

Jesus and Freud: How They Agree ... and How They Don't

*Can you name 5 things on which Jesus and Freud agree?
(Are you surprised they agree on anything?)*

The word "Freud" triggers a negative reaction for many Christians. We react before we think, and that's a mistake. We need to be a more discerning. While Jesus and Freud had their differences, they share similarities you may not have noticed. Let's take a look.

How Jesus and Freud Agree

What views did Jesus and Freud share?

- Both worked to bring what was hidden into the light.
- Each believed that our words express our innermost selves. (See Luke 6:45)
- Both said that we deceive ourselves, believing the false to be true.
- Each affirmed that we all share similar motives and needs.
- Both recognized the significant influence that parents have on their children
- Each saw the need to rid ourselves of illusions and to deal with reality.
- Both accepted the existence of impulses, emotions, thought, and conscience.
- Each taught that at birth we have no ability to distinguish between what gets us in trouble and what doesn't. (Jesus called it the flesh; Freud called it the id.)
- Each noted that we make choices to deal with the conflict between our impulses and the demands of external reality. (For Freud this was the function of the ego.)
- Each believed in the existence of false guilt and the need to correct it. (Paul, in 1 Corinthians 8:10-13, called such false guilt a "weak conscience"; Freud called it the superego.)
- Both agreed that guilt and shame affect us all.
- Each supported the need for cleansing. (Freud called it "catharsis.")
- Both acknowledged that each of us struggles with fear and develops methods (defenses) to avoid experiencing it.
- Jesus and Freud even agreed on the importance of sex and aggression. Jesus' views reflected those of God the Father. Do you remember God commanding Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it"? (Genesis 1:28) Pastor Ray Stedman noted many years ago that God's command to "fill the earth and subdue it" sounded a lot like sex and aggression to him. Most interesting.

And How the Two Differ

It isn't all bonbons and roses. Jesus and Freud disagree on some significant issues:

- **CHANGE:** Jesus said that change begins when we accept His gift of life and continues as the Holy Spirit renews us (re-birth and sanctification). Freud said that change comes as we progress through a series of sexual stages.

- **CONFLICT:** Jesus points to the conflict between us and God. (We rebel both against God and against the nature that He has built into each of us.) Freud points to the conflict between basic biological drives and the demands of our environment.
- **CLEANSING:** Jesus taught that cleansing is available only through His cross and is experienced through our confession of sin. Freud taught that cleansing (catharsis) comes through expressing the unconscious.
- **FEAR:** Jesus saw fear as a response to guilt. Freud saw guilt as a response to fear.
- **GOD:** Jesus said God was real and created us all. Freud believed that we create God – that all religious systems are projections of our fears of our earthly fathers.
- **GUILT:** Jesus spoke of objective guilt and the universality of sin. Freud rejected the reality of sin and believed all guilt to be false. Jesus remedies guilt by paying the price for our failure to meet God’s standards. Freud remedies guilt by lowering our standards.
- **MOTIVATION:** Jesus recognized love as a primary spiritual motivator for believers (2 Corinthians 5:14). Freud saw love as secondary to the more primary biological motivators such as fear of punishment or of alienation.
- **SELF-DECEPTION:** Jesus deals with self-deception by telling people the truth. (See 1 John 1:8-10.) Freud deals with self-deception by encouraging people to speak whatever comes to mind (free-association). In addition to our ability to deceive ourselves, Jesus also recognizes both the influence of Satan, the deceiver, and the power of the Holy Spirit who leads us into truth and away from illusion.
- **THERAPY:** The word therapy comes from a Greek word that means healing. While both Jesus and Freud associate healing with discarding our illusions about reality, Jesus taught that we must depend on the Holy Spirit to separate reality from illusion. Freud taught that people, on their own, are able to discard their illusory ideas.

Jesus and Freud also differ on the source of personal change and on the kind of change that is possible. For Jesus, God both initiates and produces personal change. For Freud, changes come from self-generated insights. Freud deals exclusively with “soulish” issues: thoughts, feelings, and choices. Jesus offers healing not only in these areas, but in the deeper and lasting realm of the human spirit. Our Lord offers the healing of the innermost person – the healing of the self.

May we choose that deep healing for ourselves,, offer it to others, and depend on God to impact our hearts.