

Christian Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a well know therapeutic modality for dealing with everything from emotional trauma to depression to anxiety. What most people don't realize is that the word of God spoke first about the powerful connection between thoughts and behaviors (Jesus said "Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:45)

Everyone is subject to what cognitive behavioral therapists call cognitive distortions. Although the unregenerated person, by nature, is subject to serious cognitive distortions, the same is often true of the regenerated individual. Often times the regenerated person suffers from a strong delusion as well, because they have not submitted to the word of God as the supreme authority in their life and made a daily habit of washing their mind clean with the water of God's word.

Clinically a cognitive distortion is a term used by counselors to help their clients understand that their thoughts and perceptions are subject to distortion. In other words, just because you think or feel something, that does not make it true. Many times we are under a kind of delusion (2 Thessalonians. 2:11) and we must use God's word to correct our distorted cognitive vision. These distortions cause all kinds of emotional, spiritual and relational problems.

The Bible refers to these distortions in several different ways: powerful delusions, blindness, having a hostile mind towards God or towards truth; and thoughts, arguments and pretensions that set themselves against the knowledge of God. The apostle Paul has much to say about the importance of having a mind filled with and transformed by God's truth. The Bible is the authority on human nature and it teaches us that there is much deception that occurs in the human mind. In 2 Timothy 2 verses 23-26 Paul writes that teachers must gently instruct those who oppose the truth so that they will perhaps come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will. Paul constantly prays for God's people to be filled with the knowledge of God's will through spiritual understanding and wisdom (Colossians 1:9).

Unbelievers are alienated from God in their minds (Colossians 1:21) and believers are warned about being deceived by fine sounding arguments and deceptive philosophies (Colossians 2:4). In fact in 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul speaks of a literal spiritual blindness that veils the minds of unbelievers. Further, in 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul emphasizes the importance of recognizing and correcting thoughts and beliefs that do not line up with God's word: "Take every thought captive" is his charge to God's people. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10 Paul emphasizes the seriousness of the matter when he says "They perish because they refuse to love the truth..." Finally, Paul tells us that the solution to our mental and emotional health problems is not cognitive behavioral therapy but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) which parallels Jesus' instruction to His disciples: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32.

Below are some examples of common cognitive distortions (aka lies) commonly identified in cognitive behavioral therapy and the biblical truths which counter those distortions or lies.

1. Perfectionism:

CD: If yours/others performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself/them as a total failure.

Truth: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24

2. Overgeneralization:

CD: A single or a few negatives, results in a belief that all related things are also negative. As a result your perception of reality becomes clouded by a negative perception.

Truth: And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

3. **Shame:**
CD: Rejecting the positives about yourself. Believing “something is wrong with me and I can’t change.”
Truth: If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. 2 Cor 5:17
Truth: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Phil 4:13.
4. **Mind reading:**
CD: You assume a person is reacting negatively to you without checking out your assumptions.
Truth: For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? 1 Cor 2:11
5. **False prophesying:**
CD: Making negative predictions about future outcomes. “I’ll never get that job.”
Truth: For with God nothing is impossible. Luke 1:37
Truth: A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. Proverbs 16:9
6. **Blaming:**
CD: Deflecting another’s complaint towards you while minimizing your own responsibility and vice versa.
Truth: Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:5
7. **Emotional reasoning:**
CD: Assuming your negative feelings reflect the way things really are: “If I feel it, it must be true”.
Truth: We walk by faith and not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7.
Truth: If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, “Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea” and it would obey you. Luke 17:6
8. **Should statements:**
CD: Guilting yourself with manmade laws. Failure to perform the law results in feeling guilty and inadequate.
Truth: For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I stilled pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. Galatians 1:10
Truth: You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace. Galatians 5:5
9. **Punishment:**
CD: If I or someone else fails they deserve to be punished.
Truth: In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sin. 1 John 4:10
Truth: But He was wounded for our transgressions. Isaiah 53:5
10. **Rejection:**
CD: If I receive a rejection/disapproval message from someone, I cannot feel good about myself.
Truth: Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. Psalm 27:10
11. **Codependency:**
CD: “I’m the glue that holds this family together. Everything depends on me.”
Truth: The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. Hebrews 1:3