

## **Dr. Dobson's Commitment to Psychology**

Today, the influence of psychology is not limited to Christians of liberal persuasion, nor is it limited to those of neo-orthodox persuasion, nor is it confined within denominational boundaries. The influence of psychological theories having to do with understanding the nature of man and with matters of life and conduct has crossed the boundary of every denomination and even reaches its tentacles around those attempting to remain true to the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Psychological counselors who are also professing Christians contend that the Bible does not speak to every situation and therefore needs certain supplementation or integration with so-called psychological truths, which are simply the opinions of men based upon limited, often very subjective information. There is an assumption that psychological theories contain truths that the Bible somehow missed.

Dobson's faith in psychology can be seen throughout his books. He quotes numerous psychologists as authorities and recommends their books. Among the psychologists he cites authoritatively are Sigmund Freud,<sup>1</sup> B.F. Skinner,<sup>2</sup> E.L. Thorndike,<sup>3</sup> William Glasser,<sup>4</sup> Stanley Coopersmith,<sup>5</sup> and Clyde Narramore.<sup>6</sup> Throughout his books he recommends professional counseling. Moreover, Focus on the Family has become a vast referral system for Christians to be therapized by professional, psychologically-trained counselors.

The staff at Focus on the Family refers those seeking a counselor to licensed therapists only. This excludes pastoral counselors who do not hold those degrees and licenses which require extensive course work in psychology. Since the Focus on the Family policy is to refer only to licensed counselors, anyone who relies solely on the Word of God and work of the Holy Spirit need not apply. Therefore, if a person requests the name of a Christian counselor, he will be referred to a professing Christian who is trained in psychological notions and methods.

Dobson recommends professional counseling and vividly describes what he believes to be the ideal therapeutic relationship in his book *Hide or Seek*. The therapist is portrayed as savior. And the thrust of humanistic psychology can be seen in the sentimental unconditional acceptance that Carl Rogers equated with love. Dobson dramatizes the supposed internal response of the client and then equates professional psychological counseling with the essence of biblical compassion and with the biblical commandment to "bear one another's burdens."<sup>7</sup> Of course no mention is made about the exchange of money for "professional services." Nor does he mention that Paul would not equate bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) with psychological counseling. Indeed, in Galatians 6 the counseling is spiritual and can only be done by those who are spiritual. Paul's epistle to the Galatians explicitly warns against Christians following or dispensing other gospels built upon the vain philosophies of men rather than established by the cross of Christ and the Word of God.

While Dobson says that he rejected some of what he learned in psychology classes, he contends that "there are many instances where traditional psychological understandings are perfectly consistent with biblical teaching."<sup>8</sup> Therefore he encourages young people to consider psychology as their vocation. He says:

Psychology offers a unique opportunity for a person to be of service as a disciple of Christ. . . . I have found it rewarding in my practice to represent the Christian view of marriage, morality, parenting, and honesty, while respecting the right of the individual to make his own choice. What I'm saying is that Christian psychology is a worthy profession for a young believer to pursue, *provided* his own faith is strong enough to withstand the humanistic concepts to which he will be exposed in graduate school.<sup>9</sup> (Emphasis his.)

Then he cautions: "If he begins to compromise on his fundamental beliefs, he could easily become a liability and a hindrance to the Christian faith."<sup>10</sup> However, Dobson's note of caution is not strong enough. In order to become a disciple of Christ in a career of counseling psychology, one must also be a disciple of such psychologists as Freud, Skinner, Adler, Fromm, Maslow, and Rogers. The compromise is so subtle that those who call themselves Christian psychologists do not realize the extent to which they allow psychological presuppositions to compromise their faith. However, each concession to psychology eats away at total reliance on God and His Word until psychology is no longer a supplement to the Bible, but a supplanter of the Word. Soon the dominant perspective on human nature is psychological rather than biblical.

## **The Psychological Perspective**

Our culture has come to view problems of living psychologically. Rather than looking at problems from a biblical viewpoint, many Christians have also come to perceive problems from a psychological perspective. A good example of this is the opening illustration of Dobson's book *Hide or Seek: How to Build Self-Esteem in Your Child*. In his graphic story-telling mode, Dobson says:

He began his life with all the classic handicaps and disadvantages. His mother was a powerfully built, dominating woman who found it difficult to love anyone.<sup>11</sup>

Dobson proceeds to tell about her lack of affection, love, and discipline and about the rejection the young man had experienced throughout his life. He tells about the boy's school failures, how he was laughed at and ridiculed in the Marines, how he therefore resisted authority, and how he was dishonorably discharged. Dobson continues the pathetic story of this supposed victim of circumstances with "no sense of worthiness."<sup>12</sup> Then, after describing the man's bad marriage, Dobson writes:

No one wanted him. No one had ever wanted him. He was perhaps the most rejected man of our time. His ego lay shattered in a fragmented dust!<sup>13</sup>

Near the end of the story, the man's identity is revealed. He was President Kennedy's assassin. Dobson concludes:

Lee Harvey Oswald, the rejected, unlovable failure, killed the man who, more than any other man on earth, embodied all the success, beauty, wealth, and family affection which he lacked. In firing that rifle, he utilized the *one* skill he had learned in his entire, miserable lifetime.<sup>14</sup> (Emphasis his.)

Dobson wrote the story of Lee Harvey Oswald to make a strong point concerning feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem that Dobson believes are rampant among youth. He concludes the story with these words:

Thus, much of the rebellion, discontent, and hostility of the teen-age years emanates from overwhelming, uncontrollable feelings of inferiority and inadequacy which rarely find verbal expression.<sup>15</sup>

Dobson's description of Oswald's life reveals a psychological viewpoint influenced by underlying ideologies of the Freudian unconscious, Adlerian inferiority, and the humanistic belief in the intrinsic goodness of man and the universal victimization of the individual by parents and society. The culprit is society (mainly parents) and the diagnosis is low self-esteem with feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. In fact, those feelings are presented as overwhelming and uncontrollable and thus causing rebellion. Therefore the universal solution to personal problems, rebellion, unhappiness, and hostility presented throughout Dobson's books is raising self-esteem.

Beginning with a reconstruction of Lee Harvey Oswald's life presented in a contemporary psychological framework, Dobson sets the stage for psychological explanations of problems of living and psychological solutions. How one sees a problem will determine the solutions offered. Dobson graphically sets forth Oswald as a victim of deep feelings of inferiority, self-hatred, and low self-esteem caused by a domineering mother who did not cherish her child and a society which did not value him.

While Dobson is careful to say that Oswald must still be held responsible for his criminal behavior,<sup>16</sup> the thrust of the story emphasizes a kind of psychic determinism which led to his horrendous crime. In other words, Oswald is seen as a victim of circumstances and society. The emphasis in the story is about Oswald's unfulfilled needs for love, acceptance, and worth rather than about the horror of the actions he chose. He is presented more as a victim of internal and external forces than as a sinner in need of a savior.

Of course the primary point Dobson dramatizes is that if a person develops feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem he will have a miserable life, which could lead in the same disastrous direction as Oswald's. He says:

The greater tragedy is that Lee Harvey Oswald's plight is not unusual in America today. While others may respond less aggressively, this same consuming awareness of inadequacy can be seen in every avenue of life.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the preventive medicine for society which Dobson presents throughout *Hide or Seek* is strategies for developing self-esteem and self-worth.

### **The Psychological View or the Biblical View?**

Psychological solutions often seem to make sense when the problem is presented from a psychological viewpoint. However, is there possibly another way for Christians to look at such a life of misery and violence? What if the story had been written from a biblical, Christian perspective? One might say that the boy was born to a godless woman who neither cared for God nor for His gift of a child, a woman who exhibited the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit, who herself had either never heard of or else rebelled against the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who was her only hope of salvation. Thus she brought up her son in the same sinful manner in which she herself lived, rather than in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Rather than teaching him the Love of God through words and actions, she taught him her own evil ways of rebellion, blame, frustration, despair, and hopelessness. One might conclude that since she did not know the Savior, she was her own god, pursuing her own will and not caring a whit for others. Doesn't the Bible tell us about such a life lived according to the sin nature? (See, for example, Romans 1:21-32 and Eph. 4:17-19.)

Then as Oswald continued his life in this world, he also depended upon his own flesh. His life seems to parallel Paul's description of the Gentiles, as being "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel [in this case separated from the household of faith], and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Evidently at no time in his life did he believe the Gospel and receive new life, for true faith in Jesus **does** transform a person's life from darkness into light, from despair to hope, from alienation into a love relationship that surpasses even the best that parents can give.

If the story is told in the context of Scripture, both the analysis and the answers will come from an understanding of the law of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, the sinful self and its activities are recognized as the problem, not just as a generalized conclusion, but as a careful analysis. And, the solution is Jesus Christ, not just as a catch-all phrase, but as the living reality of the full effect of the cross, of the resurrection, and of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

If most Christians truly believed this, they would double their efforts toward evangelism and discipleship. More would reach out to those who have been going the way of the world, the flesh and the devil with both the truth of God and the mercy of God. More would be on fire for the Gospel. Instead, however, too many have been enticed by many other gospels offered by psychology and by those professing Christians who promote the psychological way.

Unfortunately, however, these essential truths have become relegated to the "of-course-we-all-know-that-but" category. They are looked upon as old fashioned thinking and old fashioned terminology. In subtle ways the Bible is put on the back burner, and many in the church are cooking with popular psychologies instead of the Word of God. Rather than the solutions to life's problems coming from God's plan for mankind as outlined in His Word, the solutions come from secular psychological theories.

Dobson views problems of living from a psychological perspective. In fact he contends that both Oswald and the other Kennedy assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, followed these steps to destruction:

(1) they experienced deep-seated feelings of inferiority; (2) they sought to cope by withdrawal and surrender; (3) their vain attempts to achieve adequacy were miserable failures; and (4) they exploded in violence.<sup>18</sup>

Again, this is a combination of Alfred Adler's theories about inferiority, Sigmund Freud's unconscious defense mechanisms, and the defunct hydraulic model of energy theory. Dobson calls this last theory a "psychological law." He says:

Remember this psychological law: any anxiety-producing thought or condition which cannot be expressed is almost certain to generate inner pressure and stress.<sup>19</sup>

In his book *Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* Dobson dramatically asserts:

When *any* powerful emotion is forced from conscious thought while it is raging full strength, it has the potential of ripping and tearing us from within. The process by which we cram a strong feeling into the unconscious mind is called "repression," and it is psychologically hazardous. The pressure that it generates will usually appear elsewhere in the form of depression, anxiety, tension, or in an entire range of physical disorders.<sup>20</sup> (Emphasis his.)

Researchers refer to this particular notion as the hydraulic model of emotions. The model says simply that if emotional energy is blocked in one place it must be released elsewhere. However, this is only an opinion. It is not a "psychological law" or a psychological fact. Researcher Dr. Carol Tavris says, "Today the hydraulic model of energy has been scientifically discredited."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless psychologists tend to expand the hydraulic idea to all emotions in spite of the opposing research. Therefore Dobson's "psychological law" is merely his Freudian opinion, which has been scientifically discredited.

In the opening chapter of *Hide or Seek* Dobson uses a psychological foundation and framework for defining, diagnosing, and solving problems of living. He describes problems in psychological rather than biblical terms. Then, he analyzes problems according to what parents and society did not provide in terms of so-called needs of the self as proposed by humanistic psychology. His solutions or goals are self-esteem and self-confidence. And the rest of the book is devoted to strategies for overcoming the problem (low-self esteem and inferiority) through building high self-esteem and self-confidence.

But, if we are going to believe in the sufficiency of God's Word for matters of life and godliness, we need to evaluate problems according to a biblical, rather than a psychological, framework. We need to ask the following questions. Will our description of problems be in psychological rather than biblical language? Will we analyze problems according to ideologies behind the psychologies, such as tenets of secular humanism, psychic or environmental determinism, the so-called unconscious, or behaviorism? Or will we analyze the problem according to God's Word? Will our solutions and goals be based upon psychological theories (such as in Dobson's illustration) and the so-called hierarchy of needs (including the need for self-esteem)? Or will our solutions and goals be biblical ones? Will we look to human strategies for overcoming the problems identified by Dobson as low-self esteem and inferiority? Or will we trust God's ways of transforming sinners into saints through His Word and His Spirit, thereby enabling Christians to walk according to the spirit rather than the flesh?

## **The Religion of Pragmatism**

The influence of pragmatism among Christians cannot be overestimated. The crux of the matter is this: Will we obey God because He is God or will we obey God **if** we think that it will work for our own good? The quick response of most Christians is, "Of course we will obey God because He is God." Nevertheless, most appeals to Christians are based on the premise that something works and is good for someone. These goals can be confused because God's will is indeed best for us. But, when the reason shifts from God's authority to whether something works for my best interests, then I have fallen for pragmatism.

In attempting to avoid a dogmatic, authoritarian manner of presenting the Word of God, many Christian speakers and writers supply man-centered reasons for obeying God. It is a subtle shift, which places man's opinion of what is good above what God has said is right and good. It is the same philosophical and ethical stance that prevailed during the time of Judges.

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:6 and 21:25.)

Just as that was the pathetic condition during the period of Judges, this seems to be the hallmark of our present age and the church has not been immune to its influence. Just before that pathetic period Joshua had declared: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And while Dobson may sincerely believe that his message resembles Joshua's, his reliance on pragmatism taints his message with the humanistic ethic based on what looks right, whether through the eyes of a single person or through the eyes of psychological observers of behavior.

Dobson's advice in *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* is based more on pragmatism than on God's will. For instance, Dobson describes what he calls "a universal characteristic of human nature" and then talks about how women can use this to their advantage. He says:

*We value that which we are fortunate to get; we discredit that with which we are stuck! We lust for the very thing which is beyond our grasp; we disdain the same item when it becomes a permanent possession.* <sup>22</sup>(Emphasis his.)

He follows this with a discussion about how women can use this to manipulate relationships. He illustrates that by saying how he used an attitude of self confidence, self respect and independence to win his wife. He then restates the formula, "*we crave that which we can't attain, but we disrespect that which we can't escape,*" and declares that "this axiom is particularly relevant in romantic matters."<sup>23</sup>

Even though Dobson says that he is not recommending any "sneaky cat and mouse game to recreate a 'challenge,'"<sup>24</sup> this kind of suggestion can very easily lead to manipulation and game playing rather than commitment to serve and obey God. His recommendation sounds like the usual advice to the lovelorn: Be "quietly confident, independent and mysterious."<sup>25</sup> We know this is the wisdom of the world. What would be the wisdom of God on the matter? When fear of man (or fear of losing a man) takes precedence over fear of God, worldly wisdom replaces the wisdom of God. These kinds of games prevail in the world. One would think that a Christian adviser would be more biblical in his counsel to women.

Dobson's pragmatic appeal can be seen throughout his work. His apparent reason for teaching parents to discipline their children is that it works. He quotes Jack London's words: "The best measurement of anything should be: does it work?"<sup>26</sup> The reason is pragmatism. And, although he brings God into the picture by saying that properly applied discipline will help teach our children about God, he does not give God's will as the primary reason for disciplining children. Elsewhere he says:

The most magnificent theory ever devised for the control of behavior is called the "Law of Reinforcement," formulated many years ago by the first educational psychologist, E. L. Thorndike. **This is magnificent because it works!**<sup>27</sup> (Emphasis added.)

He says, "Good discipline is brought about by the intelligent application of this principle of reinforcement."<sup>28</sup> Dobson has great confidence in the Thorndike Law of Reinforcement, which he quotes: "Behavior which achieves desirable consequences will recur."<sup>29</sup> To illustrate the usefulness of reinforcement, Dobson tells how marvelously well this Law of Reinforcement worked on his dog. That makes sense, because Thorndike was an animal psychologist, best known for his work in animal learning. He developed the "law of effect" and is in the same tradition as behaviorists Ivan Pavlov and John B. Watson. Such behaviorism views humans as highly evolved animals. The book *Theories of Personality* refers to Thorndike's law of effect as a "hedonistic formulation."<sup>30</sup>

Dobson evidently believes that what works with dogs will work with humans. In other words, he is recommending that, when it comes to training and discipline, parents treat their children like animals. Dobson declares: "Rewards are not only useful in shaping animal behavior; they succeed even better with humans."<sup>31</sup> He comes to his conclusions regarding rewards from animal psychology rather than from the Bible.

Dobson then presents this psychological theory as fact:

It is an absolute fact that unreinforced behavior will eventually disappear. This process, called *extinction* by psychologists, can be very useful to parents and teachers who want to alter the characteristics of children.<sup>32</sup>

While this may be true of animals it is not always true of people. Because of the complexity of sinful humanity and because other factors enter in, one cannot say categorically, "It is an absolute fact that. . . ." In fact, many people get stuck in unproductive activities that continue in spite of adverse results.

Jay Adams disagrees with Dobson's behavioristic methods of training children. He says:

James Dobson's book *Dare to Discipline* . . . while placing a needed emphasis upon discipline by structure, is based upon this non-Christian ideology. It is basically a godless humanistic book. The discipline advocated is behavioristic (Skinnerian). According to Dobson, a child is to be "trained" as one would train his dog. The methodology does not differ. The presupposition (not stated, but underlying the book) is that man is but another animal. There is no place for the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion or sanctification. Change takes place strictly on the horizontal level.<sup>33</sup>

Adams also says:

When Dobson, for instance, recommends strictly behavioristic methods for child raising *in the name of Christianity*, he badly confuses important distinctions and erases lines that forever must be drawn clearly. His near total capitulation to behaviorism is couched in Christian terms but really introduces an equally godless system into the Christian home while purporting to be a Christian reaction to permissiveness. . . . Conspicuously absent in such child discipline is the use of the Scriptures, conversion, repentance, the work of the Holy Spirit, and sanctification. Ephesians 6:4 emphasizes, in contrast, *both* discipline (by reward and punishment) and nouthetic confrontation (the "nurture *and* admonition of the Lord").<sup>34</sup> (Emphasis his.)

Rather than using the Bible to discover God's principle of reward and punishment and of mercy and justice, Dobson turns to psychological behaviorism and credits Skinner, Thorndike *et al.* for giving parents the wherewithal to discipline their children. And, of course, the appeal to parents is that **it works**.

Why should Christians follow a course of action? Because it works or because it is God's will? The origin of any teaching will determine the direction it goes. If parents discipline their children according to his Word and because God requires it, they are responding in obedience to God and the direction will be towards God. If, on the other hand, parents discipline their children according to the opinions of men because they work, the direction is too often towards self. Parents can feel good about themselves, and children can feel good about themselves, but will they truly submit to God's will even when obedience doesn't look as if it's working to their benefit?

The crux of the matter is this: Are we to do what God says even when we do not see results? Or are we to say that something is right and good because it works? Will we follow pragmatism or biblical authority? Pragmatism may very well come from and lead to love of self, while obedience to God comes from and leads to love for God. The danger of pragmatism is that one may be doing right things for wrong reasons. Goals and values become secularized and person-centered rather than sacred and God-centered.

On the other hand, a number of parents who use some of Dobson's advice may actually be following biblical authority because they know what God has said on the matter. If obedience to God is the motivation rather than pragmatism, they may very well be pleasing God and having success. But, if the motive is for success and because it works, they may become discouraged when it doesn't work and try something else.

Pragmatism must not be the primary reason even for obedience to God. However, obedience to God does work to bring us closer to Him and to mold us into the image of Christ. Nevertheless, love for God, rather than pragmatism, must be the reason for whatever we do in raising our children, as well as for whatever we think or do in all areas of our lives.

## **Dobson's Criticisms of Psychology**

Although Dobson demonstrates commitment to the psychological way of understanding people and helping them, he voices strong criticism of those psychological theories and techniques he does not agree with. This is not unusual. With over 450 different systems of psychotherapy (psychological counseling) and the often contradictory theories of child psychology, there is bound to be conflict. Rather than each so-called discovery and theory adding to a cohesive body of knowledge, psychology is made up of a cacophony of conflicting voices. To add to the confusion, psychologists are often eclectic. Each one picks and chooses bits and pieces he happens to like. Therefore, each psychologist offers his own concoction.

Dobson's primary area of study was child development, which is concerned with how children learn and develop through their ages and stages. It studies how children process information, how they learn, what they like to do, what they can do, in short, what is natural for them at any particular age. This field of study is dominated by professional educators and psychologists who are now the so-called experts, who speak as authorities even though they are often merely voicing their own opinions and biases. Although the study of child development and educational psychology have some basis in objective observation, they are not free from contamination. They are filled with subjectivity and are contaminated with presuppositions which conflict with the Bible, including evolutionism, behaviorism, pragmatism, and humanism.

Dobson opposes the teachings of certain authorities in his own field. Because every psychologist must choose from the various conflicting theories, each psychologist inevitably ends up, as Dobson does, disagreeing with other psychologists. Dobson rightly criticizes his colleagues who promote permissiveness. He declares that permissiveness is based upon the presuppositions that people are born good and that if they are allowed to develop with as little interference as possible they will become wonderful people. The presupposition is wrong.

But even though Dobson objects to that presupposition of secular humanism as it relates to permissiveness, his own promotion of self-esteem comes from the same source. Self-esteem teachings come from humanistic psychologists who presuppose that people are born good and that when their needs for self-worth, self-esteem, and self-actualization are met they will be good people who are socially responsible. Dobson picks from the same tree as the promoters of permissiveness and offers the fruit to fellow Christians.

### **Dobson's Criticisms of Experts**

Although his authoritative position in Christendom depends upon his status as a licensed psychologist and an expert in child development, Dobson also expresses his concern about people depending upon "experts." While parents of past generations learned about child rearing from members of their extended family, he says that parents now look to experts because they feel unprepared for raising children. Therefore they "have turned to pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists and educators for answers to their questions about the complexities of parenthood."<sup>35</sup> He continues:

Therefore, increasing numbers of American children have been reared according to this professional consultation during the past forty years. In fact, no country on earth has embraced the teachings of child psychology and the offerings of family specialists more than has the United States.<sup>36</sup>

Those psychologists, educational psychologists, and psychiatrists are the very ones who have undermined parents and made them feel inadequate and dependent upon "experts." Freud created much criticism of parents and doubt about their expertise. He and numerous other psychological "experts" have nearly destroyed the thread of passing wisdom from one generation to another through the family.

Although Dobson is part of the group of "experts" who have intimidated parents, he asks: "What has been the effect of this professional influence?" Then, in answer to his own question, he bemoans the rise of "delinquency, drug abuse, alcoholism, unwanted pregnancies, mental illness, and suicide" among young people. He declares: "In many ways, we have made a mess of parenthood!"<sup>37</sup> And while he is careful not to place the entire blame on psychologists, he says:

I believe they [the professional "experts"] have played a role in creating the problem. Why? *Because in general, behavioral scientists have lacked confidence in the Judeo-Christian ethic and have disregarded the wisdom of this priceless tradition.* <sup>38</sup>(Emphasis his.)

We agree with his criticism of the substitution of the psychological opinions of men for what he calls the "Judeo-Christian ethic," though we would be more specific and use the entire Word of God, rather than a "Judeo-Christian ethic," which is looser in definition and practice.

Dobson criticizes members of his own profession for ignoring wisdom from the past and "substituting instead their own wobbly-legged insights of the moment."<sup>39</sup> We agree with his description of the substitution, but it is even more serious when Christians ignore the Word of God and substitute the "wobbly-legged insights" of psychological opinions. And we thoroughly agree with his next remark about psychological "experts":

Each authority, writing from his own limited experience and reflecting his own unique biases, has sold us his guesses and suppositions as though they represented Truth itself.<sup>40</sup>

Dobson bemoans the anti-Christian bias of secular psychologists who “have argued God out of existence.”<sup>41</sup> Lest anyone misunderstand him, however, Dobson is quick to defend his own position. He places himself outside those psychologists who depend upon the wrong source for wisdom in dealing with the issues and problems of life. He says:

How do my writings differ from the unsupported recommendations of those whom I have criticized? The distinction lies in the *source* of the views being presented. The underlying principles expressed herein are not my own innovative insights which would be forgotten in a brief season or two. Instead, they originated with the inspired biblical writers who gave us the foundation for all relationships in the home.<sup>42</sup> (Emphasis his.)

This is an extremely important point which requires examination. We know that Dobson thinks that his source is the Bible, and yet the Bible does not teach a number of concepts that Dobson teaches. And while some of his teachings may agree with the Bible, psychology plays a significant role in his teachings—so much so that we would venture to say that Dobson’s source for much of what he teaches is the very psychological cistern he criticizes: humanistic psychology with its hierarchy of needs, including the so-called needs for self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence. And while his emphasis on love and discipline sound very biblical, behavioral psychology and pragmatism are strong contenders as the underlying source.

Dobson is right in not trying to take credit for his ideas as though he himself discovered them, because they are not simply his own “innovative insights.” They are taken from the insights of secular psychological theorists and given a biblical boost. He says that his purpose in writing has been “nothing more ambitious than to verbalize the Judeo-Christian tradition regarding discipline of children and to apply those concepts to today’s families.”<sup>43</sup> But Dobson’s “Judeo-Christian tradition” can hardly be distinguished from traditional American middle-class family values and is vague enough to incorporate any psychological notions he wishes to promote.

Because he chose to “verbalize” a tradition rather than a solidly biblical Christianity, Dobson gave himself latitude to include unholy mixtures of the wisdom of the world, the tradition of men, and enough Bible to lend authority and appeal to his Christian sensibilities. Terms such as *Judeo-Christian tradition* and *Judeo-Christian ethic*, while loosely attached to Old Testament law, designate something quite different from Christianity. For instance Judaism and Christianity do **not** agree on many things, including the source of change and help (Christ’s death and resurrection) or its power (the indwelling Holy Spirit). It is to the whole counsel of God we must turn.

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Notes:

1. James Dobson. *Dare to Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1970, p. 157.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 25; James Dobson. *Hide or Seek*, Revised Edition. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979, p. 66; James Dobson. *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975, p. 63.
5. Dobson. *Hide or Seek*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 92-93.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
8. James Dobson. *Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1982, 1989, p. 497.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 498.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Dobson. *Hide or Seek*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

19. Dobson. *What Wives Wish. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
20. James Dobson, *Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1980, p. 93.
21. Carol Tavris. *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, p. 38.
22. Dobson. *What Wives Wish. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
26. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
28. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
30. Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey. *Theories of Personality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1957, p. 234. Also see, pp. 420-421.
31. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
33. Jay E. Adams. *The Big Umbrella*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972, p. 131.
34. Jay E. Adams. *The Christian Counselor's Manual*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973, p. 82.
35. James Dobson. *The Strong-Willed Child*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1984, p. 232.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.* p. 234.
43. *Ibid.* p. 235.

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Published by EastGate Publishers

Santa Barbara, California

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