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## PSYCHOLOGY

Thinkers have long considered the nature of the human mind and human behavior. The ancient Greeks, with their dualistic understanding of reality, separated matter and spirit, and thus distinguished between body and soul. Christianity, while picturing man as a psycho-physical unity, taught that he was made up of component parts.<sup>88</sup> While the Enlightenment emphasized man's rational nature, the Romantic Movement, with its emphasis on human emotions, opened the door for the pursuit of psychology as a recognizable discipline. Thus the middle of the nineteenth century witnessed the origins of psychology as we know it today.

Psychology is the study of the ψυχή (*psyche* - soul or mind) - essentially the study of man. It is therefore important, as with all the social sciences, to test any modern psychological theory and its view of human nature against the biblical doctrine of man. Since there are almost as many schools of psychology as there are psychologists, we cannot hope to give generalizations that are valid for all secular approaches to the discipline. Instead, we will evaluate a few influential examples from the standpoint of Scripture.

### BASIC APPROACHES

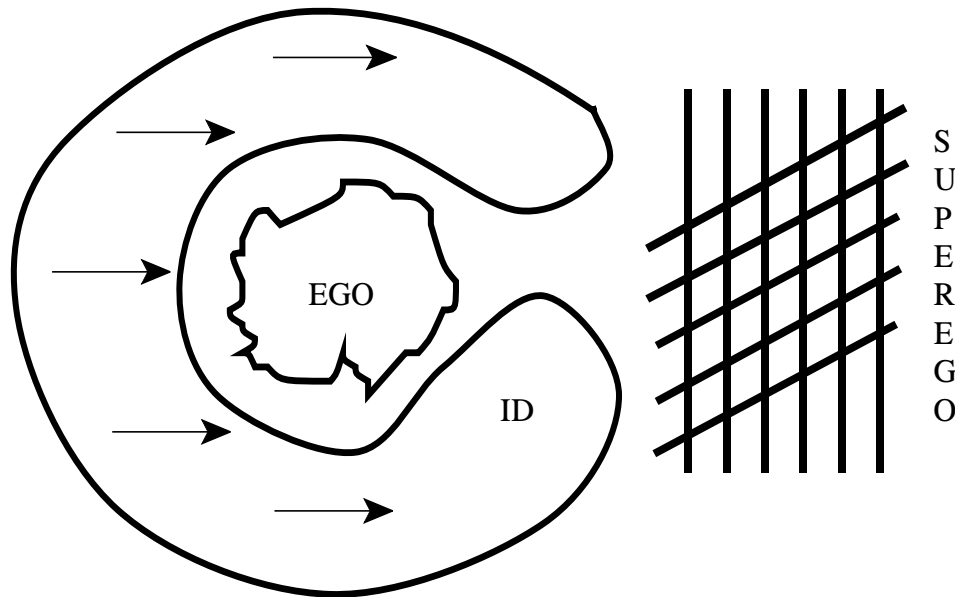
As we examine three of the diverse approaches to psychology that have developed over the years, we will focus on their understanding of the nature of man and the ability of man to deal with his problems and conflicts. Then we will give a biblical response to each.

#### PSYCHOANALYSIS (e.g., Sigmund Freud)

The great pioneer in the field of psychology was Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). With regard to the makeup of the human psyche, Freud believed that human nature was made up of three basic components - the id, the ego, and the superego (see diagram on the next page).

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<sup>88</sup> Among Christian theologians, some are *Dichotomists*, arguing that man is made up of two components, the body and the soul/spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7), while others are *Trichotomists*, seeing man as consisting of body, soul, and spirit (I Thessalonians 5:23).



- The id consisted of the basic unconscious animalistic drives inherited from our bestial past. Because these focus on self-preservation, they involve sex and violence.<sup>89</sup>
- The superego, on the other hand, is not inborn, but rather imposed from without by society, particularly by one's parents. It is what is sometimes called the conscience.
- Finally, the ego is the conscious mind, what most people would refer to as the self.

According to Freud's understanding, the unconscious drives of the id struggle to assert themselves, while the societally-imposed superego struggles to control and suppress them. The poor ego, consequently, is the innocent bystander that winds up being mangled in the struggle between these two powerful forces not of our own making. Note the implications of this scheme:

- Man cannot be described as either inherently good or inherently evil. The bestial id is amoral, acting on instinct. It is no more evil in its drives than is the ape who would attack his rivals and seek to spread his seed as widely as possible. The ego is in many ways passive, shaped by the two powerful forces to which it is subject. If there is any villain in this picture, it is the superego, which suppresses the natural urges inside a person and warps the self in various problematic ways.

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<sup>89</sup> The influence of Darwin is strong here. The struggle for survival favored aggression, while the drive to perpetuate the species emphasized sex. Note the implication here that man is not fundamentally a rational creature (here the influence of Romanticism in its critique of Enlightenment thought is evident), but at the core a beast who acts on instinct.

- Man is thus not ultimately responsible for his own behavior, since the two troublemakers, the id and the superego, were respectively inborn (but unconscious) and imposed by others.<sup>90</sup>

Because the root of the problem is beyond the person's control, professional help is needed in order for people to get to the source of their problems. This is the basic approach taken by psychoanalysts. Note the following:

- Since the real problem is the overly-restrictive superego, the therapist must take the patient back into his early life to detect the source of the problem. How does one penetrate the subconscious or bring out long-forgotten incidents from the past?<sup>91</sup> A variety of techniques have been used to do this, including hypnosis, with which Freud was fascinated early in his career, Rorschach (ink blot) tests, and free association.
- According to Freud, each individual goes through certain stages of development, and if problems occur in any of these stages, the person can suffer from a fixation that stalls his development at that stage.
  - The first stage is the oral phase, during which the child's entire life is preoccupied with sucking as a source of nourishment; one who suffers trauma in the first year of life may manifest an oral fixation later in life by thumb-sucking, chewing gum, smoking, or simply talking too much.
  - The second stage, the anal phase, focuses on potty training. If this experience is a traumatic one, the person can develop an anal fixation.<sup>92</sup>
  - Sex also enters into this. Freud argued that male babies instinctively love their mothers and hate their fathers out of jealousy over the mother's breasts.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The implications of this for the legal system are enormous. How often do defense attorneys try to convince a jury that a criminal should not be held accountable for his actions because he couldn't help himself, either on the basis of "temporary insanity" (the id took over) or because of childhood abuse or a miserable environment (it's the superego's fault)?

<sup>91</sup> One particularly controversial aspect of such an approach is the issue of repressed memory. In several highly-publicized court cases, parents or others have been convicted of sexual abuse of which the defendant had never been aware until he or she lay on the psychiatrist's couch, when "evidence" was brought out by asking leading questions. In many cases the therapists, often committed feminists, have pursued an agenda because of their conviction that most girls have experienced sexual abuse in childhood of which they are not aware.

<sup>92</sup> Notice the extent to which this kind of thinking has entered the language. People often describe someone who is very uptight or characterized by OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) as "anal" or an "anal retentive."

<sup>93</sup> He called this the Oedipus Complex, named for the protagonist in Euripides' play *Oedipus Rex*, who was abandoned as a child by his wicked father, raised by a shepherd, then returned and delivered the city of his birth by killing his father and unwittingly marrying his mother. Young girls, similarly, hate their mothers and want to sleep with their fathers; this is the Electra Complex, named for the Greek heroine who killed her mother Clytemnestra after the latter had murdered her father Agamemnon.

The bottom line here is that, whatever the nature of a person's problems, they are usually the fault of the parents. Did the patient lack affection as a child? Were his parents overly restrictive? Once the cause is discovered, those troublesome restrictions needed to be removed by weakening the superego (shifting the blame onto others) so that the powerful forces of the id can be released in socially acceptable ways, thus relieving the pressures on the poor mangled ego. How is this done?

- The process of transference, which involves the patient imagining that the therapist is the parent or other person with whom he must deal, often initiates the healing process. The psychologist then encourages the patient to vent his feelings in a way that relieves him of the pressures that have been building up over the years.<sup>94</sup>
- The weakening of the superego requires the rejection of restrictions imposed by society. Guilt feelings need to be removed by convincing the patient that the things for which he feels guilty are not really wrong; he has merely been told that they are wrong by others.

Because the Freudian scheme admits no responsibility on the part of man for his problems, it also ascribes to him no real ability to deal with those problems. He must depend on the professional therapist, who alone is skilled enough to help him eliminate his false feelings of guilt and maladjustments caused by what his parents in particular and society in general have done. This often takes years of therapy, of course, involving frequent sessions at obscenely high prices.

Freud's approach is contrary to Scripture in many respects. To begin with, the Bible pictures human nature as totally corrupt as the result of the Fall (Romans 3:10-21). It also teaches that man is responsible for his own behavior. The unconscious id cited by Freud is not an inheritance from our evolutionary past, but a sinful nature for which we are accountable before God. The conscience, as well, though undoubtedly shaped by parents and society to some extent, is a matter of personal responsibility, since we are to check it against the standards of Scripture rather than following it without question. Furthermore, when Freud advocates weakening the superego, the Bible describes the same procedure in much more negative terms, like "hardening the heart" or "searing the conscience with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:2). It is true that man is unable to solve his problems on his own, but he needs the Spirit, not the shrink, to do so. Scripture pictures man as totally unable in himself, but totally able by the power of God, to deal with the challenges of life.

#### NON-DIRECTIVE THERAPY (e.g., Carl Rogers)

Carl Rogers (1902-1987), an American therapist from Minnesota, is considered the founder of the school of client-centered or non-directive therapy. What are the fundamental beliefs and practices associated with Rogers' approach?

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<sup>94</sup> Unethical therapists have on occasion used the transference process to take advantage of vulnerable patients sexually, giving the entire approach a bad name in the eyes of many.

- Rogers had a very optimistic view of human nature. Man, he believed, is essentially good and has within himself all the resources he needs to deal with what life brings.
- Man's basic problem, then, is not unconscious drives or societal pressures, but a lack of self-understanding.
- The task of the therapist, therefore, is to serve as a mirror in which the patient is able to see his true self, to reflect and recast the patient's statements, never providing outside input (thus "non-directive" therapy), until the patient gains insight into his own problems and sees how they should be handled.

Needless to say, Rogers' approach fits very well into the modern climate of self-fulfillment and self-actualization. It has influenced the field of education, where, along with the teachings of John Dewey, it has led schools to value self-esteem over actual accomplishment and to focus on learning by discovery rather than actual formal instruction. It has also contributed greatly to the various "Twelve Step" programs (see below) that have appeared to deal with a bewildering assortment of problems.

From a biblical standpoint, Rogers' view of human nature has much in common with that of the fourth-century heretic Pelagius, who believed that man was essentially good, but did evil because he followed bad examples. Scripture, of course, tells us differently, picturing man as inherently evil, sinning because he is in rebellion against a holy God. Man is therefore totally unable on his own to solve his problems; looking inside himself will only lead him deeper into the heart of darkness (cf. Luke 11:24-26). Biblical guidance is always *directive* - man needs to be told what to do, and the standard for proper thinking and behavior is the Word of God, not personal feelings.

#### BEHAVIORISM (e.g., B.F. Skinner)

Behaviorism has its roots in the pioneering work of Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), who did the famous stimulus-response experiment with dogs, demonstrating that they could be made to salivate at the sound of a bell. When such conditioned responses become the framework for interpreting all behavior, both human and animal, one arrives at Behaviorism. The best-known modern advocate of the theory is the late Harvard psychologist B.F. Skinner (1904-1990).

Behaviorism depends very heavily on evolutionary theory, but in a different way than did Freud. For the Behaviorist, man is no more than an animal, the sum of his behaviors. The existence of the soul is denied, along with any notion of free will (cf. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*). Behavior is determined by forces within and without, and may be modified (through stimulus-response conditioning) by altering those forces.<sup>95</sup> For instance, at one point a follower

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<sup>95</sup> Skinner created experiments with animals to support his behaviorist theories. He invented the Skinner Box, an environment that could be used to accomplish such tasks as teaching rats to run through a maze or pigeons to play a simple piano by stimulus-response conditioning.

of Skinner was given a contract by the state of Massachusetts for the treatment of sex offenders in the prison system. Volunteers were subjected to electro-shock therapy in order to change their responses to stimuli previously eliciting sexual desires (pictures of naked children, for instance). Since man is the product of his environment, the only way to deal effectively with his problems is to manipulate that environment, both internally and externally. The specter of Big Brother rears its ugly head.<sup>96</sup>

As far as the ability of man is concerned, Behaviorists believe that man has absolutely none - he has no freedom, yet paradoxically the Behaviorist advocates that society *choose* the path of control over that of freedom and permissiveness.<sup>97</sup>

From a biblical standpoint, man, made in the image of God, is more than an animal. He has an eternal soul, and is more than the sum total of his observable behavior. He is responsible for what he does; he cannot blame it on environmental factors. Furthermore, man is not bound by his environment, but is able to transcend it by the grace of God.

#### NOUTHETIC COUNSELING (e.g., Jay Adams)

What about a biblical approach to psychology? The example we will consider comes from one of the pioneers in biblical counseling, Jay Adams (b.1929). For years, Christians in the field of counseling simply “baptized” whatever secular approach happened to be popular at the time, adding a few Bible verses to what the secular therapists were doing. While this remains a danger, the pioneering work of Jay Adams in the sixties and seventies laid the groundwork for a truly biblical approach to psychology and counseling. He insisted that the Bible had to be the foundation for any Christian psychology, and his book *Competent to Counsel* claimed that any pastor who knew the Word of God and could apply it to people’s lives was better qualified to deal with people’s problems than the most experienced of secular psychologists. While some of Adams’ ideas and practices were extreme, his work laid the foundation for a uniquely Christian approach to psychological counseling.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> George Orwell’s *1984* is a classic picture of the abuse of behavioral conditioning. In the novel, people’s actions, words, and even thoughts are completely monitored by a central authority that controls the environment in which they live.

<sup>97</sup> Skinner wrote a novel called *Walden Two* in which he advocated the benefits of a controlled human environment. In the novel, Walden Two was a commune where strict environmental controls eliminated all conflict and brought perfect peace and contentment to all in the community.

<sup>98</sup> The term “Nouthetic Counseling” was taken from the Greek word translated “counsel” in the New Testament.

With regard to the nature of man, Adams emphasized three basic biblical teachings:

- First of all, man is a creature of God, and thus accountable to Him, and is not an autonomous being accountable only to himself (contra. Rogers).
- Secondly, man is made in the image of God, and is therefore a responsible being (contra. Freud and Skinner).
- Thirdly, man is fallen in sin - guilty before God, yet having the hope of restoration in Christ (contrary to all secular schools of psychology).

The root of all psychological problems is sin, not one's upbringing or one's instincts, one's knowledge or one's environment. Consequently, the solution to all problems is found in Christ, and the Word of God is the principal tool of the counselor.<sup>99</sup>

Man is therefore unable on his own, but fully able in Christ, to solve any and all problems. In this regard, Adams was very skeptical of the way in which professional therapists used the term *mental illness*. He insisted that referring to what was really sin as some form of sickness would eliminate the idea of a person's responsibility for his own actions, and thus eliminate any hope of change. Instead, he believed that the term *mental illness* should be reserved only for those conditions where the cause of the problems was verifiably physiological.<sup>100</sup> In the years since Adams did his seminal work on Christian psychology, great advances have been made among believers to produce a genuinely Christian approach to counseling. Much of this work has been done in the context of the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF), which Adams founded.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> I had the privilege of taking several courses with Dr. Adams at Westminster Seminary, and he often related ways in which his counseling sessions with unbelievers became opportunities for evangelism. He would tell people who came to him for help with their marriages, for instance, that he could give them advice that would make their marriage better by changing certain forms of behavior, but that these would accomplish no more than putting a band-aid on a cancer; no real solutions to their problems could be found apart from submitting their lives to Christ.

<sup>100</sup> Admittedly, in the last thirty years, much more has been learned about the role of the physiology of the brain in certain types of mental and emotional problems such as bipolar disorders and depression, for example, so this is a more complex issue than Adams would initially have acknowledged.

<sup>101</sup> Leading figures associated with the work of CCEF over the years include Wayne Mack, Paul Tripp, David Powlison, and Ed Welch.

## GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

The practice of group psychology has its roots in the self-help “Twelve Step” programs that first appeared during the Depression (the first, Alcoholics Anonymous, was founded in 1935).<sup>102</sup> The basic idea behind this approach is for people who share the same problem to get together, discuss it, and seek to help one another.

In the sixties, the practice of group psychology grew popular in connection with the freedom of self-expression advocated by the free-spirited “hippies” and others. It took on various forms and various names - encounter groups, sensitivity training, etc. It has survived to the present in a variety of forms, which, as we will see, involve little more than Rogerian therapy applied to groups rather than individuals. What does group psychology involve? The practices listed below are not universal, but all are common in many such settings.

- Absence of moral judgments - anything anyone says is to be accepted without question.
- Emphasis on the expression of emotions - “let it all hang out.”
- Release of aggressions and frustrations - hitting or kicking inanimate objects, pillow fights, “primal scream therapy,” etc.
- Total openness and honesty with other members of the group, even if such honesty might be hurtful.<sup>103</sup>
- Non-verbal techniques, including art as a form of therapy.

Today, group psychology often becomes a means of generating strong social pressure to conform to certain politically correct attitudes. Sensitivity seminars intended to root out racist, sexist, or homophobic ideas, language, or practices subject Christians in academia or the business world to unbiblical ways of looking at the world that promote acceptance of what Scripture says is clearly wrong.<sup>104</sup>

Because of its close relationship to Rogerian therapy, group therapy shares some of the same flaws. Note the following:

- Moral relativism will never lead to the solving of problems. It may remove guilt feelings, but never guilt.
- Emphasis on the irrational bypasses divine revelation as a source of healing.

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<sup>102</sup> The founders of AA, Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, were Christians, but the movement has lost almost all vestiges of its original Christian emphasis.

<sup>103</sup> The Esalen Institute, founded in Big Sur, California in 1962 and considered a pioneering effort in the Human Potential Movement, became notorious for promoting openness through the use of nude therapy.

<sup>104</sup> This is not meant to suggest that prejudice is ever right, but that such seminars, often forced upon the participants, become settings for fostering a radical anti-Christian agenda.

- Hostility is not to be handled by “blow-up” or “clam-up” approaches, but emotions are to be channeled against the *problem*.
- Honesty and openness require the context of a relationship; Scripture tells us to speak the truth *in love*.
- Non-verbal techniques often worsen the problem by pandering to man’s lower nature.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND THE STATE

The manipulative powers of psychology, particularly with regard to stimulus-response conditioning, have long been a temptation to those in positions of power, whether that power is political or economic. Note the following:

- Propaganda - A form of behavioral psychology, propaganda involves controlling the environment by restricting the flow of ideas. It is not just a matter of presenting a slanted view of things, but also of preventing access to contrary viewpoints and beliefs. Thus it is no surprise that governments wishing to utilize the power of propaganda must eliminate the freedom of the press. When coups occur in Third World countries, for example, rebels first take over the government buildings, then seize the TV and radio stations.<sup>105</sup> Propaganda thus has the power to brainwash, as George Orwell illustrated in his classic *1984*.
- Advertising - Politicians are not the only ones who seek to manipulate the minds, and thus the behavior, of people by controlling the information they receive. Businessmen do the same thing through the medium of advertising. Techniques include creating “needs,” appealing to subliminal drives and desires (this moves a bit into the Freudian camp), and creating peer pressure. Like good behaviorists, advertisers work hard to associate through conditioning things that have no inherent relationship to one another. In the same way that Pavlov’s dogs salivated when they heard a bell because they had come to associate the bell with food, so advertisers seek to get people to buy their products by associating them with human desires with which they have no inherent connection - sex, power, sex, popularity, sex, independence, sex, acceptance, sex, well, you get the idea. . . .

## PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

Sadly, in the same way that Christians tended for many years to adopt the counseling methods of secular psychologists and baptize them with a few Bible verses, so the church has too often adopted the practices of the world because they are perceived to “work.” But Christians are not pragmatists, and the work of God cannot be accomplished using the methods of the world.

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<sup>105</sup> Attempts by the Chinese government today to restrict access to the Internet by its people fits into the same category.

God's work must be done in God's way. Note the following examples of psychological techniques borrowed from the world by the church:

- **Inducements** - The extensive bus ministries that built up enormous Sunday Schools in the churches of men like Jerry Falwell and Jack Hyles were notorious for offering inducements to get children to get on the buses and come to church. Such publicity stunts and handouts are little more than applied Skinnerian conditioning. We need to beware of giving the impression that the Gospel lacks either value or power in and of itself to draw people to Christ.<sup>106</sup> This does not mean, of course, that there is no legitimate place for rewards to encourage such things as learning Bible verses, but the rewards should be related to the goals to be achieved.
- **Emotionalism** - In our preaching, we must be careful not to obscure the Word of God by manipulating the emotions of our listeners. A preacher's basic job is neither to entertain nor to stir, but rather to present the Word of God clearly. The power of preaching comes from the Word, not from rhetorical techniques. The problem, of course, is that when someone responds to emotional manipulation, he is responding to the preacher rather than to God. When we try to do the work of the Spirit, false conversions, and their accompanying false assurance, result far too often.<sup>107</sup>
- **Invitations** - When Charles Finney devised the New Measures for evangelism during the Second Great Awakening in the early part of the nineteenth century, the keystone of his technique was the altar call. These have all too frequently become times of psychological manipulation, involving the use of anything from peer pressure<sup>108</sup> to people's aversion to

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<sup>106</sup> A good illustration is the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team of 1972-73; the worst team in the history of the NBA finished with a record of 9-73. That year, the general manager brought in every crazy halftime show he could think of just to get people to come to the games. The implication, of course, was that without the inducements unrelated to basketball, no one would conceivably want to come, since the product on the court was not worth watching.

<sup>107</sup> Missionaries in Asia, sincerely desirous of helping the poor and starving peasants, would often give out rice while preaching the Gospel. Unfortunately, the sense of social obligation prevalent in the Far East moved the recipients of the rice to profess acceptance of what the missionaries were preaching, though this in practice amounted to little more than adding Christ to their well-stocked "god shelf" at home. These "rice Christians," because they came largely for the food being offered by the missionaries, showed little evidence of true conversion.

<sup>108</sup> Crusade evangelists, including Billy Graham, would train people to counsel those who came forward in a meeting. The counselors would be instructed to come forward as soon as the invitation began, giving the impression that many throughout the audience were responding to the Gospel, thus creating peer pressure. Even worse, I have known evangelists giving altar calls to lie. After asking respondents to raise their hands when everyone's eyes are closed, the speaker will say, "Yes, I see hands going up all over the auditorium. Won't you also join in and give your life to Christ?" Sadly, no hands have been raised at all. Such blatant manipulation dishonors Christ and undermines the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of people.

cognitive dissonance.<sup>109</sup> The basic thing to remember here is that God saves, not people. Our responsibility is to be faithful, not to get results. The results will be genuine only if God is the one who produces them.

Thus the church must be careful not to be seduced by the practices of the world, with their unbiblical assumptions about human nature. The ends do not justify the means, and any approach to evangelism that justifies itself simply because “it works” is unlikely to advance the Kingdom.

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<sup>109</sup> Evangelists who give invitations often begin by asking people who wish to respond to raise hands while everyone’s eyes are closed, then argue that, if they really mean it, they should be willing to stand, and then finally come forward, because Christ will deny anyone who refuses to acknowledge Him publicly. The result is that, once someone has started, he feels pressure to follow through on what he has begun. Does such a technique imply that had the person been asked to come forward immediately, he probably wouldn’t have been saved?!?