

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:	1
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE DEFINED:	6
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AS A TOOL FOR PREDICTING HUMAN BEHAVIOR:	11
THE ROLE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:	17
THE LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:	27
PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE WITH RESPECT TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE CHURCH:	38

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible ©
1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973 1975, 1977, 1988,
by the Lockman Foundation
through a license with Biblesoft 1988-1996
22014 7th Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98198
All rights reserved.

PREDICTABILITY VERSUS DETERMINISM: THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN CHURCH CONFLICTS

INTRODUCTION:

Cognitive dissonance is a theory of behavior that has been explored for more than forty years. It was first expressed in 1957 by Leon Festinger who, at the time, was a resident fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. This was not the first time the phenomenon, now known as cognitive dissonance, was observed but was the first time it was formulated into a theory to explain observable behavior.

Before defining and attempting to apply the theory of cognitive dissonance to the subject of conflict management in the church, several things need to be observed. First, there is a prominent knee-jerk reaction by many Christians today when any topic regarding psychology is mentioned. This is unfortunate because there are many things that can be learned from psychology.

In its simplest form, psychology is a study of the soul (ψυχή) of man. Here, soul refers to more than the immaterial part of man. Vine and Hogg make the following observation regarding the concept of soul found in the Bible:

". . . Besides its meanings, "heart, mind, soul," denotes "life" in two chief respects, (a) "breath of life, the natural life," e. g., <Matt. 2:20; 6:25; Mark 10:45; Luke 12:22; Acts 20:10; Rev. 8:9; 12:11> (cf. <Lev. 17:11; Esth. 8:11>); (b) "the seat of personality," e. g., <Luke 9:24>, explained in <v. 25> as "own self" See list under SOUL. See also HEART, MIND.

Notes: (1) "Speaking generally, psuche, is the individual life, the living being, whereas zoe, is the life of that being, cf. <Ps. 66:9>, 'God... which holdeth our soul (psuche) in life (zoe),' and <John 10:10>, 'I came

that they may have life (zoe),' with <v. 11>, 'The Good Shepherd layeth down His life (psuche) for the sheep.'"¹

Therefore, as the term is used in this paper, psychology is "the science that deals with mental processes and behavior."² It could also be said that psychology is a philosophy in that it is "the branch of metaphysics that studies the soul, the mind, and the relationship of life and mind to the functions of the body."³ As long as psychology is limited to a study of the human soul, it is a valid discipline and can teach many things about human behavior. However, when it is elevated to a philosophy of life by which all of life and existence is explained and when it becomes the final arbiter of human behavior, it is no longer valid.

There is a great deal Christians can learn from the behavioral sciences. However, it must be understood that much of what the behavioral scientists see has to do with the effects of the fall. It is often fallen man analyzing fallen man. For this reason, we should not be surprised if the conclusion drawn is that certain behaviors are determined by environment alone such as in stimulus/response psychology and that man is incapable of overcoming certain stimulus/response cycles. The natural man is not able to comprehend the principles and power of the resurrection in this present life nor is he able to comprehend many other aspects of the God's grace. When psychology is limited to

¹ W. E. Vine quoting Notes on Galatians by Hogg and Vine. pp. 324,1 Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words eds. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr. (Nashville, Camden, and New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 368.

² The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3rd ed. (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992 licensed to BibleSoft 1993-1996).

³ Ibid.

viewing human behavior through the scientific method, a research tool valid in its own right when used properly, any outcome of supernatural origin is dismissed outright.

It is in the conclusions drawn that psychology becomes erroneous. When humanists or behaviorists, or even some Christians, use the conclusions drawn from a study of the soul of man to sit in judgment upon God's revelation or substitute these conclusions for revelation, then psychology becomes erroneous and even harmful. On the other hand, when the supernaturalist refuses to acknowledge any validity to the study of the soul, this too can produce error. This does not mean that we should elevate psychology so that it is held on a par with revealed truth. Doing so would result in either of two errors, synergism or syncretism.

Synergism is "the simultaneous action of separate agencies which, together, have greater total effect than the sum of their individual effects."⁴ Psychology can help to explain human behavior as recorded in the Bible but it is not psychology plus revelation bringing us to a higher reality. Psychology merely enhances our ability to understand the Bible and its applications to human behavior. Revelation is always the determining factor in what is true.

Syncretism is "the combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs or practices in religion, philosophy, etc., or an attempt to effect such compromise." When psychology is elevated to the level of a belief system or philosophy of existence as in humanism or behaviorism, then the positive affects of God's revelation are diminished

⁴ Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, ed. David B. Guralnik, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 1444.

and truth is undermined. In order to avoid these pitfalls, we need to know what the Bible says. What is important is not what we think the Bible says. We must put on the spiritual armor by understanding the message of the Word. Without it, we are going to be misled or worse we are going to mislead others.

The importance of knowing what the Bible says is made very clear when reading works by men such as Professor Delos McKown, head of the Philosophy department at Auburn University (Alabama). He has written extensively in philosophical and rationalist journals and is a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. In a recent article published on the Internet, he suggests using cognitive dissonance as a tool to demolish the reasoning of so called bibliolaters. In this article he wrote:

Bibliolaters should not be humored by being allowed to prattle on unchallenged but should be put in the position of having to put up or shut up. Positive good can come from making them suffer what sociologists commonly call cognitive dissonance, for it is out of intolerable intellectual and emotional conflicts with oneself that deliverance often comes."⁵

Dr. McKown proceeded to rattle off a number of so called inconsistencies in the Bible and in what people believe. He lists several fallacies regarding what he thinks the Bible says and what he thinks Christians believe. Then in a humorous way he dismisses each fallacy supposing to increase cognitive dissonance so as to change the belief system of Christians. Needless to say, he demonstrates both the ignorance of the individuals to which he refers and his own sorry ignorance of what the Bible teaches.

Unless Christians know the message of God's Word, individuals like him will be successful in undermining the faith of many. This is an opportunity to overcome the

dissonance he proposes to cause by increasing our understanding the Word. In this way, we will be able to ward off the "flaming missiles of the evil one."⁶ These flaming missiles are not psychology itself or the theory of cognitive dissonance but the false conclusions and misuse of psychology and this theory.

In this paper, the purpose is to define cognitive dissonance, then to consider cognitive dissonance as a tool for predicting human behavior, and then to consider the limits of cognitive dissonance. Finally we want to explore the practical application of this theory to the management of conflicts in the church. One thing we do not want to do is elevate this theory to a place of importance above or even equal to that of God's revealed truth. The purpose is not to start a movement as we saw happen three decades ago when Dr. Tim LaHaye published his book, Spirit-Controlled Temperament.⁷ All of a sudden Christians everywhere were trying to figure out each other's temperaments. It was as if his insights were the answer to all problems. We want to see some practical applications of cognitive dissonance but then hold firmly to God's grace as revealed in His Word as the answer to the human condition.

⁵ Delos McKown, Ph.D., "How To Handle Bibliolaters" (Internet Infidels 1995-1997)

⁶ cf. Ephesians 6:16.

⁷ Tim LaHaye, Spirit-Controlled Temperament (La Mesa: Post, Inc. Publishers of Scriptural Truth, 1966).

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE DEFINED:

Before attempting to state the theory of cognitive dissonance, it is important to define terms. The term *cognition* refers to "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior."⁸ *Cognitive elements*:

"Represent knowledge about oneself: what one does, what one feels, what one wants or desires, what one is, and the like. Other elements of knowledge concern the world in which one lives: what is where, what leads to what, what things are satisfying or painful or inconsequential or important, etc."⁹

When cognitive elements, what one knows, are in conflict with one another, this is generally called inconsistencies. These inconsistencies produce pressure and tension within the individual knowing them. In cognitive dissonance theory, the term inconsistency is replaced by the term *dissonance*. Therefore, *dissonance* refers to the inconsistencies one observes between cognitive elements. The opposite of inconsistencies is consistencies. Therefore, in cognitive dissonance theory, the opposite of *dissonance* is *consonance*.

The basic hypotheses as stated by Dr. Festinger is:

1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.
2. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.¹⁰

⁸ Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 3.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

In the application of the theory, one can readily see that the magnitude of the total dissonance within a person increases according to the amount of dissonance between conflicting elements. Festinger lists four areas in which dissonance might occur. These are:

1. Dissonance could arise from logical inconsistency.
2. Dissonance could arise because of cultural mores.
3. Dissonance may arise because one specific opinion is sometimes included, by definition, in a more general opinion.
4. Dissonance may arise because of past experience.¹¹

We are now ready to posit a definition of cognitive dissonance. One simple definition is "A condition of conflict or anxiety resulting from inconsistency between one's beliefs and one's actions, such as opposing the slaughter of animals and eating meat."¹²

Two additional articles will help to clarify this definition. First:

Cognitive dissonance is a theoretical construct in social psychology, first advanced by Leon Festinger, that attempts to explain certain aspects of decision making and an individual's behavior before and after the decision-making process.

Festinger assumed that people strive toward an internal consistency between their beliefs and their actions or between one belief and another. He termed the lack of such consistency *dissonance* and asserted that when such dissonance occurs, individuals unconsciously seek to reduce it by changes in behavior, changes in belief, and selective exposure to new information and opinions congruent with their actions. An important hypothesis of the theory is that the greater the difficulty a person has in making a decision, the greater the tendency to rationalize or justify that decision.

Many hypotheses of cognitive dissonance theory have been tested, and the theory's usefulness in predicting human behavior is accepted by

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹² The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3rd ed. (Houghton Mifflin Company 1992 licensed to BibleSoft 1993-1996).

most social psychologists. Behaviorist critics contend, however, that tests of the theory yield ambiguous data that could be interpreted just as easily by using other psychological models.¹³

The Second article states:

Cognitive dissonance, the mental conflict that occurs when beliefs or assumptions are contradicted by new information. The unease or tension that the conflict arouses in a person is relieved by one of several defensive maneuvers: the person rejects, explains away, or avoids the new information, persuades himself that no conflict really exists, reconciles the difference, or resorts to any other defensive means of preserving stability or order in his conception of the world and of himself. The concept, first introduced in the 1950's has become a major point of discussion and research.¹⁴

An example of the effects of cognitive dissonance upon opposing sides in a conflict is seen in the recent headlines of a local newspaper.^{15, 16, 17} The controversy concerns the fallout from the deadly Ruby Ridge shootout near Bonners Ferry, Idaho five years ago. On the day of these articles, Kevin Harris turned himself in to authorities after being charged with first-degree murder in the killing of Deputy U.S. Marshal William Degan. On the same day, FBI sniper Lon Horiuchi was also charged with manslaughter for shooting to death Randy Weaver's wife during the standoff.

Some believe that Kevin Harris should never have been tried and, once tried in federal court and found not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, should not be tried again in

¹³ Academic American Encyclopedia (Grolier Incorporated, 1992), 5.

¹⁴ The New Encyclopædia Britannica (Encycloædia Britannica, Inc., 1997), 434.

¹⁵ Susan Drumheller and Craig Welch, "Harris surrenders: Inexperienced prosecutor to seek convictions where feds failed," The Spokesman-Review, August 22, 1997, A1.

¹⁶ John Craig, "Hometown rallies behind accused killer: Raucous Republic crowd cheers Harris, assails charge against 'model citizen,'" The Spokesmen-Review, August 22, 1997, A1.

State court. Many also believe that Kevin Harris should have been charged with manslaughter and Horiuchi charged with first-degree murder. Of particular interest is the view of many who seek to minimize the importance of the events five years ago and maximize the importance of Kevin Harris' model lifestyle since.

How can so many people hold such a wide diversity of views given the same information? The theory of cognitive dissonance provides at least a partial answer. Also, in the equation is the amount of cognitive dissonance raised in the Northeast Washington and Northern Idaho area by the way in which the news is being managed by the media. It seems very clear to this observer that the controversy is being inflamed by irresponsible journalism, both in the printed and electronic media, for the purpose of selling their product.

An important point to note is that according to Festinger's theory cognitive dissonance relates primarily to the process of making decisions and the effect of those decisions upon the person psychologically. Festinger summarizes:

Dissonance has been shown to be an inevitable consequence of a decision. The magnitude of the postdecision dissonance has been hypothesized to depend upon the following factors:

1. The importance of the decision.
2. The relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative to the chosen one.
3. The degree of overlap of cognitive elements corresponding to the alternatives.

Once dissonance exists following a decision, the pressure to reduce it will manifest itself in attempts to increase the relative attractiveness of the chosen alternative, to decrease the relative attractiveness of the

¹⁷ Jim Camden, "Feds defend FBI sniper: Case should be moved, former Ruby Ridge commander says," The Spokesman-Review, August 22, 1997, A1.

unchosen alternative, to establish cognitive overlap, or possibly to revoke the decisions psychologically.¹⁸

Much has been written over the past forty years regarding the development and application of this theory to education, child psychology, and other disciplines. Space in this paper does not allow a full presentation of all the information. For the purpose of shortening this section so as to come to the point regarding conflict management, the following summary is given:

The entire theory of cognitive dissonance can be stated in a few propositions:

- (1) Cognitive dissonance is a noxious state.
- (2) The individual will attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance or to eliminate it, and he will act to avoid events that increase it.
- (3) In the case of consonance the individual will act to avoid dissonance-producing events.
- (4) The severity or the intensity of cognitive dissonance varies with the importance of the cognitions standing in dissonant relation to one another.
- (5) The strength of the tendencies enumerated in (2) and (3) is a direct function of the severity of dissonance.
- (6) Cognitive dissonance can be reduced or eliminated only by adding new cognitions or by changing existing ones.
- (7) The new cognitions may throw added weight to one side, decreasing the proportion of cognitions which are dissonant.
- (8) The added cognitions may change the importance of the cognitive elements that are in dissonant relation with one another.
- (9) Cognitions may change so and may become less important or less contradictory with others.
- (10) These processes may recruit other behaviors which have cognitive consequences favoring consonance, such as seeking new information.

Empirical work on dissonance theory can be divided into four areas of interest: postdecisional effects; insufficient justification; disconfirmation of expectancies; and exposure to information.¹⁹

¹⁸ Festinger, 47.

Before leaving the definition of cognitive dissonance, one more important point must be made as this discussion applies to the field of conflict management. Dr. Festinger draws a clear distinction between cognitive dissonance and conflict. He wrote:

It is best, before going on, to also discuss the distinction between conflict and dissonance, because they are dynamically different in their effects. The person is in a conflict situation before making the decision. After having made the decision he is no longer in conflict; he has made his choice; he has, so to speak, resolved the conflict. He is no longer being pushed in two or more directions simultaneously. He is now committed to the chosen course of action. It is only here that dissonance exists, and the pressure to reduce this dissonance is *not* pushing the person in two directions simultaneously.²⁰

This distinction is important for those seeking to manage conflicts because it helps to explain how individuals become resistant to change and underscores the importance of knowing what steps are necessary in order to produce change so that conflicts can be resolved. We will attempt to adhere to this distinction in the remainder of this paper.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AS A TOOL FOR PREDICTING HUMAN BEHAVIOR:

Since the purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship of cognitive dissonance to the process of conflict management, it is important to see how this theory relates to change in the individual(s) involved in the process. Brehm and Cohen make a

¹⁹ International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, (The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968), ed. David L. Sills, s.v. "Thinking," "Cognitive Organization and Processes" by Robert B. Zajonc, vol. 15, 609.

²⁰ Festinger, 39.

distinction between the terms opinion, evaluation, and attitude. This distinction will help us understand the principle of change. They write:

We shall use the general label of "attitude change" to include all those studies which are concerned with changes in opinion, whether they refer to evaluations of people, objects, or behavior or to specific beliefs. Evaluation is generally assumed to refer to the component of attitude which refers to the appraisal of something (object, person, event) as good or bad, harmful or beneficial, important or unimportant, and so on. Opinion generally represents the component of attitude having to do with the knowledge that something is true or untrue, correct or incorrect, probable or improbable, and so on (Hovland, Janis and Kelley, 1953). The latter term, opinion, signifies knowledge about the object, while the former, evaluation, indicates how one feels about it. A combination of evaluation and opinion may be termed an attitude.²¹

It is upon *attitude* as defined above and changes in attitude that much research has focused. In order to move an individual or group from one point of view to another, there must be changes in attitudes. Since attitudes are made up of *opinion* and *evaluation*, for change to take place, both types of information which make up one's attitude must be examined. Change will take place only when the magnitude of dissonance between consonant and dissonant elements is sufficient to produce a willingness to change one's attitude in a way that will reduce the dissonance.

This reduction will come through the addition of new information, further clarification of old information, or minimizing the disparity between dissonant elements whether positive or negative. At this point social psychologists begin to construct formulas by which they predict what is necessary to produce changes and the amount of change that can be expected. One does not have to read very far in order to begin to

recognize the level of frustration and differences of opinion among psychologists over just how accurate these formulas are. In spite of their best efforts, dissonance reduction and dissonance arousal as motivational tools for changing attitudes and behavior is not an exact science.

Leon Festinger alluded to this difficulty in a fascinating work, When Prophecy Fails, written before his landmark publication on cognitive dissonance. In it he wrote:

A man with a conviction is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point.

We have all experienced the futility of trying to change a strong conviction, especially if the convinced person has some investment in his belief. We are familiar with the variety of ingenious defenses with which people protect their convictions, managing to keep them unscathed through the most devastating attacks.

But man's resourcefulness goes beyond simply protecting a belief. Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to his belief, that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it; finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that this belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before. Indeed, he may even show a new fervor about convincing and converting other people to his view.²²

Anyone who has suffered through a difficult conflict in a church will sympathize with this major premise of Festinger's book. How can a person's attitude be changed when he is so resistant to change? Of course the conclusion of Festinger and his colleagues is a detailed application of the science of cognitive dissonance. However, most of us will

²¹ Jack W. Brehm & Arthur R. Cohen, Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance (London and New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1962), 16, 17.

²² Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riechen, and Stanley Schachter, When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956), 3.

never come to the level of understanding of this theory that they have and hence attempting to change attitudes and behavior through increasing or decreasing cognitive dissonance is probably unwise. This is why God in His divine wisdom did not tell us in His Word to use the theory of cognitive dissonance to change behavior. We are given much better tools.

This does not mean that what social psychologists are saying about the subject should be ignored. We should seek to understand it and use it as a tool when observing behavior and as a tool for predicting the course a conflict might take given the makeup of the individuals involved in the process and the level of dissonance we observe. Already this study has helped me to understand the reason for the direction past conflicts have taken and it is helping to predict the course of present conflicts. Two illustrations will demonstrate what I mean, one from a past conflict and one from a conflict situation in which I am presently involved.

In a past conflict my wife and I were amazed when a couple who strongly supported my call to the church had a change of attitude shortly after we arrived. What was so hard to understand was how these two seemingly compliant individuals, who demonstrated strong loyalty to others in spite of shortcomings and to whom I had ministered in a family crisis, were so quick to turn against us.

After months of observing their silence and avoidance of us, I finally confronted the man and was shocked to hear him say, "You are not a pastor to me. I do not want you to be my pastor." When I asked him to explain to me why he felt this way and what brought the radical change, he was unable to answer. I was concerned and took his

comments to the governing board of the church of which he was a board member. Instead of this action helping the situation, it offended him and he resigned immediately.

Looking back on this situation with a little more understanding, I can now see more clearly what happened. The man was Asian-American. His reserve was a part of the culture in which he was raised. Yet he was capable of very strong emotion which I, not having known him for long, was not able to detect.

Very soon after we arrived at the church, my family began to experience turmoil. My wife and I had difficulty with our teenage son who was having emotional problems carried over from some difficult circumstances he faced in previous ministries. My wife and I did not handle the situation very well and the turmoil spilled over into the church. We thought the church, the board, and particularly this couple understood what we were going through. What I did not understand was the cognitive dissonance created in this couple as they observed the way my family and I handled the matter.

When this man expressed his feeling that I was not his pastor, I felt he was rejecting me. Instead, what he was expressing was a reaction to the cognitive dissonance he felt between his concept of a pastor and the circumstances concerning my family. When I took the matter to the board, it was like a slap in the face to him and a rebuke. By bringing the matter to public light, instead of reducing it, I caused his cognitive dissonance to increase. A member of the board who had known him for years tried to explain this to me but I was not able to understand it. Now I do. Had I been able to predict what would happen to his level of dissonance by my actions, I would never have brought the matter to the board.

The second illustration is from a present conflict in which I am involved. A family member is in a nursing home and I am seeking to assist another member of the family with her care by counseling him and going with him to meetings of a committee of staff at the nursing home. The family member has the power of attorney and has the responsibility for all decisions made. This allows me the freedom to act as a third-party observer.

In a recent meeting, a new staff person was present. I immediately sensed a level of dissonance by her demeanor and conversation in the meeting. Sensing her level of cognitive dissonance directed toward the family member, I was able to speak softly and interject questions at the proper time to keep the communication focused on the issues and away from personalities and thereby avoid having the meeting degenerate into a shouting match or worse.

After the meeting and after significant time had elapsed, I was able to share my observations with the other family member toward whom the staff member's cognitive dissonance was directed. Through much prayer and the careful choosing of words, I am seeking to help defuse the situation. On every occasion, I seek to minimize elements that created the dissonance and maximize the positive elements of the situation. Through understanding more about cognitive dissonance, I am now better able to predict the direction a conflict will go and find ways to diffuse the situation before it becomes unmanageable.

Concerning the role cognitive dissonance plays in predicting attitudes and behavior, it is important to remember that many of those who espouse this theory do not

hold to a belief in absolute truth. Therefore, in spite of all of their tests and models and formulas, accurate prediction of changes in attitudes and behavior will always be beyond their grasp. On the other hand we, who believe in absolute truth, who hold to an inerrant and infallible Bible, and who trust in the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Bible, should find the theory of cognitive dissonance of considerable assistance in predicting changes.

THE ROLE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:

Remember in Behem and Cohen's concept of attitude they see attitude as that which is made up of evaluation and opinion. Both of these have to do with the perception of the individual. Therefore, both elements are limited to finite perception. Figure 1 illustrates attitude as defined by secular psychology.

evaluation + opinion = attitude



Figure 1. The attitude of a man apart from Christ is limited to his own evaluation and opinion of cognitive elements. The result is a strictly human view based solely on his ability to perceive correctly those elements.

When the principle of divine revelation is interjected into the equation, we have a third overarching element that ought to govern one's attitude along with the two original elements, evaluation and opinion. We still have two elements but, instead of it being two

finite elements, it is divine revelation and the individual's evaluations and opinions. When divine revelation is viewed as inerrant and infallible, it is the final authority and one's evaluation and opinion is subject to it. Paul calls this "the mind of Christ."

Concerning this he wrote:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.²³

In the New Testament, this knowing by revelation and knowing by experience is clearly seen through studying the two Greek terms, οἶδα and γινώσκω. The first term is often used to indicate complete knowledge as in knowing by divine revelation. The second term usually refers to the relationship between the person knowing and what he knows. This distinction is illustrated in a series of dialogues between Jesus and His disciples in the Gospel of John. Concerning these Vine writes:

... ginosko, frequently suggests inception or progress in "knowledge," while oida suggests fullness of "knowledge," e. g., <John 8:55>, "ye have not known Him" (ginosko), i. e., begun to "know," "but I know Him" (oida), i. e., "know Him perfectly"; <13:7>, "What I do thou knowest not now," i. e. Peter did not yet perceive (oida) its significance, "but thou shalt understand," i. e., "get to know (ginosko), hereafter"; <14:7>, "If ye had known Me" (ginosko), i. e., "had definitely come to know Me," "ye would have known My Father also" (oida), i. e., "would have had perception of": "from henceforth ye know Him" (ginosko), i. e., having unconsciously been coming to the Father, as the One who was in

²³ 1 Corinthians 2:12-16

Him, they would now consciously be in the constant and progressive experience of "knowing."²⁴

By accepting the validity of absolute truth received through divine revelation, the God-breathed, inerrant, and infallible Word of God, the whole equation of cognitive dissonance changes. In some ways individuals become less susceptible to change, especially if one's evaluation and opinion is based upon an understanding of divine revelation. On the other hand, one's evaluation and opinion should be more easily changed if it can be shown from the Scriptures that his attitude is wrong.

Paul was alluding to this when he wrote:

Therefore from now on we recognize (οιδαμεν) no man according to the flesh; even though we have known (εγνωκαμεν) Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know (γινωσκομεν) {Him} {thus} no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.²⁵

In this text, Paul explains the transformation that comes when a person is brought under the influence of divine revelation and his attitude which consists of evaluation and opinion is subject to this divine revelation. The initial event is called "being born from above."²⁶ The transformation is brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit as one comes to the realization of the truth of God's Word. Concerning this Jesus said:

"He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness; and no man receives His witness. He who has received His witness has set his

²⁴ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., eds., Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 346, 347.

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.

²⁶ John 1:13; 3:7.

seal to {this,} that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."²⁷

By this, Jesus was testifying to His own testimony, divine revelation, concerning the Father. This testimony could only be received by those whom the Holy Spirit empowered to do so. This explanation answers the dilemma John raised in Chapter two when he noted:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man."²⁸

This phenomena of believing and yet not being saved is again noted by John in chapters six and eight when he writes:

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father." As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore."²⁹

As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, {then} you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."³⁰

²⁷ John 3:31-36.

²⁸ John 2:23-25.

²⁹ John 6:63-67.

³⁰ John 8:30-32.

The context of chapter eight clearly shows that those who "came to believe" were the ones who quickly turned on Jesus and sought to kill Him. The grammar of the Greek throughout John's gospel makes it clear that there are those who believe temporarily through their own fleshly perception. This is indicated by the Aorist and Perfect tenses of the verb, πιστεω, and corresponds to what the social psychologists, Brehm and Cohen, referred to in their definition of attitude as that which is made up only of evaluation and opinion. On the other hand, one who believes unto eternal life being empowered by the Holy Spirit to believe that God is true is indicated by the Present Active Participle of the verb πιστεω.

Concerning the Greek Present Active Participle, Burton writes:

"The Present Participle is also used without reference to time or progress, simply defining its subject as belonging to a certain class, i.e., the class of those who do the action denoted by the verb. . . A class may consist of those who habitually or constantly do a given act."³¹

This distinction is consistent throughout John's gospel and is carried over to other verbs as well; verbs such as "receiving," "following," "abiding." Therefore, by using the Present Active Participle, John is describing a class of individuals who by nature believe, receive, follow, and abide. On the other hand, the Aorist and Perfect tenses describe individuals who only believe due to the immediate circumstances such as Jesus performing miracles. This kind of belief is based upon fleshly perception and therefore is momentary.

³¹ Ernest De Witt Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, reprinted 1966), 56.

From this we see that the cognitive dissonance of those who have truly been born from above should be more easily predicted. A change in attitude for the positive through clarification of God's revelation rather than through fleshly perception should be more easily obtained. Three passages are quoted here to emphasize this point.

And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted {it} not {as} the word of men, but {for} what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they {did} from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.³²

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.³³

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.³⁴

The common thread running through each of these passages was the predictability of the attitude and behavior of these Christians, not because of their fleshly perception, but because of the effect of God's revelation upon each of them. For this reason, it is imperative that we include the concept of absolute truth realized through God-breathed

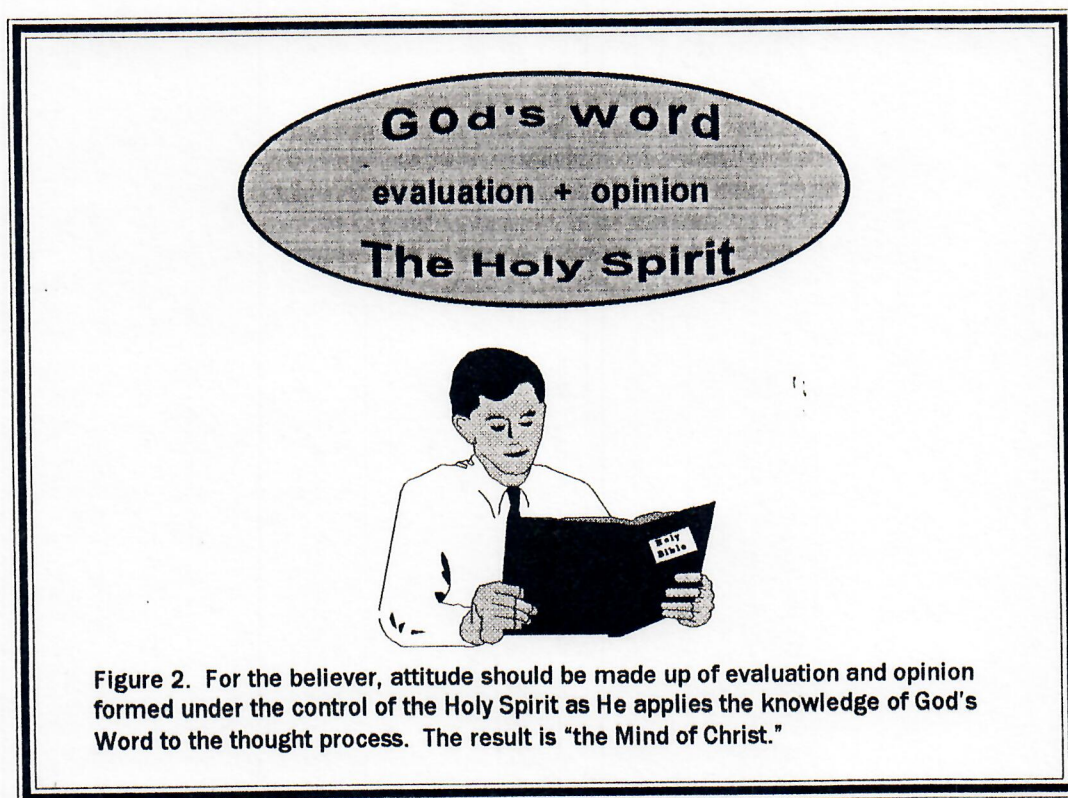
³² 1Thessalonians 2:13-16.

³³ Romans 6:17-18.

³⁴ Romans 15:13-14.

Scripture in the theory cognitive dissonance. Figure 2 represents the attitude of a believer empowered by the Holy Spirit and influenced by the knowledge of God's Word.

We can learn from social psychologists and, because of our confidence in divine revelation, can go far beyond what they are able to achieve in predicting the effects of cognitive dissonance upon attitudes and behavior. Cognitive dissonance can be a tool to use in conflict management but only if kept subservient to divine revelation. Before coming to some practical applications of the cognitive dissonance theory, we need to discuss some limitations of this theory. However, before we leave the topic of the role of the Scriptures in cognitive dissonance we need to consider some additional thoughts from the Scriptures that shed additional light on the subject of the believer's attitude.



The New Testament contains many exhortations for believers to think together and hold the same attitudes together.³⁵ From the above discussion, it is clear that this can only be done when everyone is controlled by the Holy Spirit and is knowledgeable regarding what the Word of God teaches. But does this mean that everyone must be equally knowledgeable regarding the Word? The answer is no. Having the mind of Christ does not depend upon the amount of knowledge a person has. Instead, it depends upon whether or not the Holy Spirit has control over the thoughts and actions of the individual.

An important Greek term to consider at this point is one that is often lost in our English translations. The term is $\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$. W. E. Vine has a very important observation to make along the lines of this-present discussion and so a lengthy quote is in order.

$\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$ ^3982^, "to persuade, to win over," in the passive and middle voices, "to be persuaded, to listen to, to obey," is so used with this meaning, in the middle voice, e. g., in <Acts 5:36-37> (in <v. 40>, passive voice, "they agreed"); <Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 3:3>. The "obedience" suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.

"Peitho and pisteuo, 'to trust,' are closely related etymologically; the difference in meaning is that the former implies the obedience that is produced by the latter, cf. <Heb. 3:18-19>, where the disobedience of the Israelites is said to be the evidence of their unbelief. Faith is of the heart, invisible to men; obedience is of the conduct and may be observed. When a man obeys God he gives the only possible evidence that in his heart he believes God. Of course it is persuasion of the truth that results in faith (we believe because we are persuaded that the thing is true, a thing does not become true because it is believed), but peitho, in NT suggests an

³⁵ Romans 12:16, 15:5; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:25; Phillipians 2:1-4.

actual and outward result of the inward persuasion and consequent faith."³⁶

From this we see that true faith will produce both an inward and outward transformation as God the Holy Spirit persuades the individual concerning the validity of the Word of God. The negative term corresponding to $\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$ is $\alpha\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$ from which we get the English word "apathy." $\Lambda\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\omega$ is often translated "does not believe" or "does not obey." The implication is immediately clear. New life in Christ begins when the Holy Spirit persuades us that God is true but someone who is not persuaded does not have life.³⁷ Following rebirth, the believer must learn to walk in the Spirit so as to remain persuadable. This type of a person is called a "son of God."³⁸ "Son" refers to both male and female believers.³⁹ Every believer is a son of God, not because of chronological age, but because of the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables each believer to think like Christ thinks. Again, this is not a matter of the amount of knowledge one has. It is a qualitative dimension rather than quantitative. It is having the ability to understand and obey the Father's will.

Therefore, in one sense, even though we might lack knowledge of God's Word, no believer regardless of age or gender is an infant or child. This means that every believer has the ability to respond to circumstances as a son of God. If we lack knowledge, we are teachable because the Holy Spirit makes us persuadable. A very important passage to

³⁶ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., eds., Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 438, 439.

³⁷ John 3:31-36.

³⁸ Galatians 4:1-7.

consider at this point is Hebrews 12:1-17. Here the writer describes in a vivid way the attitude of a believer who is persuadable.

In this passage, the key word is "discipline." The Greek term is παιδεύω. This word comes from another Greek term, παῖς, referring to a small child. However, in παιδεύω the emphasis is not upon chronological age but upon being teachable. This corresponds with and helps to explain Jesus' exhortation that His followers are to be like little children.⁴⁰ This is seen by what the writer says in Hebrews 12:7. God does not discipline us as children but as sons.

In the next verse, one who is without discipline (παιδείας) is an illegitimate child (νοθοί). This is the only occurrence of this term in the New Testament. It refers not to a child of God who is without discipline but to an individual who does not belong to God. A corresponding passage is Galatians 4:30, 31. God does not discipline individuals who are not His own like He disciplines His sons.

Therefore, it is imperative for each congregation of believers to learn to respond together to the discipline of the Heavenly Father. It is through this discipline, through the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit, that each one has the mind of Christ and harmony among brethren is possible. From this harmony will come a reduction of cognitive dissonance and a corresponding simplification of conflict management. While an understanding of cognitive dissonance helps to demonstrate whether or not individuals

³⁹ Galatians 3:28.

⁴⁰ Matthew 19:14.

are walking according to the Spirit, intricate formulas and manipulation are not the way to overcome dissonance.

The Holy Spirit produces a willingness to be persuaded. This attitude will in turn cause us to stop and listen to each other. Those, whom He has equipped with greater knowledge of God's Word, will be heard by those who lack knowledge producing greater understanding among all. Then each individual will know how to submit to one another⁴¹ and how to conduct himself/herself in the household of God.⁴² This brings us to the limitations of the theory of cognitive dissonance.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:

We have seen how an understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance can aid in predicting behavior including helping to understanding why people behave the way they do. We also have seen from an application of this theory that changing the level of dissonance is required in order to change attitudes and behavior. In situations of conflict where individuals are involved who are not born again, we are limited to manipulating cognitive elements in order to produce a change. Since we will always be faced with these kinds of situations in the world, it is very helpful to know how to put into practice principles derived from this theory.

However, when we are dealing with conflicts in the church, we need to use the spiritual armament that God has given us. When we observe cognitive dissonance, we should not immediately bring out our formulas and charts. Attitudes and behavior are

⁴¹ Ephesians 5:21.

changed, not by applying formulas but by yielding to the control of the Holy Spirit and obeying God's Word. This distinction between behavior modification in the world and in the church is seen in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. Paul wrote:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I {did} not at all {mean} with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within {the church} But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.⁴³

What does it mean to judge? Many have erroneously concluded that this passage and a similar passage, Matthew 7:1-5, forbid judging. Here would be the prohibition regarding judging the world. In Matthew 7, so the interpretation goes, would be the prohibition against all judging. However, careful exegesis of both passages and a comparison of other Old and New Testament passages indicate that men cannot avoid judging. What is in view in each of these passages is the kind of judging taking place.

In Matthew 7, Jesus' command is a prohibition against having two standards, one for self and one for others. In 1 Corinthians 5, it is a prohibition against an arrogant tolerance of sin that destroys the body fellowship in the church. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 6 that such tolerance of sin and the relationships established with sinners is actually the cause of much conflict and, even worse, prevents complete reconciliation once conflicts are resolved. Paul wrote:

⁴² 1 Timothy 3:15.

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. Now in a like exchange--I speak as to children-- open wide {to us} also. Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. "And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me," says the Lord Almighty.⁴⁴

Wrenching the two verses, 1 Corinthians 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 6:13, out of their contexts might lead someone to conclude that Paul is talking in riddles. He is not. It is in the arena of judging that an understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance can be very helpful. By noting the level of dissonance caused by the behavior of others while not finding the same level of dissonance caused by the same behavior in one's self is evidence of what is known as projection. The individual is projecting his or her own blame onto others. This is what is found in Matthew 7.

In the 1 Corinthians 5 passage, we can and must tolerate attitudes and behavior in non-Christians that have no place in the church. To tolerate them in the church is to destroy the church. A knowledge of cognitive dissonance, minimizing, balancing values, etc., helps us to find ways of coping with sinful behavior in the world. At the same time recognizing dissonance caused by attitudes and behavior should drive us to the Scriptures to find ways to change those attitudes and behaviors in the body of Christ. Yet this is exactly where we find the limitations of the theory of cognitive dissonance. Many today

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 6:11-18.

would apply the principles of attitude and behavior modification through manipulation of dissonance to the church instead of going back to the Scriptures. They are substituting theory for revealed truth.

A good example of the way social psychologists use cognitive dissonance is found in a recent newspaper article. Scott Smith seeks to find out from the public what types of public display of affection are acceptable and what types are not. He asks the questions:

How do you react to public displays of affection?
Here's your chance to speak out. What's acceptable? What's over the line?
Who are this area's worst offenders?
Is there an appropriate way to respond to flagrant groping and tongue hockey in settings where ignoring it is all but impossible?
Please call and leave a message on City Line (Several phone numbers follow.).⁴⁵

While the terms cognitive dissonance are not used, social psychologists are quoted to give an explanation of why some individuals react more negatively—experience cognitive dissonance—than others. Scott quotes one educator:

"One factor in how people feel is whether they can avoid being involved. For example, if it's going on in the park, but it's at a distance where people can ignore it, more or less, they're going to be less judgmental," says Stanley Jones, a communications professor at the University of Colorado and an expert in the field of touching.

Jones also stresses that age—both of viewers and view-ees—is a factor in PDA sensitivity. He's 61 and says his line of good taste stops with viewing a brief kiss on the mouth ("Beyond that, it's too far," he says).

⁴⁵ Scott Smith, "Passion in public: Some lovers can't seem to wait for a private moment to satisfy the urge for sloppy affection," The Spokesman-Review, August 26, 1997, D1, D11.

"People's values are set in their age group, their generation," he says. "You're going to hear more objections from older people who were brought up in the different milieu."⁴⁶

Scott goes on to quote a member of the younger generation:

Eric DuBoue, 25, agrees. . . "The younger you are, the less stuff bothers you," DuBoue says. "But it's a personal thing: One person might look at a couple and say, 'Oh, that's disgusting.' Another person might walk by and say, 'Look, isn't that adorable?' Not much bothers me."⁴⁷

This is nothing more than situational ethics. What is right for one may not be right for another. The social psychologist's answer to such moral diversity is sensitivity training whereby one's level of dissonance is altered by changing his or her values. They seek to change so called "homophobic" individuals into tolerant individuals by changing the value elements in their cognitive system.

While this has a semblance of correctness, it is actually the basis of much conflict in the world. The more society seeks to gerrymander levels of dissonance in this way, the wider apart social groups become and the more both extremes in the conflict will resort to fanaticism. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Sideris, and Stubing prove this point in a recent study, although unintentionally. They were studying the effects of morally neutral and yet aversive elements such as cancer to see if dissonance caused by such aversive elements would produce distancing from the victims. Not surprisingly, their conclusion is that this does take place. They conclude:

More generally, the present findings suggest that it might be possible to reduce or eliminate potentially harmful defensive distortions

⁴⁶ Ibid., D1, D11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., D11.

by encouraging people to express their emotions. The idea that there are beneficial effects of being in touch with one's feelings is, of course, far from novel. It is one of the basic assumptions underlying a wide variety of approaches to psychotherapy that cuts across major schools of thought. Indeed, the suggestion that people "get in touch with their feelings" has been made to the point of cliché in pop psychology books. Nonetheless, to our knowledge, the present studies provide the first empirical demonstration that such awareness can indeed reduce the extent of defensive reactions.⁴⁸

This article demonstrates an almost total lack of concern for the role morality plays in the matter of fear-expression and defensiveness. A few years ago, a sixteen-year-old boy in a church was caught molesting other children in the church. Because civil authorities by law had to be brought into the situation, the effective application of Biblical truth was stymied because the solution of the authorities was sensitivity training so that the young man could "learn to manage his chosen alternative life style."

In essence he was told his behavior was OK as long as it was expressed in a socially acceptable way. While there was a change in his behavior—he learned what was socially acceptable and what was not and how to choose what was—the moral issues were never addressed nor could they have been through application of the principles and methods of the theory of cognitive dissonance. Manipulating one's cognitive elements alone is no answer to the sin that is in the human heart. Therefore, it is easier to change one's view of morality than to change one's attitude and behavior.

⁴⁸ Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, John Sideris, and Mari Jo Stubing, "Emotional Expression and the Reduction of Motivated Cognitive Bias: Evidence From Cognitive Dissonance and Distancing From Victims' Paradigms," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1993, Vol. 64, No. 2, 185.

Not all conflict in the church is due to sin. However, by definition cognitive dissonance caused by the decision-making process necessary to resolve conflict can lead to sin. This is why it is important to not confuse conflict with cognitive dissonance. Paul was referring to cognitive dissonance not conflict when he wrote:

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ, . . . Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one {of you,} with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and {yet} do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.⁴⁹

When we learn to trust one another knowing that we all are speaking the truth and desiring the truth, cognitive dissonance will be less and less a factor in our conflicts. This is brought about, not by knowing all there is to know about the theories and formulas of cognitive dissonance but by knowing how to yield to the Holy Spirit and God's Word. If conflict is filled with dissonance, then we know someone is not controlled by the Holy Spirit. When we are all controlled by the Holy Spirit then there will be little cognitive dissonance.

It is important to note that the control of the Holy Spirit must be both individual control and corporate control. This distinction is clearly seen by the two Greek terms, περιπατεω and στοιχεω. Even though the English Bible translates both "walk," careful observation of the contexts demonstrates that περιπατεω⁵⁰ refers to an individual believer walking in the Spirit and στοιχεω⁵¹ refers to a group of believers

⁴⁹ Ephesians 4:15, 25-27.

⁵⁰ For περιπατεω cf. Galatians 5:16-23; Ephesians 2:10; 4:1, 17; Philippians 3:17, 18.

⁵¹ For στοιχεω cf. Galatians 5:25ff.; 6:16; Philippians 3:16.

walking together in the Spirit. In the contexts where στοιχεω is found it is the application of the Word of God by the Spirit of God that is in view.

It cannot be emphasized enough. When dealing with conflicts in the church, the solution to cognitive dissonance is not to stop and analyze and try to manipulate people through theoretical principles devised by men. The presence of dissonance should drive us to our knees and into the Word. We should stop and consider who might not be walking in the Spirit. It might be us. To do otherwise is to rely upon the arm of the flesh.

The truth of this was demonstrated, albeit unintentionally, in an article by Simon, Greenberg, and Brehm.⁵² This article presents the findings of four studies performed to test the use of trivialization to reduce dissonance. In each study, groups were provided a salient cognitive element. Different groups were manipulated through different means without them being aware of it and the amount of trivialization was measured.

While the purpose of these studies was to see how attitudes or behaviors were changed toward a specific salient element through trivialization, the broader moral issue was overlooked. If the attitude presented as salient was truly salient, should trivialization be viewed as an acceptable means of changing attitudes and behavior?

All four studies centered on "mandatory comprehensive exams." The conclusion was that given the right conditions, individuals do resort to trivialization of attitudes or behavior in order to reduce dissonance. Given this central issue—mandatory comprehensive exams—it mattered little how dissonance was managed and the study and

⁵² Linda Simon, Jerry Greenberg, Jack Brehm, "Trivialization: The Forgotten Mode of Dissonance Reduction," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1995, Vol. 68, No. 2, 247-260.

the results of the study were morally neutral. However, what if the salient element was abortion or homosexuality or some other attitude or behavior specifically condemned by Scripture? Is trivialization a legitimate means of reducing dissonance? The answer is no.

While the article did not deal with the moral ramification of its findings, moral ramifications there are. In a society where trivialization is the method of choice in reducing dissonance, more and more immoral behavior will be viewed as acceptable. We are living in a world where individuals are trivializing many attitudes and behaviors that ought to produce dissonance. This dissonance is the work of the conscience every man is given at birth. But many, having learned inappropriate methods of reducing dissonance, are found to be further and further removed from God.

Paul describes this in Romans 1:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.⁵³

Man's solution has always been to trivialize truth. This was Satan's challenge to Adam and Eve in the garden, "Hath God said?"⁵⁴ The end of that line of reasoning is:

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they

⁵³ Romans 1:18-20.

⁵⁴ Genesis 3:1.

exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; {they are} gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.⁵⁵

We see this trivialization of attitudes and behaviors in the current trend toward moral relativity. Joe Leo recently observed this trend in an article in U.S. New & World Report. Leo writes:

Overdosing on nonjudgmentalism is a growing problem in the schools. Two disturbing articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* say that some students are unwilling to oppose large moral horrors, including human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing, and slavery, because they think that no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture.⁵⁶

The problem, Leo concludes, is that multiculturalism is being taught in schools under the banner of "values clarification." Concerning this he writes:

The "values clarification" programs in the schools surely should come in for some lumps, too. Based on the principle that teachers should not indoctrinate other people's children, they leave the creation of values up to each student. Values emerge as personal preferences, equally as

⁵⁵ Romans 1:22-32.

⁵⁶ Joe Leo, "A no-fault Holocaust: 'Absolutophobia'—an unwillingness to say something is wrong," U.S. News & World Report, July 21, 1997, 14.

unsuited for criticism or argument as personal decisions on pop music or clothes.⁵⁷

We live in a world where moral issues are not always black and white. It is very difficult to determine how much dissonance should be aroused by immoral behavior. Ellen Tobey Klass attempted to determine this through experimentation.⁵⁸ However, the results were skewed by the fact that what is considered immoral is constantly changing.

Why do we need to develop theories and devices to measure dissonance caused by immoral behavior when God's Word says:

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.⁵⁹

Flee immorality. Every {other} sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.⁶⁰

But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance {and} gentleness.⁶¹

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love {and} peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.⁶²

We not only need to form proper attitudes toward evil and avoid evil behavior; we need to put them away from our churches completely. When we begin to trivialize, we become arrogant like the church at Corinth who thought their tolerance toward a sinning

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ellen Tobey Klass, "Psychological Effects of Immoral Actions: The Experimental Evidence," Psychological Bulletin, 1978, Vol. 85, No. 4, 756-771.

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:20.

⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:18.

⁶¹ 1 Timothy 6:11.

⁶² 2 Timothy 2:22.

brother was something for which to be proud.⁶³ Paul rebuked them for this. He did not stop to measure how much dissonance was being caused by such tolerance or suggest ways to reduce the dissonance. Instead, he commanded immediate and decisive action toward the brother. He wrote:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump {of dough} Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are {in fact} unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.⁶⁴

In this section, our purpose has been to show that, while the theory of cognitive dissonance can be very beneficial in helping to recognize the presence of dissonance and in predicting the attitude and behavior that will result, it is not a good approach to changing attitudes and behaviors. It is at this point that it is most tempting to substitute psychological theory for clear, objective, God-breathed Scripture. Therefore, we need to try to answer the question, what practical applications are there concerning the theory of cognitive dissonance to the subject of conflict management in the church?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE WITH RESPECT TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE CHURCH:

We have seen that the theory of cognitive dissonance is an effective tool for identifying the existence of dissonance and predicting the attitudes and behavior that will

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

result from it. However, it is not an effective means of changing attitudes and behavior. The Scriptures present a better way. So then what can be gleaned from a study of this theory?

First, the theory of cognitive dissonance is beneficial in helping to understand dissonance and its causes and effects upon human behavior. Second, the theory of cognitive dissonance is beneficial in recognizing the presence and level of dissonance. Dr. Kevin Wise lists ten typical emotions people feel during conflict.⁶⁵ These are: anxiety, aggression, dissonance, frustration, anger, ambivalence, guilt, fear, happy feelings associated with victory, and self-justification. Each of these emotions is negative in the context of conflict management.

In all of the above emotions, there is usually one over-arching emotion, that of cognitive dissonance. This is when the mind senses discord or disharmony. In other words a conflict is not simply external between individuals or groups, it is internal within the mind of the individuals themselves. Internal conflicts produce dissonance.

This dissonance may be due to the disparity between the values of the individual and his or her emotional reaction to the circumstances. The Bible tells us to love our enemies and yet we find ourselves wanting to get even. We are to love our brother and yet the conflict may stimulate emotions of anger and even hatred toward a brother in Christ.

⁶⁵ Terry S. Wise, Conflict in the Church: Practical Help for Understanding and Dealing with Conflict, (Newburgh: Avalon Press, 1994), 14.

Cognitive dissonance unrecognized and unchecked will often lead to wrong perceptions and hence to a wrong course of action. Some individuals will refuse to deal with conflicts thinking that the path of least resistance will dispel the dissonance they are feeling. Others will rationalize or justify their positions in ways that are not conducive to conflict resolution. In a sense, cognitive dissonance is the underlying emotion from which all other negative emotions originate. Therefore, it must be recognized and managed.

Dr. Wise lists six cognitive perceptions people experience during conflict.⁶⁶ Each of these has the potential of being very destructive to the conflict management process. The first is projection. Individuals often project blame onto the other party in a conflict when they are guilty of the same things. Sometimes that which is projected is not true of the one upon whom it is projected but is merely a way to deflect true self-guilt. This approach is often used in a court of law whereby the defense seeks to discredit a witness by implicating him in some way. This form of character assassination has no place in the family of God and will destroy the conflict management process because it is based upon lies and half-truths.

The second cognitive perception caused by cognitive dissonance is dichotomous reasoning. This is often seen in the "Us and Them" dichotomy whereby one side thinks its view is right and every other view is wrong. In the church this is observed when one group concludes that its view is God's view and the other is of Satan. Most of the time

⁶⁶ Ibid.

this is not the case at all. Many issues are simply matters of personal preference with no moral significance.

The third cognitive perception caused by cognitive dissonance is overgeneralization. In this instance thinking is distorted. A common example of this is the conspiracy theorists who see conspiracy in every conflict. At other times individuals find two or three pieces to a puzzle and draw immediate conclusions without waiting for all of the facts.

The fourth cognitive perception is selective perception. Like overgeneralization, conclusions are drawn from only a few pieces of the puzzle. However, in this instance more pieces are present but are ignored because they do not lead to the predetermined conclusion. This is the "Don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up" scenario.

The fifth cognitive perception is magnification. When my children were growing up, we called this "awfulizing." This is perhaps the most common perception when cognitive dissonance is present. I can still remember the night a German exchange student kept my daughter out long after her curfew. I had awfulized the situation to the point that nothing they said appeased my anger. Praise the Lord I loved and trusted my daughter, and she had the courage to stomp her foot and tell me to sit down and listen instead of going back to bed in a fury. That became a turning point in our relationship.

The last type of distorted thinking Dr. Wise mentioned is arbitrary inference. As a father, I inferred certain things because this German boy had kept my daughter out so late. I attributed motive beyond evidence. While she now, years later, understands and

accepts my behavior, what cemented our relationship was an agreement on my part that I would not make such inferences in the future. I needed to trust her and not always draw inferences about her behavior based upon my own past wrong behavior which brings us back to the first perception mentioned. I needed to guard against projecting my own past guilt and wrong behavior upon my daughter. Since dissonance is caused by inconsistencies in attitudes and behavior, early detection will help to minimize the damage it can cause.

A third benefit to an understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance when judged by the light of God's Word is that it helps to clarify how not to try to change attitudes and behavior. I discovered cognitive dissonance by observation years ago when the ministry of discipleship first became popular. I did not know at the time that what I was observing was called cognitive dissonance. Yet what I saw was very real.

At that time I was taking eight men individually through the discipleship material. One by one each man fell by the wayside. The same experience was happened to others who were trying to implement this discipleship program. Figure 3 is a diagram of what I observed to be happening.

Everyone has a certain amount of knowledge of proper behavior, but no one lives up to the level of what he or she knows. The difference between the two I labeled our "guilt factor." When we enter into an in-depth training time whereby our level of knowledge is increased but not our level of obedience, the result is that we increase our

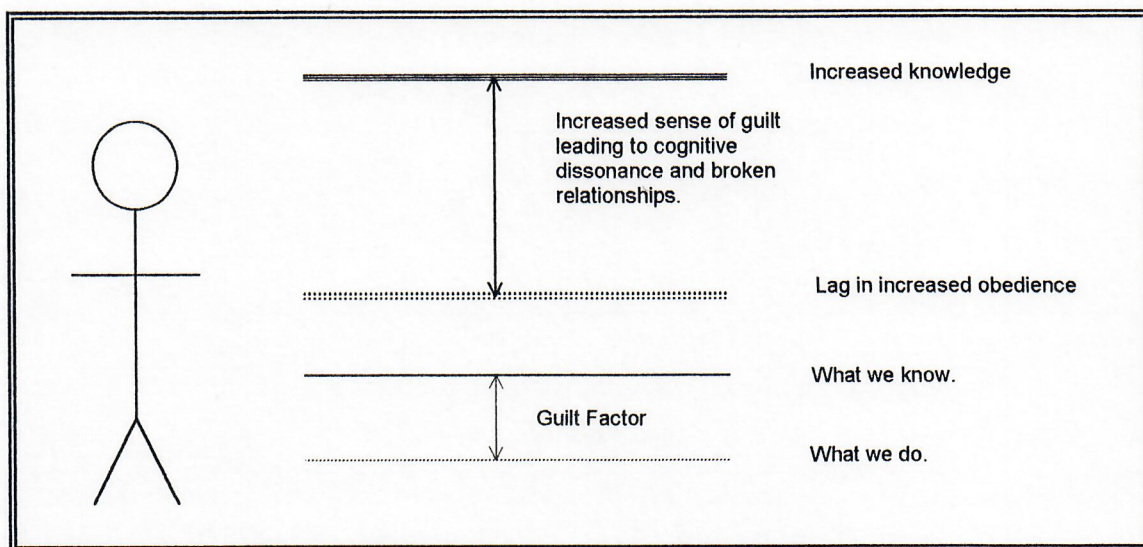


Figure 3. Cognitive Dissonance

guilt factor and individuals, not being able to handle the guilt, become discouraged and fall away.

One of the men I was discipling at that time met with me almost every week for two years. All of the others had left the program long before and this last individual was becoming restless as had the others. I asked the remaining individual to take a week off and consider what was changed in his life because of the two years we met together. At our next meeting he spent twenty minutes relating what he had learned. When he was through, I called his attention to the original question, "What is different in your life because of the two years we have met together?" His quick response was "nothing."

I subsequently learned that something had indeed changed in his life. He was becoming more and more of a tyrant in his home as the cognitive dissonance in his life grew. It had reached the point where it nearly destroyed his marriage. The in-depth teaching had not changed his behavior or his attitude toward the better but for the worse. Teaching alone does not change attitudes and behavior. In fact it can often increase the resistance to the right kind of change and can produce change opposite to what was intended. In this case, almost all the men walked away from the church.

The answer is not to quit teaching God's Word. The answer is to take the time to insure that cognitive dissonance is not building up. Principles of Scripture should be taught in smaller steps with time given to monitor changes in behavior before going on to another step. As God's children who are born from above, we begin from a point where God recreates us "in righteousness and holiness of the truth."⁶⁷ Our task is to put on this new man whom God has already created, not to try to conjure up some image through our own efforts. After all, God has provided us as individuals in Christ with "everything pertaining to life and godliness."⁶⁸

In the church, conflicts arise and are accentuated because of cognitive dissonance. Because the fellowship of believers is based upon righteousness, it is all too easy to become legalists judging one another by our own human and imperfect standards and rejecting those who do not measure up. It is important that church leaders understand the principle of cognitive dissonance so that conflicts can be managed. While cognitive

⁶⁷ Ephesians 4:24.

⁶⁸ 2 Peter 1:3.

dissonance may be the result of conflict, it can often be the cause because of the way in which the Word of God is taught. If the message from the pulpit or classroom is always negative or people are always made to feel guilty, there will be a general heightening of cognitive dissonance.

A fourth benefit of a study of cognitive dissonance has already been pointed out over and over again in this paper. It is underscored here both as a clarification and summary of what has been seen thus far.

Jesus said, ". . . I came that they might have life, and might have {it} abundantly."⁶⁹ Obviously He was not referring to life as simple existence. The Greek term here is ζωη which refers to a quality of life with God that lasts for eternity. The goal of church life is for Christians to share this life with one another and with God. John wrote:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life--and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.⁷⁰

The theory of cognitive dissonance can be an effective tool for determining when we are not enjoying ζωη. It cannot, however, produce this life nor can knowledge alone. It is very important when studying the Gospel of John to note that he never uses the Greek noun πιστις translated "faith." This was intentional because he was answering

⁶⁹ John 10:10b.

⁷⁰ I John 1:1-4.

the Gnostics of his day who claimed that all one needed to do was be initiated into some body of knowledge and they would be elevated to the next level of existence similar to what the Heaven's Gate cult believes in our day.

No human theory or manipulation of dissonance is going to produce this life. It is found only in the person of Jesus Christ who is the embodiment of all of God's revelation from the beginning of time. Simply stated, our need is a personal relationship with a holy God who loved us enough to take on human form and live a difficult existence here on earth to demonstrate how to rid ourselves of the cognitive dissonance of this existence.

In this way He demonstrated a life and love that no social psychologist through manipulation can produce. The concept of love in John's gospel and epistles gives us something clearer and far more magnificent than anything any psychologist can imagine through examining fallen human nature. This love is only understood by the revelation of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit led John and others to carefully choose two Greek terms to describe it.

The first Greek term is $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ and is a love of the will. In cognitive dissonance parlance, it is the decision that one makes. When this decision is made in the light of and consistent with the revealed will of God, there is never any dissonance. John writes, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."⁷¹ We cannot experience the

⁷¹ I John 4:18.

purity of this love in the flesh. It can only be experience through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷²

The second Greek term for love is φιλεω. This love is not a choice. It is never commanded. Instead it arises among individuals within a relationship. It begins with affinity and attraction and grows into affection. Its existence is seen when self-disclosure begins to take place. Jesus said, "For the Father loves (φιλει) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel."⁷³ Later Jesus told His disciples:

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life (ψυχην) for his friends (φιλων). You are My friends (φιλοι), if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends (φιλους), for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."⁷⁴

Given the light that this look into psychology has shed on the meaning of ψυχη, the connection in this verse is amazing. It is understanding and benefiting from the soul of Jesus and not that of fallen men that brings us into a close affectionate relationship with one another. No amount of manipulation of cognitive dissonance can produce that. However, if this kind of relationship does not exist in the church or in us toward our Lord—the theory of cognitive dissonance can point this out—then we better examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. Paul wrote to the troubled church at Corinth, "Test

⁷² Galatians 5:22, 23.

⁷³ John 5:20.

⁷⁴ John 15:13-15.

yourselves {to see} if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?"⁷⁵

One additional observation regarding the distinction between ἀγάπη and φιλία in the New Testament will bring the conclusions drawn from this study home. Ἀγάπη is never used with other terms to form other words. It is as if God the Holy Spirit, the true author of Scripture, meant to keep the concept of obedience simple and unadulterated. On the other hand, numerous examples of φιλία combined with other terms are found in the New Testament, many of which have found their way into the English language through transliteration. These are some of the most positive and uplifting concepts known to man: Philadelphia (love of the brother), Philandros (love of husband), Philagathos (love of good men), Philotheos (love of God), Philonexia (love of strangers), Philosophia (love of wisdom), Philoteknos (love of one's own children), and Philanthropia (love for mankind). This last occurs in Titus 3:5 where Paul writes:

But when the kindness of God our Savior and {His} love for mankind (φιλανθρωπία) appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to {the} hope of eternal life.⁷⁶

In a real sense, the psychologist, who knows only what he sees through the eyes of fallen man by observing fallen man, can show us what is wrong; but only God through His revelation can show us what is right and how to become right before Him. Revisiting

⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 13:5.

⁷⁶ Titus 3:4-7.

the church at Corinth, a church that exhibited much dissonance, Paul's warning was not to apply the principles of psychology to their problems. He warned them to come to Christ who is both the wisdom of God and power of God. Through Him alone will we find the way to change attitudes and behavior. Without this change which culminates in choosing to obey Him and in genuine affection for Him, the church will never be effective in managing conflicts. Paul concludes his epistle to the Corinthian church, notorious throughout church history for its many conflicts, "If anyone does not love (φιλει) the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 16:22.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Academic American Encyclopedia. Grolier Incorporated, 1992.

Brehm, Jack W., Arthur R. Cohen. Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance. Long and New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1962.

Burton, Ernest De Witt. Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1966.

Constall, Alan and Arthur Still. Cognitive Psychology in Question. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1987, Bourne, Lyle E., Roger L. Dominowski, Elizabeth F. Loftus, Alice F. Healy. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986.

Festinger, Leon, Henry W. Riechen, and Stanley Schachter. When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956.

_____. A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.

Guralnik, David B., ed. Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.

LaHaye, Tim. Spirit-Controlled Temperament. La Mesa: Post, Inc. Publishers of Scriptural Truth, 1966.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Houghton Mifflin Company licensed to BibleSoft, 1992.

The New Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1997.

Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. Nashville, Camden, and New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

Wise, Terry S. Conflict in the Church: Practical Help for Understanding and Dealing with Conflict. Newburgh: Avalon Press, 1994.

Yates, Aubrey J. Frustration and Conflict. London: Methuen & Co LTD., 1962.

Zajonc, Robert B. "Thinking," "Cognitive Organization and Processes." International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968.

ARTICLES

- Aronson, Joshua, Joel Cooper, and Hart Blanton, "From Dissonance To Disidentification: Selectivity in the Self-Affirmation Process," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 68, no. 6 (1995): 986-996.
- Botti and Myers, "Problem-Based Learning Background & Objectives," The Internet (1995)
- Camden, Jim, "Feds defend FBI sniper: Case should be moved, former Ruby Ridge commander says," The Spokesman-Review (August 22, 1997): A1.
- Craig, John, "Hometown rallies behind accused killer: Raucous Republic crowd cheers Harris, assails charge against 'model citizen,'" The Spokesmen-Review (August 22, 1997): A1
- Drumheller, Susan and Craig Welch, "Harris surrenders: Inexperienced prosecutor to seek convictions where feds failed," The Spokesman-Review (August 22, 1997): A1
- Elliot, Andrew J. and Patricia G. Divine, "On the Motivational Nature of Cognitive Dissonance: Dissonance as Psychological Discomfort," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 67, no. 3, (1994): 382-394.
- Fleming, John H. and Laurie A. Rudman, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Self-Concept Regulating and Communicative Properties of Distancing Behaviors" 64, no. 1, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, (1993): 44-59.
- Green, Christopher D., "Where Did the Word 'Cognitive' Come From Anyway?," Canadian Psychology 37, The Internet, (1996): 31-39.
- Harmon-Jones, Eddie, Jeff Greenberg, Linda Simon, David E. Nelson, and Jack W. Brehm, "Evidence That the Production of Aversive Consequences Is Not Necessary to Create Cognitive Dissonance," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 70, no. 1, (1996): 5-16.
- Kiesler, Charles A. and Michael S. Pallak, "Arousal Properties of Dissonance Manipulations," Psychological Bulletin 83, no 6, (1976): 1014-1025.
- Klass, Ellen Tobey, "Psychological Effects of Immoral Actions: The Experimental Evidence," Psychological Bulletin 85, no. 4, (1978): 756-771.
- Leo, Joe, "A no-fault Holocaust: 'Absolutophobia'—an unwillingness to say something is wrong," U.S. News & World Report (July 21, 1997): 14.
- McKown, Delos. "How To Handle Bibliolaters." Internet Infidels, (1997).
- Pyszczynski, Tom, Jeff Greenbbberg, Sheldon Solomon, John Sideris, and Mari Jo Stubing, "Emotional Expression and the Reduction of Motivated Cognitive Bias: Evidence From Cognitive Dissonance and Distancing From Victims' Paradigms," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 64, no. 2, (1993): 177-186.

- Shultz, Thomas R. and Mark R. Lepper, "Cognitive Dissonance Reduction as Constraint Satisfaction," Psychological Review 103, no. 2, (1996): 219-240.
- Simon, Linda, Jerry Greenberg, and Jack Brehm, "Trivialization: The Forgotten Mode of Dissonance Reduction," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 68, no. 2, (1995): 247-260.
- Smith, Scott, "Passion in public: Some lovers can't seem to wait for a private moment to satisfy the urge for sloppy affection," The Spokesman-Review, (August 26, 1997): C1.