



## **Cognitive Biblical Truth vs Emotional Healing – a Widespread and Expensive *False Dichotomy***

(K.D. Lehman MD, first released 7/18/2008, last revised 3/21/2025)

If you are not already familiar with the differences between non-traumatic memories and traumatic memories, you will want to read “Brain Science, Psychological Trauma, and The God Who is With Us, Part III: Traumatic Memories vs Non-Traumatic Memories” before looking at this essay. “Role of Truth Carried In Non-traumatic Memories” may also be helpful as prerequisite reading. (Both of these essays are available as a free download from the “Kclehman.com Website Archives” section of [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com).)

I want to talk about an important point of tension and division in the church – the tension and division between those who emphasize memorizing scripture, biblical study, and teaching, but are suspicious of emotional healing; and those who emphasize emotional healing, but are frustrated with, and devalue, more traditional teaching. For example, on one side, I have met committed Christians who say things along the lines of:

“Those people in emotional healing ministry do weird stuff, and it makes me anxious. Not only is it loud and messy and scary, but some of those emotional healing people teach and do stuff that is just plain *weird!* And it makes sense! They neglect scripture and good biblical teaching, so they naturally fall into deception.<sup>1</sup> *Who needs any of that?!* We don’t need more therapists or healing ministries – what we really need is to receive more good teaching and to spend more time in the Word.”

On the other side, I have met committed Christians who say things along the lines of:

“If someone hands me one more Bible study about depression I’m gonna puke! They seem to think that if I would just memorize enough scripture, go to enough seminars, hear enough “good teaching,” and read all the books they recommend, I could just choose to stop being depressed, choose to stop having panic attacks, choose to stop being afraid of my husband...etc. I do all the things they tell me, but it doesn’t seem to help. When I need it the most – when something happens, and I get triggered, and I’m really upset – all that teaching stuff goes out the window. The only thing that ever REALLY helped was a healing prayer conference where I went to the memories of my alcoholic father coming home drunk and beating us up, and then Jesus met me in those memories and healed them. Ever since that conference, my panic attacks have been gone. I’m tired of memory verses and “good teaching” – what we really need is more healing conferences and more ministry time.”

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<sup>1</sup> This problem is not an inherent, necessary part of therapy or emotional healing ministry, but my perception is that this concern is often valid. Many who emphasize emotions and emotional healing *also undervalue scripture and other good teaching*, and therefore *are* vulnerable to deception. They *do* stray into the woods, and end up doing and teaching things that are not just weird, but also misguided and hurtful. This makes sense, since one of the important functions of scriptural truth and other good teaching is to provide reference points for the “error trapping” safety nets for those who work with material that is especially experiential, emotional, and intuitive.

The bad news is that this tension and division is widespread and costly. The good news is that it is entirely unnecessary.

I want to expose and challenge the *false* dichotomy that underlies this unnecessary tension and conflict. In logic, a dichotomy is a situation where we face two *mutually exclusive* choices, and must choose *one or the other*. A *false* dichotomy is when we *think* we are facing mutually exclusive alternatives, and must choose one or the other, but this is not actually true. We need to recognize the value and role of truth carried in cognitive semantic non-traumatic memories, AND we need to recognize the need for working *inside* of traumatic memories to resolve distorted beliefs that are anchored in unresolved trauma. Recognizing the importance of truth carried in *non-traumatic memories* and recognizing that special conditions and interventions are required for resolving distorted beliefs carried in *traumatic memories* are *not* “either/or” options. We *do not* have to choose one or the other.

My perception is that many in the church somehow get into a *false* dichotomy with respect to these two pieces. Some Christians perceive the importance and value of truth carried in non-traumatic cognitive-semantic memories, and do a good job of studying, teaching, and preaching to provide this truth; but these people often fail to recognize the reality or importance of trauma-anchored distorted beliefs, and think that the only problem with those who have distorted beliefs is that they have not yet loaded enough truth into their cognitive semantic memory files. Other Christians recognize the reality of distorted beliefs anchored in unresolved trauma, and recognize the importance of working *inside* the traumatic memories to resolve these beliefs; but these people often devalue cognitive-semantic truth, and come to the mistaken conclusion that healing work to resolve trauma-anchored beliefs is the *only* important work.

These approaches that choose *one or the other* have been misled by *false*-dichotomy thinking.

Again: We need to recognize the importance and role of truth carried in cognitive-semantic non-traumatic memories, AND we need to recognize the reality of distorted beliefs that are anchored in unresolved trauma, and recognize the importance of working *inside* the traumatic memories, with effective interventions for healing, in order to resolve these distorted beliefs. I propose that we recognize and learn about *both* cognitive-semantic memories *and* traumatic memories, so that we can work with them in ways that are complimentary.