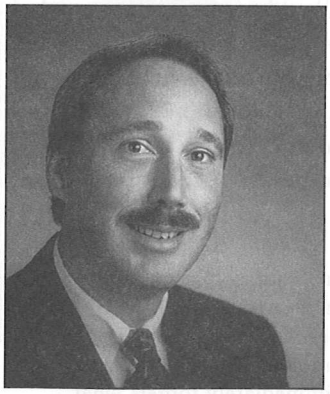
"I Have a Problem, I Don't Want to Change, Please Help"

Just one of the myriad reasons I don't waste my time counseling

By Craig R. Dumont



Some time back, Dr. Lanny Johnson shared with me the conclusion he had reached after years of providing counsel to people seeking his help. Ostensibly they were seeking solid advice in various matters; however, in reality most were foraging for magical solutions that conveniently avoided any moral and ethical change in their lives. They were saying in effect, if not directly by words, "I have a problem, I don't want to change, please help!"

The powerful reality of this truth was hammered home a short time later when I asked him to meet with a mutual friend of ours who was facing a problem and had come to me requesting advice. The problem was clearly articulated, understood, and agreed upon and, based upon the circumstances, Dr. Johnson provided a well thought-out solution that our friend acknowledged as being the route out of his predicament. Everyone was thankful that the Lord had provided experienced and wise counsel that would produce a concrete, quick, and good resolution. Problem solved . . . . Not! Unfortunately, our friend proceeded as if we had never discussed the situation and continued to pursue the very actions that had caused his discomfort. He struggled with hardship and difficulty for another year and a half. This was a clear-cut case of the "I've got a problem, I don't want to change, please help!" syndrome.

The Lust for Magical Solutions

Our society is full of people who know they have problems, but are too much in love with their unethical, immoral, or just down right stupid lifestyles to actually want to change. Oh, they may say they hate those problems and will entertain multitudes of solutions with a passion—as long as those solutions are magical and instantaneous, rather than ethical and applied. The majority of people want to eliminate problems without giving up the cause of their problems. They desire to reap what they have not sown!

The *Wall Street Journal,* July 17, 1999, carried a story illustrating this very fact. The Oglala Sioux Indian council has banned liquor sales on their reservation because their people have a propensity to succumb to drunkenness and alcoholism. However, as is always the case, there is someone who will provide the opportunity—for a price—to those who choose to seek it out. In this case, there is a town (population 22) located just two miles from the reservation border that exists solely to sell liquor to Indians. Last year the town rang up over three million dollars in alcohol sales almost exclusively from the Indian clientele who live in the poorest county in the nation.

Alcohol abuse has devastated the Oglala Sioux tribe, and they have recently poured out their anger on the merchants who sell the liquor. They have vandalized and burned stores and marched in protest against the sale of alcohol. The local drug-and-alcohol detox center "is nearly 80% Sioux Indians, many of whom relapse into drinking after completing the center's 30-day program." There is a problem of great magnitude here.

But despite the protests, vandalism, and constant calls for help, they are wedded to their problem because they love the behavior that produces it. "I have a problem, I don't want to change, please help!" cries the Oglala Sioux Indian. The *Journal*'s article summarizes it thus:

> The result for Whiteclay [the town selling the alcohol] is an odd dynamic between merchant and customer, one in which business owners and Indians are dependent on—and hostile toward—one another. All that binds them together is alcohol.
>
> "That's one of the things we find so disturbing," says Mr. Loomis, the detox counselor. For the Oglala Sioux, "the attitude is going to be, 'I hate you—and I'll take one of those'" [a drink].

There you have it, in a nutshell. The very thing that binds them together is their problem. And they can't change that because that would mean changing the actions and choices that got them there! They are truly bound. They live with their sorrows, broken lives, and hatred; but please don't ask for change, just line up the beer!

If the results weren't so tragic and if this were an isolated example of man's desire to pursue death rather than life, it would be humorous. But the results are tragic and it definitely is not an isolated example. It's the rule. And it's as rampant in the church as out.

Spiritual Quick Fixes

One example of this mentality or syndrome within the church (at least within charismatic and Pentecostal circles) is the attraction to and fascination with spiritual quick fixes at the altar. Almost weekly the call goes out to bring your problems to the altar and receive prayer to solve the situation. Now, acknowledging that God continues to perform miracles despite ourselves, and without in any way denigrating prayer or opposing the Biblical requirement to pray one for another, it must be noted that a significant majority who respond to these invitations are plagued by problems that are the direct result of continuous bad choices they have made, habits they have established, and even open rebellion to God's Word.

For instance, many come forward to receive prayer to solve financial problems, but have no intention of changing the way the handle their money. Their hope is that God will help them hit the lotto. Others come to find relief from stress and worry, but they continue to pursue the very activities that the Bible says will cause worry and anxiety. Still others want a "healing touch" and dismiss out of hand any change of attitude or action that are at the root of their health problems. Then there are those who want God to solve all their marital problems without actually having to take time to apply His marriage laws. They want God to save their children, even though they will not take time to teach their children the Bible and have absolutely no intention of removing them from the synagogues of Satan (government schools). Of course, they all desire a "deeper experience" with God without the bothersome requirements of daily prayer, Bible study and meditation, and all that annoying obedience stuff.

Magic Versus Ethics

Keeping with the prevailing spirit of the times, these Christians pour down to "altars" telling God they have a problem, and then ask Him to perform a miracle so that the problem will go away and so they don't have to change. Nice, neat, and easy. Christian magic in lieu of Christian ethics; "slain in the Spirit" for a few moments vs. walking in the Spirit every day. This is the spiritual version of "I've got a problem, I don't want to change, please help!" Again, simply put, they want to reap what they haven't sown. Worse, despite knowing that the fruit of their illegitimate sowing is and will be problems of increasing magnitude, they are more determined than ever to repeat their actions.

It is a humanistic dream and goal, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, to believe in and seek a radical disconnection between a cause and effect. God said, "Eat this fruit from this tree and die." The serpent and then Adam and Eve proclaimed God a liar. "I shall not surely die," decided Eve, "the problem of death is unrelated to my action." The human race, when accepting this verdict, is at war with God. We seek to establish our own law—the law of no consequences—over God's law that specifically states that He will bless or curse as a direct result of our actions. Problem-solving without change is a fiction, a fantasy that is as powerfully seductive as the myth of the fountain of youth—and just as empty.

Rather than continuing the charade of "ministry" and even encouraging people to enter deeper and deeper into problems and bondage, we should proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is life and life more abundantly. And He requires not only the confession of a problem, but repentance accompanied by *change*: "Go and sin no more." "If you love Me, keep My commandments." The Apostle James puts it this way:

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does. (*Jas. 1:22-25*)

The time is coming, and now is, when God's people must condition their hopes and expectations by His Word alone and stop dreaming the world's dreams. We must stop playing the roles of court magician and stage actor and start proclaiming the Word of God which clearly says, "You do have a problem. You must change. Christ can help, but it is through ethical application of God's Word, which the Spirit of God Himself empowers you to do."

As Dr. Johnson so pointedly, but accurately, put it, there is no time to waste in giving counsel to those who continue to live lives of fantasy. I have found this to be true. To those who say, "I have a problem, I don't want to change, please help," my response is, "Please leave my office and come back when you want to act like a mature Christian."

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