELF-IMAGE**

The psychological way emphasizes the development of a positive self-image. Meyer follows this focus:

"God wants to help you change your self-image. Your self-image is the picture you carry of yourself on the inside of you." (47AA)

She tells us to look away from worldly positions and find a "healthy self-image" in Christ:

"The bottom line is, if we know who we are in Christ, then we can have a healthy self-image apart from our position or job title." (50AA)

Moreover, she traces poor self-images to the sins of others in the past:

"Most people-pleasers feel that way because they have a poor self-image. They don't value themselves, so they think nobody else values them either. It is likely most people-pleasers were raised in homes in which their needs and feelings were not valued, respected, or considered important." (167AA)

While Scripture affirms our creation in God's image, and the believer as a new creation in Christ, *self-image* is never the focus of biblical truth.

### **SELF-WORTH**

Emphasis on self-image leads easily into self-worth. Meyer echoes the teachings of many when she says that:

"God would not let Jesus die for a bunch of junk, for people with no value and no purpose. And Jesus would not have given Himself to die on our behalf if we had been of no worth or value to God." (71AA)

Of course we must treat human life with great value because people are made in *God's* image. However, Scripture does not teach that our intrinsic worth or value is the basis for or purpose of our salvation. It is rather for the glory and praise of God (see, e.g., Ephesians 1:14).

Meyer also proposes that self-worth should be the result of our salvation:

"In Ephesians 1:6 Paul says that all of us who believe in Christ have been 'accepted in the beloved.' That should give us a sense of personal value and worth." (79BA)

She teaches that self-worth should come from God rather than from other people or personal accomplishments:

"I was trying to get David [her husband] to give me something that only God could give me, which was a sense of my own value and worth." (34BA)

"We suffer much agony because we try to get from people what only God can give us, which is a sense of worth and value." (21AA)

"I have since learned that my sense of worth and value are in Christ, and not in things or other people. Until I learned that truth, however, I was very unhappy and totally incapable of maintaining healthy relationships.... Since I have believed and received God's love for me, my most basic needs for love and a sense of self-worth have been met." (88BA)

"Since such people do not believe that they are lovable in themselves, often they will use the world's standards (money, status, clothes, natural talents, etc.) to prove to themselves and others that they are valuable. They live a life of misery, always trying to prove that they have worth and value." (84BA)

"When we base our self-worth on how people treat us, or on what we believe they think about us, it causes us to become addicted to their approval." (91AA)

"I believe in working hard, but if we are addicted to work, or if we derive our sense of worth and value from it, we need help.... People who derive their sense of worth and value from their accomplishments frequently talk about all they are 'doing.'" (200AA)

It is not surprising to find that Meyer links lack of self-worth to the past sins of others:

"If you are seeking recovery from abuse, you must not allow other people's opinions of you, as evidenced by the way you have been mistreated in the past, to determine your worth." (75BA)

She even claims that many people are *not even aware* of their dislike for themselves:

"It is interesting to me that a lot of people don't even know they don't like themselves until I call it to their attention. I have been convinced for years that a large percentage of people's problems comes from how they feel about themselves. I think that insecurity is why some people struggle for position and power. They derive their sense of worth and value from what they do rather than from who they are." (47AA)

In response, we should first note that, contrary to Meyer's claims, we are *not* lovable in ourselves. The amazing thing about God's redemptive love is that He sent Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners--ungodly people, unable to save ourselves (Romans 5:6-8). Christ alone is *worthy* (Revelation 5:1-10). There is no biblical admonition to spend time building up our sense of self-worth, but there *is* biblical warrant to worship and serve the only One who is worthy of praise and glory. It is futile and discouraging to focus our time and energy on building up self-worth, self-esteem, self-value, or the like.

In discussing self-worth, Meyer also has much to say about the rejection we experience from others:

"The fear of rejection only exists because we base our self-worth on the opinions of others rather than our relationship with God. Most of those who are critical of us are actually people who have a poor self-image of themselves." (195AA)

"Jesus gave instructions to His disciples regarding the handling of rejection [Matthew 10:14]. He told them to 'shake it off.'" (185AA)

"The word *reject* can be defined as to refuse, to throw away without value. Absolutely none of us want to feel like we are being thrown away as if we have no value. We all want to be noticed and accepted." (189AA)

Maybe we do, but Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10 had to do with people who reject the preaching of the gospel, not personal rejection. We can expect opposition and rejection when we stand for God's truth. Our focus needs to be on how we can honor God, proclaim His gospel, and build His kingdom, not on whether others do or do not reject us, or on our own sense of self-worth. Meyer comes closest to the biblical view when she says:

"The Bible states in John 3:18 that for those who believe in Jesus there is no judgment, no condemnation, and no rejection. Jesus gives us freely what we struggle to earn from people and never seem to get: freedom from judgment, condemnation, and rejection!" (191AA)

Yes, believers are free from God's condemnation and rejection, because of *Christ's* worth and *Christ's* work.

### **SELF-LOVE, SELF-ACCEPTANCE, SELF-APPROVAL**

Along with self-image and self-worth, there is self-love, self-acceptance, and even self-approval. All of these are wrapped around the idea of "feeling good" about self. For example:

"Many people who have eating disorders are starving for love. They want to feel good about themselves." (32BA)

Meyer assumes that many people *do not* love or approve of themselves:

"Most of the time people don't love and approve of themselves; therefore, they seek from others what they should be getting from God, which is a sense of being valuable and lovable." (67AA)

She assumes this was true of herself in the past:

"Many years have passed since I finally learned that I had to accept and love myself, not hate and reject myself." (77BA)

Such assumptions are contrary to Scripture. In His description of the two greatest commandments, Jesus assumed that we already do love ourselves (Matthew 18:34-40; Ephesians 5:28-29).

It is true that God loves us and that His love is based on Himself rather than on anything in us. Meyer at points acknowledges this:

"The Bible teaches us that God loves us perfectly or unconditionally. His perfect love for us is not based on our perfection. It is not based on anything except Himself." (35BA)



Yes, His love is based on Himself--more specifically, on Christ's finished work on the cross. But Meyer jumps from this great biblical truth to the conclusion that we must learn to love ourselves:

"If you can believe that God, Who is so perfect, loves you, then you can believe that you are worth loving.... Once you begin believing that you are accepted and loved by God, then you can begin accepting and loving yourself. Then not only will you start loving God in return, but you will also start loving other people." (38BA)

If God's love were based on our worth, it would not be such an incredible expression of grace that is to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:6)

Meyer goes on to supply "trickle-down" charts (40-41BA) for unconditional love (based on who God is), and conditional love (based on performance), with a number of "therefores." For example:

"THEREFORE, since my most basic need for love and a sense of self-worth have been met by God, I don't need to be 'fixed' by other people." (40BA)

"THEREFORE, I look to others to give me something that only God can give me--a sense of my own self-worth." (41BA)

The chapter in which these charts appear ["Loving Yourself"] begins as follows:

"The Bible teaches us we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (see Matthew 22:39). What if we don't love ourselves? It renders us incapable of loving others, which is a big problem." (65AA)

But again, Jesus presupposed the love of self. He gives no affirmative *third* command to love self, and later Scripture (Ephesians 5:28-29) expressly teaches that *no one* hates himself.

Meyer has advice for those who supposedly have trouble loving themselves:

"People who cannot love and approve of themselves live in tremendous emotional pain. If they don't approve of

themselves, they may end up with an addiction to approval from others." (65AA)

"Love yourself in spite of everything you see wrong with yourself." (78AA)

"Believe what the Word says you are, and that is what you will become. Believe what the devil says you are, and you will become that. The choice is yours: ... **therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live** (Deut. 30:19)." (73BA)

"Begin *purposely* to think and say only good things about yourself. Make a list of what the Word says about you and of your best qualities and confess it several times a day." (73BA)

Actually, the passage in Deuteronomy 30:19 ("choose life") is about choosing to love the Lord your God and serve Him (see verse 20 that follows), not about some sort of cognitive therapy wherein you become what you believe you are.

Meyer believes that people who do not love themselves will therefore be unable to receive love from others:

"If you cannot believe that you are basically a lovable, valuable person, you will be unable to trust others who claim they love you." (86BA)

"...I would not *receive* love from other people or from God. I deflected it by my behavior which became more and more obnoxious as I set out to prove to everyone that I was as unlovable as I believed myself to be." (87BA)

God's Word says many things about believers that we need to know. Meyer cites 2 Corinthians 5:21 (the Christian is a new creation in Christ), John 3:16 (God so loved the world...), Romans 12:6-8 (God's various gifts to believers), Isaiah 43:4 (God's people are precious to Him). However, Meyer's one-sided, self-focused advice ignores the reality and gravity of sin, and the need for confession and repentance.

Scripture tells us (Romans 8:31) that God is for us, and therefore, who can be against us? Meyer uses this truth to support her counsel to love, accept, and approve self:

"If God accepts you because of your faith in His Son Jesus Christ, then you can decide to stop rejecting yourself so that your healing process can continue." (76BA)

"God is *for* you! He wants *you* to be *for* you. The devil is *against* you, and he wants *you* to be *against* you." (78BA)

"According to Paul's letter to the Romans, God is for us. We also know that Satan is against us.... Stop being against yourself just because Satan is against you!" (27AA, citing Romans 8:31)

The statement that "God is for us" comes after a description of God's work in redemption--calling us, justifying us, conforming us to the image of Christ, and ultimately glorifying us. These wonderful truths call for us to thank, praise, and glorify *God* for His incredible mercy, not inflate *self*.

Security, in Meyer's view, seems to be equivalent to self-confidence, self-acceptance, and such:

"A sense of security is something everyone needs and desires. Security enables us to enjoy healthy thinking and living. It means we feel safe, accepted, and approved of.... I believe it is God's will for each one of us to be secure, because lack of self-confidence torments us and keeps us from the blessings He intends for us to enjoy. Over the year I have learned the foundation for security is knowing who we are in Christ, accepting God's unconditional love, and accepting ourselves even though we realize we have weaknesses and are not perfect." (viii-ixAA)

However, true security comes not from any confidence in self, but from confidence in who *God* is. Yes, we need to know who we are in Christ, but such knowledge draws our attention to *Christ*, and away from self.

Meyer goes so far as to add self-approval to self-love and self-acceptance:

"Until we accept and approve of ourselves, no amount of approval from others will keep us permanently secure. The outside approval we seek becomes an addiction." (49AA)

This exhortation to self-approval is dangerous, because sin continues to indwell our hearts in this lifetime. Scripture, to

the contrary, exhorts us to die to self and live for Christ (Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 5:15).

Meyer responds to critics who accuse her of pride:

"Some people have been critical of me for saying, 'I like myself.' They think I am full of pride. That is not the case at all. I don't like myself because I think I am wonderful. I like myself because Jesus loves me, and He is wonderful!" (123AA)

On the surface, this sounds reasonable. Yes, it is Jesus who is wonderful, not us. But that is exactly why our focus must be on Him and not on liking, loving, accepting, or approving of self.

### **INSECURITY AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE**

Meyer sounds alarm bells about insecurity, which she defines in terms of feeling bad about self:

"There is an epidemic of insecurity in our society today. Many people are insecure and feel bad about themselves, which steals their joy and causes major problems in all their relationships." (viiAA, underlining added)

"Insecurity is a psychological disturbance of epidemic proportion in our society today." (196AA, underlining added)

This strong warning, and the many times that Meyer talks about insecurity, warrants a separate discussion of the alleged pervasive nature of this problem. Meyer describes insecure people and their craving for the approval of others:

"...insecure people easily become approval addicts.... But security is part of our inheritance from God through Jesus. He wants us to feel safe and comfortable at all times. He wants us to be free to be ourselves and to feel accepted." (102AA, underlining added)

"Insecure people often perceive they are being mistreated when in actuality that is not the case at all." (146AA)

"All those who are addicted to approval feel emotional and mental pain when they experience disapproval. In order to

break free from approval addiction they must press past the pain they feel when they experience disapproval." (114AA)

People-pleasers are "those who try to please people even if they have to compromise their conscience to do so. People-pleasers are those who need approval so desperately that they allow themselves to be controlled, manipulated, and used by others." (160-161AA)

"People-pleasing behavior can be quite dishonest. The Bible says we are to be truthful in all things; we are to speak the truth, love the truth, and walk in the truth. But approval addicts often tell lies because they fear people won't accept the truth." (181AA)

"We often 'murder' God's plan for our life in order to get or keep the approval of others." (183AA)

Meyer responds by pointing out the security that God grants us as believers in Jesus Christ:

"The Word of God says we can be secure through Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 3:17)." (viiiAA)

"Part of our inheritance as believers is to be secure (see Isaiah 54:17)--to know who we are in Christ, to have a feeling of righteousness or rightness with God." (ixAA, underlining added)

"As long as you and I have God's approval, we have what we need most." (95AA)

"Our desire for approval can only truly be met by receiving God's acceptance and approval of us." (15AA)

"One of the greatest cures for addiction approval is the knowledge of who we are in Christ." (19AA)

"If we are addicted to people's approval, we will always experience pain when that approval is withdrawn--as it always is, at one time or another. However, if we look to God for our approval, we will never experience the pain of withdrawal because we have a constant, steady flow of His love and acceptance." (20AA)

People do sometimes live to please others for sinful reasons rather than sacrificial love. We truly are secure in Christ, *eternally* secure, being set free from the penalty and power of sin. Meyer's statements are not altogether inaccurate. However, this wonderful security is a by-product of our faith, not a primary goal, and not merely a feeling. We will not always *feel* safe, *feel* comfortable, *feel* right, or *feel* accepted. Quite the contrary. In this life, Jesus assured us that we will face trials and tribulation.

Meyer says that "Jesus never tried to defend Himself," because "He was not addicted to approval from people; therefore, He was free from the tyranny of what they might think of Him or say about Him" (31AA). Meyer reads her psychological theories onto Scripture and dares to psychoanalyze the behavior of the eternal, sinless Son of God. When Jesus declined to defend Himself, He was on the cross accomplishing the purpose for which He came to earth--dying for our sins.

**Fear of man vs. fear of God.** Meyer says that:

"The first step in understanding an out-of-balance need for approval is to understand fear." (3AA)

She explains her view that:

"Fear is involved in approval addiction: the fear of rejection, abandonment, being alone, and of what people will think or say about us. Fear is not from God [2 Timothy 1:7]." (119AA)

She also notes the biblical teaching that we are to have a reverential fear of the Lord:

"We should not fear God in a wrong way, but we should have a respectful fear of Him, knowing that He means what He says. Since God has told us in His Word that we are not to be people-pleasers, we should take that commandment seriously and not allow an out of balance people-pleasing attitude in our lives." (162AA)

The wrong kind of fear, the fear of man, *is* a true problem, and the reverential fear of God *is* commanded by Scripture. However, consider Meyer's words through the lens of her deficient view of sin. Sinful as we are, it is all too easy to take Meyer's teachings to heart and fail to properly love others as much as

we already naturally love ourselves. Moreover, Meyer's teachings easily lure us into seeking security, approval, and acceptance more than we seek to love and serve God.

### **SELF-HATE**

The corollary to Meyer's teachings about self-love is her warning about self-hate:

"Living with daily self-rejection, or even self-hatred, is a horrible way to live. We project to others what we feel about ourselves." (67AA)

"A fear of being prideful may keep a person trapped in an attitude of self-abasement. The Bible does teach us not to have an exaggerated opinion of our own importance (see Romans 12:3).... Don't fall into the trap of pride, but don't go to the other extreme and think that self-rejection, self-hatred, and self-abasement is the answer." (68AA)

"God is not honored by people who have a bad attitude toward themselves; in fact, as I said previously, it is downright insulting to Him." (72AA)

The Bible does not exhort us to hate ourselves any more than it exhorts us to love ourselves. Moreover, as Meyer observes (68AA), you can do nothing apart from Christ, but everything in Him. Scripture does, however, drive us to look away from self. Self-love and "self-hate" (a poor term, in light of Ephesians 5:29) are both enamored of self.

### **SELF-CONFIDENCE, SELF-TRUST**

Self-confidence and self-trust are also advocated by Meyer. She seems to equate self-trust with being led by the Holy Spirit:

"Mature Christians are led by God's Spirit, not by other people. They have learned to trust their own heart." (163AA)

This is a dangerous attitude. While we must use caution in following other people (including Meyer and her books), this attitude can quickly degenerate into an unbiblical independence that refuses to consider the guidance of ordained church leaders

or other mature believers. Our hearts are still sinful this side of glory, and we dare not trust them this fully.

However, earlier in the same book Meyer rightly contrasts trust in self with trust in God:

"People who worry excessively clearly show they trust themselves, and not God, to solve their problems. Worry is a sin and should be repented of like any other sin." (89AA)

This sort of conflict, within the *same* book (or the same author writing different books), is why it is so very difficult, yet so essential, to read with discernment and see what the Bible really says.

Meyer makes a couple of comments about self-confidence that come much closer to biblical truth:

"The devil wants you and me to feel so bad about ourselves that we have no confidence in ourselves. But here is the good news: *We don't need confidence in ourselves--we need confidence in Jesus!*" (92BA)

"Actually, we don't need to believe in ourselves--we need to believe in Jesus in us. We don't dare feel good about ourselves apart from Him.... *We do not need self-confidence, we need God-confidence!*" (93BA)

YES, our confidence absolutely should be in Him, not in self.

### **SELF-ENJOYMENT**

Finally, Meyer teaches her readers to enjoy themselves:

"Enjoying life is impossible if we don't enjoy ourselves." (66AA)

"When I was growing up, I did not enjoy myself.... As an adult Christian, I began to realize I felt guilty if I attempted to enjoy myself." (168AA)

"It is good to help others; as Christians, it is our call. But, it is not wrong to do things for ourselves. Be sure you take time for yourself. Take time to do things you enjoy." (169AA)



God graciously grants us many blessings, and there are many joys in life. It is no sin to enjoy God's creation, our friends and families, and a variety of activities. However, as the first question in the Westminster Catechism reveals, the primary purpose of human beings is to glorify God and *enjoy Him* forever (see Psalm 73:25-28).

## 8. EMOTIONS

Meyer describes the "bad fruit" in her life, including depression, temper, and self-pity (26-28BA). She pretended that everything was fine and looked good on the outside, but could never remember being happy (28-29BA). Like many who have bought into the psychological way, she places an undue emphasis on emotions, particularly feeling good about self:

"As human beings we are created by God to be happy and to feel good (right) about ourselves. As a matter of fact, we must feel good about ourselves or eventually we will develop some sort of uncontrolled behavior, because such behavior gives us 'good feelings,' even if only for a little while." (31BA)

Meyer also presumes that depression is never God's will:

*"When you feel depressed, check your thinking. It is not God's will for you to be depressed."* (73BA)

Life is more complicated than it would appear from this statement. Sometimes depression is the result of personal sin. Sometimes it is related to a physiological problem. People experience seasons of grief for legitimate reasons, such as the death of a loved one. In reading over the Psalms, it becomes apparent that depression is not always outside God's will, although the believer can respond to it either sinfully or righteously. God does promise great joy to believers, but in this lifetime it comes in the midst of sorrow, and Scripture never claims that God wants us to "feel right about ourselves."

In *Approval Addiction*, Meyer describes a woman with "deep emotional problems" who "received the infilling of the Holy Spirit" at a Bible study group, was initially overwhelmed with joy, but did not pursue her "newfound relationship with the Lord" due to the skepticism other believers in her denomination showed toward her "emotional experience" (163AA). Meyer concludes that "God tried to help her, but she loved the

approval of people more than His approval" (164AA). However, that skepticism must not be dismissed so quickly. While believers need not squelch true joy in another's relationship with the Lord and ought to come alongside a woman like this to disciple her, growth in the Lord is much more than the sort of one-time emotional experience Meyer describes here and apparently approves.

## 9. JUSTIFICATION

God's free gift of salvation involves justification, which is God's judicial declaration that the believer is "not guilty," pardoning that person's sins based solely on the completed work of Christ, and imputing His righteousness. This free gift of God's grace is received through the instrument of faith. Meyer, unfortunately, misunderstands justification. Although she recognizes that salvation cannot be earned through good works, she simultaneously claims that faith itself *is* our work:

"We believe, and God works. Our work--the work of the believer--is simply to believe. Remember, we are accepted because of our *faith*, not our good works." (5AA)

This is error. Faith is the instrument through which a believer receives God's free gift of salvation. Faith is not a "work" on which our salvation is based, but an integral part of God's free gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:7-9). Faith is a gift of God, not the work of man. It is the finished work of Christ that is the sole legal ground for salvation. We are accepted *because of what Christ accomplished*, not *because of* our faith, as Meyer claims.

Meyer also misunderstands the important biblical concept of righteousness, confusing it with popular psychological notions of feeling good about self:

"We were created by God to feel right and good about ourselves. However, because of the presence of sin in the world, and the sin nature that came upon us through the fall of mankind, we cannot now *do* everything right. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, He imparts or gives to us the gift of righteousness. By faith we are made *right* with God.... We were created--and redeemed--by God for righteousness, not shame, guilt, or condemnation." (63BA)

It is true that we are made right with God, i.e., reconciled to Him, through Christ, and that we cannot live sinless lives. Meyer, unfortunately, focuses on "feeling good about ourselves" rather than following God's standard for righteousness revealed in His Word. Righteousness is not a feeling.

Meyer does mention the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers:

"Righteousness--or the right way of being what God wishes or desires--is not the result of what we do, but rather what Jesus has done for us. Righteousness is imputed to us by the grace and mercy of God." (22AA)

"Our righteousness is not found in what people think of us, it is found in Christ. He is our righteousness from God. [quotes Romans 5:17] We must learn to think about and believe in our righteousness." (35AA)

Romans 5:12-21 draws an analogy between the imputation of Adam's sin (to all mankind) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. We are reckoned as righteous because we are *in Christ*. Christ represented His people on the cross. Our sin was imputed to Him, and His righteousness is imputed to us. However, our focus must remain on Christ's righteousness. Scripture does not exhort us to think about and believe in our righteousness. Again, righteousness is not defined in Scripture as "feeling good" about ourselves.

This exaltation of self runs rampant throughout Meyer's writings, and it taints her understanding of justification:

"Under the New Covenant, every person's worth and value is based strictly on being 'in Christ' by virtue of believing in Him totally as everything that individual needs. Christ is our RIGHTEOUSNESS. We are made right, not by having what someone else has, but by faith in Jesus. Understanding this truth brings a sense of security and completely eliminates the need to be jealous or envious." (130BA)

It is modern psychology, not Scripture, that continually draws our attention to our own supposed worth and value. Only Christ is truly worthy. See, e.g., Revelation 4:11, 5:9; the Bible does not say "worthy are we" but rather "worthy is He." Justification is a declaration by God, the righteous Judge of

all the earth, that unworthy sinners are "not guilty." This is only possible, without compromising His perfect justice, because of the sacrifice of His sinless Son. Exalting man's worth, and concentrating on our own righteousness, obscures the glorious message of the gospel.

## 10. SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is a gracious work of God's Holy Spirit whereby the believer is renewed in the image of Christ, in true righteousness and holiness, increasingly enabled to die to sin and live to righteousness.

Meyer has several good comments about the study and application of God's Word, which is certainly a key ingredient in sanctification:

"To apply God's Word, we must go beyond our feelings and take action based on the truth of His Word." (127AA)

"Applying God's Word means reading and studying it and stepping out on it. Stepping out on the Word of God means doing what God has instructed us to do in His Word rather than what we think, want, or feel." (133AA)

"Feelings try to be god in our life. They want control. Feelings have been called the believer's number one enemy [quoting Watchman Nee]. Satan works through them to deceive Christians. The more you renew your mind by studying God's Word, the more your feelings will change." (139AA)

It is good to see Meyer pull away (at least briefly) from the feeling orientation of psychotherapy. She also warns against seeking counsel from just anyone: "*When you are in trouble, go to the Throne before you go to the phone*" (44BA). Meyer correctly observes that sanctification is progressive, and that it follows justification:

"...when we are made right with God, we begin to think right, we begin to talk right, and we begin to act right. It is a *process* in which we are continually making progress." (34AA)

"The outworking of righteousness--which is ultimately seen in right thoughts, words, and actions--cannot begin until

we accept our right standing with God through Jesus Christ." (34AA)

Note, however, that justification is *God's* act of declaring the sinner "not guilty," rather than *man's* acceptance of right standing. The "acceptance" Meyer posits is better understood in terms of faith, the instrument through which we receive God's free gift of salvation. The "outworking of righteousness," or sanctification, is a grace that follows justification.

The believer's union with Christ is an important concept in learning about sanctification, and Meyer mentions its significance:

"Identification with Christ is a doctrinal foundation of the Christian faith. It is not taught as frequently and fully as it should be. Some religious organizations spend far too much time telling people what they need to do, and not enough time telling them who they are in Christ." (251AA)

Unfortunately, she goes on to caution against identifying with "people who reject us and judge us critically" (251AA), rather than explaining the wonderful, biblical concept of our union with Christ: We were chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4), united with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-7:6), called in Christ (2 Timothy 1:9), regenerated in Christ (Ephesians 2:10), justified in Christ (Ephesians 1:6-7); we persevere in Christ (John 15; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 and 6:15-17), die in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16); and finally, we will be resurrected and glorified in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22, Romans 8:16-17).

Discussion of our union with Christ brings to mind the dichotomies between being/doing and truth/love that are often posed by modern psychologists. In a section titled "Doctrine Versus Liberty," Meyer says:

"Sometimes religious teaching doesn't take us far enough. It just stays in the realm of doctrine. Sometimes we get so tied up in church doctrine and rules and regulations that we never really get over into the power, victory, and freedom Jesus died to give us." (39AA)

Yes, it is possible to become immersed in a program of works-righteousness that focuses on rules and regulations. However,

obedience to God's Word, and knowledge of God's truth, is not in opposition to the victory that we have because of Christ's work on the cross. There is an integral relationship between truth (doctrine) and real life practice of that truth.

Further examination reveals additional errors in Meyer's teaching about sanctification. She dangerously concludes that the Christian's *consciousness* of sin can be removed:

"Under the Old Covenant people's sins could be covered by the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats. Their sin was covered, but not removed. Under the New Covenant our sins are completely removed by the blood of Jesus, and even the consciousness of sin can be removed." (23AA)

Meyers seems to gloss over the present reality of sin (1 John 1:8), advocating a "self-acceptance" that is unbiblical. Although there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 5:1-2), *consciousness* of sin is not (and should not be) removed in this lifetime. This is, at best, a poor and confusing choice of words. Meyer elsewhere advises readers to freely confess their sins to God and others (28-29AA). This is good, but difficult to do if the *consciousness* of sin has been erased.

Meyer's teachings about self-worth taint her perspective on how we see ourselves in our walk with the Lord:

"...I was given the impression that it was spiritual to feel unworthy and to see myself as a poor, miserable sinner. Although we have all sinned, it is not spiritual to feel bad about ourselves and be insecure--to feel as if we are no good, terrible, awful people who can never do anything right." (39AA)

This statement is problematic in Meyer's excessive *focus* on self. She is more biblical when she cautions against competition and comparison with others (see 2 Corinthians 10:12):

"Competing and comparing ourselves with others can cause only two things. It can cause an attitude of pride because we deem ourselves to be better than others, or an attitude of insecurity because we deem others to be better than we are. Both of these attitudes are ungodly and should be avoided." (44AA)

Another concern is Meyer's separation of justification and sanctification. These must definitely be distinguished (particularly to avoid a works-righteousness), but they are nevertheless inseparable in the sense that those God justifies, He also sanctifies (Romans 8:29-30). Meyer's teachings suggest that it is possible for a believer to be justified, yet never sanctified without a separate decision for Christ, i.e., she separates Christ as *Savior* from Christ as *Lord*:

"If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, that is a good place to start. But even that won't fix everything in you and your life unless you also accept Him as your Lord." (249AA)

"I say about myself that for many years I had enough of Jesus to stay out of hell, but not enough to walk in victory. I took Him for my ticket to heaven, but I needed Him as my *all*." (249AA)

Although believers do not all grow at the same rate, and may at times fall into serious sin, Scripture does not teach that it is possible to be saved from the *penalty* of sin (knowing Christ as Savior) without also being saved from the *power* of sin (knowing Christ as Lord) (see Romans 6:1-14).

What is the believer's role in sanctification? Is it active or passive? Meyer says this:

"Don't be passive and expect victory to just fall on you. It does come by the grace of God, and not by our works, but we must actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit each step of the way." (156BA)

When Meyer speaks of "freedom" or "victory" in her books, she is generally more concerned about the effects of past abuse (the sins of others) than being set free from the power and penalty of one's own sin. Christians do play an active role in sanctification. However, it is not "active cooperation" with God's Spirit, such that God's power would be limited without our help. We are active *because* it is *God* who is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

Meyer says that:

"... a lack of understanding about righteousness can result in an approval addiction and other bondages that leave us miserable and without freedom." (34AA)

This statement comes near the beginning of a chapter entitled "Conforming to Righteousness." Although Meyer describes righteousness in terms of conforming to God's will in our thoughts, words, and actions, her primary concern is about pulling away from the approval of others and overcoming insecurity. There is little about being a part of the corporate body of Christ, working together with other believers to advance the gospel, or about responsibilities to one another within that body. The *individual* is exalted in a manner not compatible with Scripture.

Yet another problem is Meyer's acceptance of "personality types" as fixed and unchangeable, describing herself as a "type-A, strong-willed, leadership-type":

"We really cannot control what temperament we are born with; that is God's choice. We can work with the Holy Spirit to achieve balance, but basically we are what we are." (179AA)

Although Scripture speaks of God distributing different gifts for service in His kingdom, the Bible does not propose that certain "personality traits" or "personality types" are permanent. The goal for *all* believers is to be conformed to the image of Christ in righteousness and holiness.

### **PLEASING GOD**

Meyer rightly says that:

"We are to be God-pleasers, not self-pleasers or people-pleasers." (159AA)

She puts it in simple terms:

"It is not as difficult to please God as we may think it is. Simple, childlike faith pleases Him." (3AA)

"So you see God is pleased when we believe in His Son Jesus, and He is not pleased when we don't." (4AA)

Meyer also says that:



"God does not reject us when we make mistakes, but if we think He does, if we *fear* He does, the lie we have believed becomes truth to us." (5AA)

It is absolutely true that our eternal salvation is based 100% on the work of Christ and not at all on our performance. Meyer correctly states that God does not reject His children (believers) when they sin, and He is pleased with belief in His Son. However, she seems to view "pleasing God" almost entirely in terms of our initial saving faith, minimizing the importance of living a life that pleases Him--not to earn His love or salvation, but out of gratitude and because He has ordained our good works (Ephesians 2:10).

Meyer errs when she suggests that it is possible to have a *perfect* heart that desires to please God:

"The Scripture does not say He is looking for someone with a perfect performance, but rather someone with a perfect heart--a heart that desires to please Him...." (8AA)

God *is* looking for a "perfect performance," but our salvation is based on *Christ's* "perfect performance," not our own. His righteousness is imputed to believers. It is true that a believer is a "new creation in Christ" with a new orientation and genuinely new heart, but on this side of heaven, no person has a *perfect* heart. As we observed in an earlier section, Meyer does not understand the sinful nature of the human heart, or the fact that the heart is the very source of sin.

## MOTIVES

Meyer challenges readers to consider the motives for their actions, and to act in love rather than fear or selfish motives:

"We should do what we do for the love of God and man. If we are motivated by fear, it does not please God." (161AA)

"Did it ever occur to you that people-pleasing can very well be a manifestation of selfishness rather than sacrifice?" (170AA)

The Bible does teach us that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), and Jesus said that those who love Him would obey His commandments (John 14:15). The love of God and others, which

summarizes all of God's commandments, is the best possible motivation for our conduct. At the same time, there is a reverential fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), and certainly that *fear* does please God.

Meyer acknowledges that we have biblical duties, but rejects duty as a proper motivation for action--even to the point of claiming a loss of heavenly reward:

"In the life of people-pleasers, the driving force is duty, not desire.... Remember, unless we do what we do for the right reasons, we lose our reward. We do have biblical duties." (165AA)

"We do have biblical duties, but on the other hand we should not allow the 'shoulds' and 'oughts' of life to control us. There is a big difference in doing our duty before God and being duty bound to people." (166AA)

Actually, our duty before God often involves duties to others. Parents have God-given duties to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Citizens have God-given duties to the civil government. Church members have God-given duties to ordained leaders. The Bible does not propose a mechanical performance of duty apart from love for God and others, but God's Word does--quite often--exhort us to *do* what God commands. Sometimes, it is necessary perform biblical duties when our desire is to do something else. Those duties cannot be ignored merely because the desire is not there.

Meyer's teachings about motives are a mixed bag. One statement is encouraging, in that she proposes hard work in order to glorify God:

"I will probably always be a hard worker, because I am motivated by accomplishment. Once I needed it to feel good about myself; now I just want to be fruitful in God's kingdom and for His glory." (199AA)

Yes, being fruitful in God's kingdom and bringing Him glory are the excellent motives for following God's Word. However, we are obligated to follow God's Word even when our motives and desires would drive us in another direction.

## 11. "ADDICTIONS"

Meyer's definition of "addiction" is "compulsory behavior, often in response to some stimulus, without conscious thought" (137BA). She claims that "addictive behaviors" are those "that can develop when a person has been abused and has a shame-based nature" (137BA). (This is dangerously reminiscent of the erroneous teachings of John Bradshaw. See CDPM's book, *A Way That Seems Right*.) Here are more of her definitions:

"An addiction is something that controls people--something they feel they cannot do without or something they do to alleviate pain or pressure." (vii-viiiAA)

"...an addiction is something people feel they cannot live without, or something they feel compelled to do in order to relieve pressure, pain, or discomfort of any kind." (87AA)

Meyer stretches the definition of "addiction" beyond substances (alcohol, drugs, tobacco) to all sorts of emotions and behaviors, including the approval of other people (the topic of her recent book):

"They suffer from those feelings and use the addiction of approval to try to remove the pain." (viiAA)

Meyer says that she was "addicted to reasoning" and became anxious if she could not figure out what was going to happen, when, and how. (88AA)

"I [Meyer] also became addicted to the need to be in control." (90AA)

Meyer reads her expanded definition onto texts of Scripture:

"We see from this Scripture [Psalm 131:2, "like a weaned child"] that these areas [mind, will, emotions] may become addicted to certain types of behavior just as the body may become addicted to certain types of substances." (140BA)

"By denying my mind the privilege of worrying and reasoning, I was weaned from my mental addiction just as a baby is weaned from its bottle or pacifier." (141BA)

A careful reading of Psalm 131 reveals that it **not** about "addictions." This short three-verse psalm is about hoping and

trusting in the Lord. Meyer reads her own teachings into the text.

Readers have noticed by now that the term "addiction" is italicized. That is because this word is loaded with baggage such as the medical model and other teachings promoted by the popular 12-step movement. Meyer reveals the true nature of the problem at points:

"...I want you to replace all addictions with one other addiction. I want you to become addicted to Jesus!" (116AA)

"If you feel right now that you have lost something or someone that you just cannot do without, you are wrong. The only thing or person in life we absolutely cannot do without is God." (51AA)

The real issue is the *worship* of something or someone other than God the Creator (*idolatry*), and the *enslaving* nature of sin. It would be more accurate to encourage readers to *worship* Jesus rather than to "become addicted" to Him. Christians do not need the confusing term "addiction," but would be much better served by biblical terminology. Scripture has much to say about idolatry as compared to the worship of the one true God, including the first two of the Ten Commandments, Psalm 115, Romans 1, and many other passages.

## 12. RELATIONSHIPS

The Bible has a great deal to say about how we relate to God and other people. Our relationship with God, broken by our sin, is restored because of Christ's finished work, and our sanctification is often worked out in relationship to others. Meyer's general focus is on self rather than loving God and others, but occasionally her statements are more biblical. Therefore, her teachings about relationships must be read with great caution and discernment, parsing truth and error.

At some points, Meyer's statements sound more biblical, in contrast to many of her self-focused statements. For example, she acknowledges the dangers in blaming other people:

"Blaming others for our own unhappiness only helps us avoid dealing with the real problem." (130AA)

"I have finally realized that nobody is responsible for my personal happiness." (131AA)

These statements require discernment, because of the implication that we should focus on our own "personal happiness." However, both statements recognize that the "blame game" leads nowhere. Unfortunately, much of what Meyer says *does* shift blame to other people.

In at least one place, Meyer departs from her usual teachings about self-approval and "feeling good" about self:

"People who are in relationship with approval addicts feel manipulated instead of loved because **the main focus of approval addicts is on feeling good about themselves.** Everything centers on them, and soon the other parties in their relationships feel used." (136AA, emphasis added)

Here, at least, Meyer admits there is a problem with a self-centered "feeling good about self" approach to life. Unfortunately, this isolated statement is swallowed up by Meyer's many statements that promote feeling good about self.

*Addiction Approval* is all about relationships, particularly the tendency to please other people at all costs (fear of man):

"People-pleasers feel awful when their decisions do not please others. They assume responsibility for other people's emotional reactions." (170AA)

At times, Meyer apparently recognizes that there is a proper, biblical way to please others:

"Paul [apostle] wanted to please people. He wanted to maintain good relationships with people, especially for the purposes of leading them to accept Jesus as their Savior. He also wanted to please God and fulfill the call on his life. Paul knew how to maintain balance in this area. He tried to please people, as long as pleasing them did not cause him to displease the Lord." (160AA)

This comment recognizes that believers must live to *please God*, and that there are appropriate ways to please others as well.

Meyer cites the example of Moses' father-in-law in Exodus 18:12-27, who advised Moses to delegate some of his duties. She

advises that: "You cannot be all things to all people all the time" (177-178AA). Yes, we can agree that delegation is sometimes wise.

However...while some of Meyer's comments are on point biblically, other teachings are not. For example, when she discusses the exercise of discernment about other people:

"When things *appear* to be right, but they *feel* all wrong down deep inside, I recommend not getting involved too quickly." (193AA)

This feeling-oriented approach to relationships is nowhere advised in Scripture. Readers would be better advised to exercise discernment based on the Bible and actual conduct of others.

Meyer mixes truth and error when she says:

"We can actually enable people to stay in bondage by continuing to give in to their demands instead of choosing to do what we believe is right for us as individuals." (208AA, emphasis added)

Yes, it is possible to participate in another person's sin by giving in to his demands, but this comment exalts what is "right for us" rather than considering what is right for the other person. It may or may not be right to sacrifice what seems "right for us" in the context of helping another person, depending on the circumstances.

## **FORGIVENESS**

Forgiveness is central to the Christian faith. Because of Christ's finished work on the cross, God graciously grants forgiveness of sins to believers without compromising His holiness and justice. In light of God's amazing gift, Scripture commands us to forgive one another.

Meyer has a lot to say about forgiveness, but unfortunately, her comments focus around the benefits to be gained by the one who forgives (especially "emotional healing"):

"Receiving forgiveness for past mistakes and sins, and forgiving others for their mistakes and sins, are two of the most important factors in emotional healing." (101BA)

"First, let me say that it is not possible to have good emotional health while harboring bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness." (107BA)

One entire chapter in *Beauty for Ashes* (107-113BA) demonstrates Meyer's view that forgiveness is more about your own "healing" than reconciliation or restoration of the other person.

Meyer counsels against holding onto anger, but again is more concerned about the benefits to self rather than the other person:

"As long as we stay angry, we keep our pain. When we begin to pray for and bless those who have hurt us, the pain is swallowed up in love. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, 'The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.'" (109AA)

"When we stay angry, God will not work in our behalf." (145AA)

Scripture does admonish us against sinful anger (Ephesians 4:26-31; Colossians 3:8), but the purpose is not "emotional healing." We are to forgive others as God in Christ has graciously forgiven us (Colossians 3:13; see also Matthew 18:21-35). God did not extend His forgiveness to us in order to gain "emotional healing."

Another serious error in Meyer's view of forgiveness is her counsel to forgive *self*:

"One evening as I knelt beside my bed, I heard the Lord say to me, 'Joyce, I forgave you the first time you asked, but you have not *received* My gift because you have not forgiven yourself.'" (101BA)

"God is willing to forgive those who make mistakes, but they must be willing to receive His forgiveness. They must also forgive themselves." (58AA)

We do receive God's forgiveness, but Scripture never commands the forgiveness of self, particularly as an additional step required of the believer.

Moreover, Meyer's low view of sin emerges when she says that:

"The majority of abusers were themselves abused in one way or another.... I really do not believe that my father understood what he was doing to me emotionally, nor do I believe that he realized he was causing a problem for me with which I would be dealing most of my life." (110BA)

God's forgiveness of sin does not excuse or minimize sin. His divine justice required the sacrifice of His Son, before He could forgive our sins without compromising His holiness. Meyer, however, blurs the gravity of sin and essentially excuses it.

Some of Meyer's comments about forgiveness are closer to biblical truth. For example, she notes the command to pray for those who persecute us:

"Many people claim to forgive their enemies, but don't or won't pray for those who have hurt them." (113BA, discussing the failure to follow Scriptures about forgiveness, resulting in the inability to forgive)

Meyer also rightly warns against talking unnecessarily about the sins of others:

"When you have been mistreated, it is very tempting to talk to other people about what has been done to you.... Quite often we exercise faith to receive healing from our hurts, and at the same time we fail to obey the royal law of love.... But if we want to forgive and recover from hurts and wounds, we must not talk loosely about the problem nor the person who caused it." (114BA)

There is truth here about our obligation not to gossip. However, the victim mentality Meyer espouses leads quickly down that road.

Meyer also recognizes the obligation we sometimes have to confront others about their sin:

"Sometimes God asks us to simply let something go and not even mention it; at other times He requires us to confront and communicate openly about situations." (155AA)



Yes, sometimes it is right to simply overlook an offense, and other times we must confront another person, *not for the self-focused motives stressed by Meyer*, but for the restoration of the person entangled in sin (Galatians 6:1-2) and restoration of the broken relationship. When God forgives, He restores and cleanses us (1 John 1:9), and He reconciles us to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Colossians 1:20-22). Restoration and reconciliation, key ingredients in biblical forgiveness, are absent from the psychologized view that Meyer promotes, where the individual sinned against is more important than the other person or the relationship. It is a good thing, for us, that God's forgiveness does not follow this unbiblical pattern.

### REJECTION

Rejection is a sad reality in personal relationships. It comes as divorce, abandonment of a child, broken friendships, and even split churches. Meyer frequently speaks of "rejection-based" people who have been deeply hurt in the past (generally in childhood):

"A person who is rejection-based is unable to receive love even when it is being freely offered to him. If he is able to accept love at all, it is only when he believes that he has earned it by behaving perfectly." (84BA)

"For a person who has been abused, intimacy is often very difficult. Intimacy requires trust, and once the trust factor has been destroyed, it must be restored before intimacy will be comfortable." (143BA)

"The fear of rejection leads people into superficial relationships or isolation. It affects their ability to give and receive love." (194AA)

"...rejection-based people often perceived that they are being rejected when they are not." (201AA)

Meyer also describes a "prove-you-love-me syndrome" earlier in her life, wherein she had to have her own way and felt rejected when others did not give in to her (87BA).

Like much of Meyer's teaching, the problem with these statements is the focus on the past sins of other people, and on learning how to *receive* love rather than how to *give* love to God and others.

## BOUNDARIES

Meyer has bought into the popular psychological wisdom of setting "boundaries" in relationships with others, and she would counsel "approval addicts" to "set boundaries":

"Those who are addicted to approval frequently get 'burned out.'" (97AA)

"People-pleasers do not live within limits or margins. In their efforts to please people, they push themselves beyond reasonable boundaries. Let's face it--people often expect us to do things we either should not do or cannot do." (173AA)

"Just as a person puts up a fence around his property to keep intruders out, so you must establish limits and margins--invisible lines you draw in your life to protect yourself from being used and abused." (175AA)

There is an element of truth here, in that no human being can or should take the place of God in another person's life, and it is important to sort out biblical responsibilities properly. However, this last quote highlights the fallacy in "boundaries" teachings. The primary purpose in setting "boundaries" is to *protect self*, rather than serve others by doing what is truly best for them. Christians who live under persecution, even to the point of being martyred for their faith, would no doubt be appalled at the idea that they must "set boundaries" for self-protective purposes.

## AUTHORITY/CONTROL

*Addiction Approval* is all about the problems that can develop in relationships when one person exercises control improperly, and another seeks approval at all costs. Here is how Meyer describes the people on both sides:

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONTROLLER (219AA):

"likely someone you know and respect"

"may be someone you need"

"could be someone you feel indebted to for some reason"

"could be someone you hurt in the past"

"may be someone you are afraid of"

"may be someone who was controlled in childhood"

"may be a deeply insecure person who feels better about life when he is in control"

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONTROLLED PERSON (220AA):

"someone who has always been controlled"

"not accustomed to making his own decisions"

"insecure, fearful, or timid who has never practiced confronting anything or anybody in life"

"confused about submission to authority"

"may have a poor self-image"

"may be dependent on others for care, etc."

Meyer makes a general statement of the problem that is reasonably biblical:

"...if we endure unjust suffering from an authority that is unkind or unreasonable, for the sake of God and His kingdom, it pleases Him.... Discerning when to endure and when to confront is the real key to success and fulfillment in this area." (213AA)

Yes, Scripture does teach that we must sometimes suffer for God's kingdom, and that sometimes we must confront the sins of others.

Meyer describes control in the context of the church:

"When a pastor or other spiritual leader tries to 'hear from God' for all his people about their decisions, he is being spiritually abusive. We all have the Holy Spirit, and we can all hear from God for ourselves." (216AA)

One example is Meyer's description of a situation where her pastor (at the time) told her husband that he should not allow her to teach a Bible study in their home, but:

"God had given the gift of teaching to me, not to my husband. Dave tried to teach for a period of time, and I tried to keep quiet. Neither of us was happy or successful in our efforts!" (216AA)

Of course, a pastor does not "hear from God" on every decision for every person in his congregation, and yes, all believers have the Holy Spirit. There are numerous situations where God grants His people more than one choice that would please Him. For example, there may be more than one young man or woman who

would be a godly spouse. However, Meyer's example is troubling, because there are scriptural commands about male leadership that she ignores. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss male headship in detail. We do not suggest that a woman can never teach a Bible study under any circumstances, but Scripture does give us commands about the roles of male and female. The pastor's admonition may not have been "spiritual abuse" at all, but rather his attempt to give counsel to Meyer and her husband based on Scripture. As we observed earlier in the section about revelation, Meyer places herself above any sort of human correction. Moreover, she explains her difficulty with submission in terms of her past:

"As a wife, learning to submit to Dave's authority and be respectful to his opinions was very difficult for me. The pain I experienced in my past as a result of my father's controlling nature left me with an unhealthy perspective about the subject of submission." (218AA)

Thus Meyer "explains" her own sin using medical terms ("unhealthy") and placing the primary blame on others (her father).

God has also instructed us about authority in the parent-child relationship. Meyer includes a paragraph about parents and children (and when to "let go") but fails to mention the age of the children and says nothing about biblical obedience (217AA).

Meyer describes some of the tactics that people use to control others:

"Emotional manipulation is one of the most evident and powerful characteristics of control. Tears, rage, and silence (especially silence as a form of rejection) are all methods frequently used by controllers to control others." (221AA)

"Other people may try to control with words of failure, defeat, unnatural obligation, guilt, criticism, and intimidation." (222AA)

These behaviors should be identified as *sin*.

Here is how Meyer would advise a controlled person to approach the problem:

"The first step to getting free from control is to recognize you are being controlled." (223AA)

"Once you recognize you are being controlled, choose to do something about it. You must not let it continue--not only for your sake, but also for the sake of the controller." (224AA)

"...you need to learn *how* the person controls you. Is it through fear, anger, silence, rage, tears, guilt, or threats?" (224AA)

This process culminates in confrontation:

"Face the battle of confrontation. Realize that if you have let another person have his way all the time, he will not like it when you change." (224AA)

"Pray for the people you need to confront, asking God to prepare their heart." (225AA)

What Meyer describes here is a real problem, and certainly it is right to pray for the other person. There are relationships where one person sinfully controls another, and another seeks approval at any cost. However, both sides must be understood in terms of *sin*, not "addiction." Correctly defining the issues as sin will lead to biblical solutions, including repentance, confession of one's own sin to God and the other party in the relationship, as well as confrontation and restoration of the other. Meyer speaks of confronting the controlling person, but the "battle of confrontation" would surely be a smoother process if the submissive person were encouraged to acknowledge and confess his own sin.

### **13. USING YOUR PAIN?**

Meyer, citing examples from Scripture, encourages her readers to reach out and help others:

"Have you been hurt by someone or something? If so, you can make the same choice these people [e.g., Joseph in Egypt] made. Don't spend your life angry and bitter--don't allow your emotional pain to imprison you in a lifelong struggle with approval. Receive healing and comfort from

God, and then go on to help someone else. Don't waste your pain." (235AA)

She even advises readers to rise above the depression they may be experiencing, and help others even though they may not feel like doing so:

"...people who have been hurt by someone frequently experience depression. I believe this is partially due to the fact that their attention is on their own pain instead of on what they can do to relieve someone else's pain." (238AA)

"While you are letting God work in your own life, use your pain. Be aggressive in helping others. Don't wait to feel like it." (244AA)

At the same time, Meyer claims that many ministry people are merely hiding their own "issues" while they try to help others:

"There are lots of people in ministry who are trying to heal others, and they are wounded themselves. I call them 'wounded healers.' Many people hide from their own issues while trying to uncover someone else's." (242AA)

This statement is filled with inappropriate "medical" terminology. All people in ministry are sinners--forgiven sinners (not "wounded healers"), if they are in Christ. It is possible to be like the Pharisees and minimize one's own sin while condemning others. But it is also possible to minister to others with humility and gentleness, recognizing that we are all sinners in need of redemption, equal at the foot of the cross.

#### **14. CONCLUSION**

Joyce Meyer has become an extremely popular author and speaker. There is a lengthy list of her books in the back of *Addiction Approval*. This brief review of two of her books (about 11 years apart) reveals that readers dare not assume that Meyer is so "anointed" that her teachings are infallible. On the contrary, much of what she says rehashes the popular psychology that lines the shelves of both secular and Christian bookstores.



