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EDITORIAL

Ryan L. Rippee*

The Supremacy of Christ in Biblical Counseling

As I sit down to write this editorial for Volume 3 of *The Cornerstone Journal of Pastoral Theology and Ministry*, I'm struck by how beautifully Christ continues to demonstrate his supremacy in the counseling room. While the watching world fragments into hundreds of competing therapeutic approaches, followers of Jesus have access to the one true Counselor whose wisdom never fails and whose methods always produce genuine transformation.

I've witnessed counseling's practical reality for over twenty-five years of pastoral ministry, and it rests on an unshakeable theological foundation: Jesus Christ possesses absolute supremacy in the counseling room because he alone holds the threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King over human hearts. As Prophet, he speaks the final word about human nature, revealing both our deepest problems and God's perfect design for flourishing (Heb 1:1-2). As Priest, he provides the only sacrifice that can remove guilt and shame, offering genuine forgiveness rather than mere coping strategies (Heb 4:14-16). As King, he exercises sovereign authority to transform hearts from the inside out, accomplishing what no human technique can achieve (2 Cor 3:18). Christ is more than simply *helpful* in counseling. He is supreme in counseling, and every competing approach ultimately attempts to usurp his rightful throne in the human heart.

But how do hurting people access this supreme Counselor? How do ordinary pastors connect struggling souls to Christ's transforming power? The answer lies in recognizing that Christ exercises his supremacy through the sufficiency of his Word.

Christ Has Already Provided Everything We Need

Paul's words to Timothy cut through every question about adequacy: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). When Scripture makes us complete, we lack nothing essential for soul care.

Further, this sufficiency is demonstrable. Scripture provides a unified understanding of human nature, the source of our deepest problems, and the path to genuine transformation. We don't have to guess about what constitutes human flourishing because our Creator has revealed his perfect

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design. His standard never changes, His methods never fail, and his outcomes produce the genuine change: image-bearers being transformed into his likeness.

Consider how freeing this is for the counselor. Instead of anxiously wondering which technique to employ or whether we're adequately trained in the latest innovations, we can confidently open God's Word knowing it contains exactly what hurting people need. The Spirit who inspired Scripture also empowers its application, making even ordinary believers effective instruments of transformation in the Redeemer's hands.

The Articles in This Volume

The contributors to this journal demonstrate how Christ's supremacy and sufficiency translates into concrete help in specific counseling challenges:

Samuel Stephens traces how we arrived at our current moment, showing how William James's 1907 pragmatic philosophy infected American intellectual life, including approaches to counseling. But Stephens doesn't leave us discouraged by this historical drift. Instead, he calls Christians to "intentionally live by God's Word," demonstrating how Scripture's absolute truth provides the only reliable foundation for genuine help.

Derek Brown's anthropological analysis reveals the comprehensive nature of biblical wisdom. His comparison table doesn't merely show differences between Christian and psychological approaches; it demonstrates how completely Scripture addresses every aspect of human experience that psychology attempts to explain. From the nature of suffering to the meaning of life, God's Word provides superior insight into what secular theories can only guess about.

Cliff McManis recovers a crucial biblical truth that strengthens our confidence in God's provision: the spiritual gift of *parakaleo* (counseling). The Holy Spirit, as divine Helper, Comforter, Advocate, and Counselor, serves as our ultimate model. When believers exercise this gift, they participate in supernatural enablement for four-fold counseling work: comforting the hurting, encouraging the hopeless, warning the endangered, and appealing to the passive.

Jay Adams's historic Vienna address reminds us why we can speak with such confidence about Christ's superiority. When Adams challenged that room full of psychiatrists with the question "Change them?...Into what?" he exposed psychology's fatal weakness: having no reliable standard for human flourishing. Christians do. "Human beings should look like Jesus Christ!"

John Street's contribution from *Passions of the Heart* courageously addresses sexual sin with gospel hope. Street demonstrates how transformation occurs by exposing heart idolatries and finding satisfaction in Christ alone. No sin, however stubborn or shameful, exceeds gospel grace's

reach. Pastors need not fear addressing sexual struggles when equipped with biblical wisdom about redirecting the heart's worship.

A Pastoral Call to Joyful Confidence

Our people desperately need pastors who believe deeply enough in Scripture's sufficiency to do the hard work of soul care. The young mother struggling with postpartum depression needs someone who can help her understand how the gospel speaks into her exhaustion, fear, and overwhelming sense of inadequacy. She needs biblical wisdom about motherhood, marriage, and finding identity in Christ rather than circumstances.

The teenager battling suicidal thoughts needs someone who can show him how the gospel addresses his deepest questions about purpose, identity, and hope. He needs to discover that his life has meaning because he is created in God's image and designed for relationship with his Creator.

The couple whose marriage is imploding needs to understand how the gospel transforms selfishness into sacrificial love, how repentance breaks cycles of hurt, and how Christ's forgiveness makes genuine reconciliation possible.

The Sufficiency That Sustains

Our hope rests not in human innovation but in Christ's unchanging sufficiency. It is the same sufficiency that sustained not only the apostles, but every faithful pastor across centuries who trusted God's Word alone to heal broken hearts. Every generation faces the temptation to supplement Scripture with contemporary wisdom. Every generation discovers that Christ's way proves superior.

FEATURED ARTICLES

The Dangers of Eclecticism in Biblical Counseling

Samuel Stephens*

I
Introduction

William James (1842-1910), known by historians as the "father of American psychology," popularized the American philosophy known as pragmatism. This philosophical outlook deals not so much with the idea of being pragmatic (in the sense of dealing primarily with practical considerations over theoretical ones) as it seeks to reinterpret the enterprise of philosophy altogether. The *search* for truth, which had been the endeavor of philosophers from antiquity is now abandoned for the *construction* of truth based upon relativistic and utilitarian grounds.[1] In a 1907 lecture entitled "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," James endeavored to delegitimize *a priori* conceptions of truth and knowledge, and instead couch epistemology exclusively within the realm of the experiential.

Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question:

> "Grant an idea or belief to be true," it says, "what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experience will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?" The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer: *True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those we cannot.*[2]

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[1]To the reader it may seem to be an argument based on semantics, but moving from a *search* for truth to a *construction* of truth has major implications in the history of ideas. It will be my contention that such re-imaginings of truth represent "deceptive philosophies" (cf. Col 2:8) that should be soundly rejected by the church and have been detrimental to the church's work regarding soul care.

[2]William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907) as quoted in Louis Menand, *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 115-116. This work is a collection of lectures delivered

While James may not be a household name to many Christians, he is not alone in embracing this philosophy to the detriment of American society (and by extension Western thought) at large. Both Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935) and John Dewey (1859-1952) espoused and embraced the philosophy of pragmatism, which left a lasting mark on American life in the realms of legal jurisprudence and educational theory.[3] The thread that unites each of these thinkers, and many more besides, is not only an adherence to a morally relativistic epistemology but a commitment to and fascination with modern psychology.[4]

James, Holmes, and Dewey operated mainly outside of the church; however, even as early as the late eighteenth century, liberal theology and secular philosophies imported from Europe began to impact pastors and theologians in America. Many began to drift from biblical and orthodox doctrines, in favor of emphasizing existential "virtue and comfort" as essential aspects of Christian ministry.[5] By the dawn of the twentieth century, American intellectuals were flocking to hear German and French psychiatrists give lectures on a new modern psychology. The Progressive Era

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by James from 1906-1907. He dedicates these lectures to British empiricist, social philosopher and proponent of utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill.

[3]Both Holmes and Dewey are considered key figures during the Progressive Era, which traversed the late nineteenth into the early part of the Twentieth Century. This period was marked by major social, economic, and political reform and upheaval. Holmes served as an associate justice to the Supreme Court from 1902 until 1932 and is known for championing an approach to legal jurisprudence (a type of judicial pragmatism) that interpreted the Constitution of the United States as a living document that should best be understood and applied with contemporary contexts. Dewey, a psychologist and educational theorist, soundly rejected objective conceptions of truth and instead promoted a type of social-constructivist epistemology where the student would have a hand in bringing meaning through the lens of their own personal investigation and experience. Of special note, Dewey was an avowed humanist and was an original signatory of the Humanist Manifesto (1933). American Humanist Association, "Humanist Manifesto I," https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto1/, accessed 21 April 2025.

[4]Metaphysically and theologically, an "open system" refers to a Christian worldview in which Creator and creature maintain their distinctiveness but relate to one another. A closed system is a naturalistic worldview which does not give credence to the former and exalts the latter. The outworkings and shifts from an open to closed system and the impacts of such shifts in the realm of psychology into the modern era can be traced by Paolo Lionni's work. Paolo Lionni, *The Leipzig Connection: The Systematic Destruction of American Education* (Sheridan, Oregon: Heron Books, 1973).

[5]E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1983), 97.

brought social-scientific insights into the pews and, according to church historian E. Brooks Holifield, "theology finally became therapy" and ushered in a new psychological age for the church.[6] Now, nearly a quarter of the way into the twenty-first century, one can find that psychological counseling has become ubiquitous not only culturally, but even within the Christian church.[7]

The philosophy, history, and impact of pragmatism is important to know because it provides a necessary backdrop for understanding why counseling psychology is thought of as an exercise in eclecticism. Eclecticism, from the Greek *eklektiko*, meaning "picking out, [or] selecting what appears to be best," relates to its philosophic parent, pragmatism, in that qualities like truth and morality become peripheral (if not completely disposable) concerns, while the most important considerations deal with personal autonomy, utility, and effectiveness (based on personal perception). In essence, eclecticism provides the rationale for counselors and clients to choose what *they* believe is helpful to them from a broad range of methodologies and theories.[8] With hundreds of psychotherapies to choose from, clients care less about *why* various therapies (each claiming to be scientifically and empirically based) conflict or contradict at crucial points, than *how* the therapy will "work" or "help" meet their needs.[9] Additionally, secular and state-licensed counselors who make a

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[6]Ibid., 193. For an examination of this drift in Protestant denominations see: Samuel Stephens, *The Psychological Anthropology of Wayne Edward Oates: A Downgrade from the Theological to the Therapeutic* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020), and T. Dale Johnson, Jr., *The Professionalization of Pastoral Care: The SBC's Journey from Pastoral Theology to Counseling Psychology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020).

[7] While modern psychology took a foothold in the West in the twentieth century, shame-based societies in the East has been slower to adopt counseling due to cultural stigmas surrounding "mental health" problems. This, however, is changing as counseling theories are being imported into many countries around the world via international students coming to study in the United States and the advocacy from globally influential groups such as the World Health Organization (WHO) which produces the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). While the ICD-11 covers a comprehensive list of known diseases, it also covers a wide-ranging list of behavioral "mental, behavioral, and neurodevelopmental disorders" that finds a counterpart in the DSM. See World Health Organization, "International Classification of Diseases," 11th Revision. https://icd.who.int/browse/2025-01/mms/en#334423054. Accessed 21 April 2025.

[8]"Eclectic." Mirriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eclectic. Accessed 21 April 2025. See also, Abigail Shrier, *Bad Therapy: Why the Kid's Aren't' Growing Up* (New York: Sentinel, 2024).

[9]David Powlison noted that it is actually more accurate to refer to the field of psychology as the "psychologies" due to the fragmented and conflicting counseling theories that it represents, thus revealing a conundrum and irony in the conception of the psychologies as "social science." See David Powlison, "Cure of Souls (and the

living marketing and promoting therapeutic services to an ever-growing clientele find that it is more advantageous to provide a broad selection of options rather than limit services, which may restrict their clientele. Yes, one can still find counselors who are credentialed to utilize particular therapies (e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Eye Movement and Desensitization and Reprocessing, etc.), but in many cases, these are promoted in conjunction with other therapeutic services and marketed as "holistic" care.[10]

Eclecticism does not represent a systematic, standardized approach to counseling. Due to the fact that there is a lack of a cohesive worldview that unites various psychotherapeutic practices, tools, methods, and theories which are inherently divergent in their original contexts, one would wonder why Christian counselors would consider approaching counseling in a similar way as the secularist.[11] Sadly, many Christians are more influenced by pragmatic and eclectic thinking than we would like to admit. So, this poses the key question this article will seek to answer: What are the dangers of eclecticism in counseling for the Christian, and why should we avoid being eclectic in favor of adhering to a biblical approach in our counseling theory and method? I contend that eclecticism poses a grave threat to the work of the biblical counselor and to the absolute truth claims of the Christian faith in that it functionally assumes that psychology is morally neutral, it results in a religious syncretism, and it diminishes the Christian gospel.[12] I will demonstrate this by outlining these three dangers of eclecticism in counseling in the hopes of encouraging Christians to hold fast to their confession and what they have learned from the sacred and sufficient Scriptures (2 Tim 3:14-17; Heb 10:23-25).

Modern Psychotherapies)," in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Spring 2007: (25:2), 5-36.

[10]The term "holistic" is widely used among many within the current clinically informed biblical counseling (CIBC)/neo-integrationist movement. While it is difficult to pin down one clear definition, typically it describes the allowance for using a plethora of eclectic methodologies to affect changes in different, yet related, areas at once. A great example of this can be found in the philosophy of the Christian counseling group Metroplex Wellness and Counseling which "offers a holistic approach to mental health treatment in that we combine modalities that address the interconnected spheres of the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical needs of those we are privileged to serve." Such wide-ranging modalities include Enneagram coaching, brain gauge cognitive assessments, use of a Zyto scanner, and micro current neurofeedback. https://www.metroplexcounseling.com/philosophy/.

[11]See Gerald Corey. *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. 11th Edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016).

[12]Additionally, it deemphasizes scriptural categories of thinking and living and ignores vital realities of a biblical worldview, among others.

II
Assuming Moral Neutrality

The first danger of eclecticism is the belief that counseling systems and methods are (or at least can be) morally neutral and thus "fair game" in terms of adoption or integration. The idea here is that even though a particular theory or method may be structured or intended to promote some ungodly goal by some ungodly means, such theories and methods can be "redeemed" when the practitioner who wields them is himself godly. This has been the argument of integrationists since the early days of that project in the mid-twentieth century. While "plundering the Egyptians" sounds like a legitimate way to make use of pre-existing tools and concepts, the assumption of moral neutrality is wrong-headed and naive.

One model that has helped me think through the feasibility of eclecticism, in the form of counseling integration, is a proposal from a biblical counselor for what a responsible model for integration could look like. Douglas Bookman's proposal seeks to answer the question:

> How can the individual who is committed to the Bible as the Word of God, and who is determined to help people as effectively as possible (and who suspects that there is some help to be found in the discipline of secular psychology) fashion a working schema of integration that will enable him or her to honor both his or her allegiance to Scripture and his or her commitment to helping others? [13]

Central to his investigation, Bookman examines the areas of ontology, axiology (ethics), and methodology. Essentially, he wants his reader to consider the possibility of whether integration *can* occur, if it *should* occur, and, assuming the first two are answered in the affirmative, *how* it could occur. Unfortunately, eclectic Christian counselors often assume that an integration of opposing systems is possible and simply begin with how to go about putting theory into practice without first considering the moral implications that should precede any attempt at integration.[14]

Ethics and morality should be the foremost concern for all Christians

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[13]Douglas Bookman. "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Biblical Counseling.* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1994), 63-97. The reader might find it odd that a biblical counselor devoted to the sufficiency of Scripture would construct such a model, but Bookman's point here is to demonstrate the impossibility of integration altogether.

[14]In other words, orthodoxy must precede orthopraxy.

regardless of the sphere or field in which they operate.[15] But how do we think about applying this lens conceptually? According to Bookman's perspective, we should consider that just because something *can* be done doesn't make it biblically ethical or moral by default, nor does it mean that a thing *should* be done at all. This being the case, a morality test must be applied to any and all secular counseling theories or methods considered for adoption, utilization, or implementation (either in whole or in part) by biblical counselors. This test addresses whether any intrinsic need or deficiency in Christian theology (i.e., according to the Scriptures) exists that only the modern psychologies can ameliorate.[16] In other words, counselors must conclude if there is something from within the wide-ranging, often conflicting, and ever-changing menagerie of psychotherapies that is *necessary* for the task of soul care. By the very nature of the philosophy and practice, eclecticism answers this question with a resounding, "Yes!"

What are the implications for laying aside a solidly biblical moral evaluation of theories and methods? For one, let us assume (and this is a huge assumption) that an integrationist (i.e., eclectic) Christian counselor could approach some secular counseling theory and be able to weed out any of its unbiblical worldview commitments along with all of its faulty methods and goals before incorporating any parts of that theory in their counseling. Even *if* this could be done, to carry out an eclectic approach responsibly, the Christian counselor would need to protect the integrity of the Scriptures and continue to preserve and define the moral weight of the counsel. Additionally, the integrationist would need to ensure that their counselee, student, or any other individual directly impacted by their eclecticism (or their followers) would have the same level of discernment and moral awareness as they have.[17] All of this would have to happen in order to protect all parties from error and maintain biblical goals and aims in view. Of course, the possibility is far-fetched because of the reality that secular counseling theories and methods actually *do* carry moral weight, and these stand in stark contradiction to biblical wisdom and a Christian worldview (1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:16). Such a worldview firmly rejects the possibility of bifurcating the secular from the sacred. As Jay Adams put it, "All of life is sacred; none is secular. All life is God-related; none is neutral. Systems, methods, actions, values, attitudes, and concepts are all either God-oriented or sinful. None are

[15]Samuel Stephens, "Christian Ministry and the Mental Health Counseling Complex: Understanding Missions, Counseling, and Biblical Structures of Care," *The Journal of Biblical Soul Care*, Fall 2024: 8:2, 21-44.

[16]Credit for this is given to Sid Galloway.

[17]Arguments like this have been made in the past from early integrationists. For a summarized treatment of this see: David Powlison, "Critiquing Modern Integrationists," *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Spring 1993: 11:3, 24-34.

neutral."[18] Of course, each counseling theorist representing the major waves of psychotherapy carries with him a set of beliefs about how the world (and people) operates, and so it is incumbent upon every biblical counselor to be aware of such commitments and counter them…instead of adopting them.

III
Committing Religious Syncretism

The second danger of eclecticism in biblical counseling is that of committing religious syncretism. What is syncretism, and how does it relate to eclecticism? As was described earlier, eclecticism is the general practice of borrowing or selecting what is perceived to be the best elements from various sources in order to bring them together for a certain purpose, with the idea of improving upon that purpose.[19] While syncretism has a longer history, initially related to the bringing together of distinct warring people groups against a common enemy, it is now generally understood as "the combination of different forms of belief or practice."[20] *The New Dictionary of Theology* defines syncretism as "the process of borrowing elements by one religion from another in such a way as not to change the basic character of the receiving religion."[21] Thus, the distinguishing mark of syncretism is the focus on religion and the content of religious belief and practice.

The reader may wonder why this religious syncretism would constitute one of the dangers of *counseling* eclecticism. What does counseling have to do with religion anyway? According to one author, everything. Paul Vitz, emeritus professor of psychology at New York University, authored *Psychology as Religion* in 1977.[22] In this text, Vitz analyzes and unmasks the pursuits of counseling psychology as not being an enterprise of the social sciences, but

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[18]Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* (Nashville: Zondervan, 1979), 43. Later on Adams notes that God is man's environment. This is the most fundamental metaphysical assumption of reality that the Bible provides for Christians to assume.

[19]At times throughout the essay, I will make mention of eclectic counselors, in this I am referring to Christian counselors who practice integration. This would also include clinically informed counselors and redemptive counselors.

[20]"Syncretism." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syncretism. Accessed 29 Apr. 2025.

[21]Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds. "Syncretism" in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 670. It may be the intention of the borrowing religious group to maintain internal coherent beliefs and structures inherent to their system, but when such borrowing occurs, especially in the context of religion, such safeguards cannot be guaranteed.

[22]The second edition was published in 1995 and is still currently in print.

as an established religion with its own rituals, liturgy, clergy, and theology.[23] For instance, Vitz speaks of the "religion of selfism," which is the culmination of assertions and assumptions from the self-psychologies highlighting secularism, self-esteem, and human potential.[24] He openly criticizes such stances as idolatrous and shows the inherent incompatibility of the counseling psychologies with the confessions of biblical Christianity:

> It should be obvious—though it has apparently not been so to many—that the relentless and single-minded search for glorification of the self is at direct cross-purposes with the Christian injunction to lose the self. Certainly Jesus Christ neither lived nor advocated a life that would qualify by today's standards as "self-actualized." For the Christian, the self is the problem, not the potential paradise. Understanding this problem involves an awareness of sin, especially the sin of pride; correcting this condition requires the practice of such unself-actualized states as contrition and penitence, humility, obedience, and trust in God.[25]

Interestingly, a leader in Christian integrationism agrees with Vitz's criticism that counseling psychology promotes spiritually harmful values, yet he falls short of identifying it as a rival religion to Christianity. In his 1988 book, *Can You Trust Psychology?*, Gary Collins devotes an entire chapter to the question, "Is psychology a new religion that competes with Christianity?" As is typical with integrationist literature, readers rarely receive direct answers to such introspective questions. While Collins does conclude that "many today bow

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[23]Vitz is far from the only critic who has compared modern psychological practice in religious terms. Authors from a diverse range of backgrounds have levied this same criticism, albeit not always as directly. See also, Richard Ganz, *PsychoBabble: The Failure of Modern Psychology and the Biblical Alternative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993); Joyce Milton, *The Road to Malpsychia: Humanistic Psychology and its Discontents* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2006); Anne Harrington, *Mind Fixers: Psychiatry's Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019); Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020); Abigail Shrier, *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up* (New York: Sentinel, 2024).

[24]Paul C. Vitz. *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 32-33. Vitz particularly excludes experimental psychology, behaviorism, and psychoanalysis and focuses instead on the "third wave" psychologies which were focused on the concept of self and personality (xvii). This does not mean, however, that the first two waves of psycho-theories should not be criticized as well.

[25]Ibid., 126.

at the words of Freud, Jung, Rogers, Ellis, Satir, Erhard, or whoever is the latest psychological guru," he concludes the chapter with warning against dismissing psychology outright "because some people have a distorted view of its value" and instead that Christians should "evaluate its findings, learning from them and make use of psychology's insights when they are consistent with Scripture."[26] When the psychologies are considered as a rival religion, instead of a helpful adjunct, to the Christian religion, then the entire eclecticism project for the Christian becomes suspect. Perhaps this is why many are hesitant to consider the inherent religious nature of counseling psychology.

Unfortunately, recent history has proven that a theological downgrade stemming from syncretistic efforts by Christian counselors has already deeply affected the integrity of truly biblical counsel, resulting in something that carries the flavor of religious counsel, *without* the distinction of it being Christian.[27]

IV
Syncretism's Effects within Modern Integration

Within the modern integrationist movement, there has been major theological shifts leftward that have come as a result of holding to theological ambiguous positions and open eclecticism. Early writings from the likes of Gary Collins, Clyde Narramore, James Dobson, and Larry Crabb, while

[26]Gary Collins, *Can You Trust Psychology?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 100-102. Of course, the perennial issue with integration and the consistency of truth claims needs to be addressed. Can theories continue to operate as designed when they are eclectically "plundered" for eclectic purposes? Should individual aspects of these theories (and their inherent truth claims) be considered apart from the worldview that the whole theory promotes? If "aspects" of the theory are unbiblical, but other "aspects" seem to be biblical, what does that mean for the entirety of the theory as intended by the theorist? Regardless, in an earlier work, Collins made a much clearer conclusion regarding the religious nature of psychology. He stated, "Every individual and every science has an underlying belief system that might also be termed a religion. Some of these beliefs are theistic; others are not." See Gary Collins. *The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration of Psychology and Christianity* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1977), 96.

[27]For an overview of these concerns from biblical counselors who seek to hold firm the essential tenets of biblical counseling see: Heath Lambert, ed. *A Call to Clarity: Critical Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling* (Jacksonville: First Baptist Church, 2024), and Lou Priolo, *Presuppositions of Biblical Counseling: What Historical Biblical Counselors Really Believe* (Conway, Arkansas: Grace and Truth, 2023). The overwhelming concern of biblical counselors (in some texts referred to as "traditional" or "historical") is not that eclectic Christian counselors would forsake the faith, but that the faith they represent in their counseling will no longer be represented by biblical Christianity.

arguing for the eclectic use of modern psychological principles and practices, still maintained a relatively high view of Scripture.[28] For instance, in his book *The Psychology of Counseling*, Clyde Narramore dedicated an entire chapter to the use of Scripture in counseling. Narramore noted, "The Bible is not merely a bland background or lace cap for scientific discovery. It is the glorious authority for life itself. It not only sets forth the only hope of our redemption and life eternal through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, it is the glorious manual and guide book [sic] of our daily lives."[29]

Fast forward fifty years to the publishing of a foundational integrationist text entitled *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*, written by well-known and lauded Christian counselors Stanton Jones and Richard Butman, and one will find a very different take on the Scripture's role in counseling. Within the nearly 500-page tome, the key words "Bible" and "Scripture" do not make a substantive appearance.[30] This volume illustrates how clear appeals to the authority of the Bible have been replaced by vague concepts such as "faith-based," "spiritual," and "Christian values" that are rarely capitalized upon or more deeply explicated. Not only is *Modern Psychotherapies* void of any discussion about the use of Scripture in counseling, but it also includes seemingly contradictory statements. For instance, the authors suggest that Christian ministry operates from the Bible, but at the same time they argue for the utilization of a plethora of secular authorities for counselors who wish to be distinctly Christian as well.[31] In a chapter entitled, "Christian Psychotherapy and the Person of The Christian Psychotherapist," they argue:

> A counselor is not thoroughly Christian merely by virtue of being anti-Freudian or antibehavioral, but we would also argue that a counselor is not thoroughly Christian merely by virtue of throwing

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[28]This does not mean that these integrationists were any less wrong in their attempts to improve upon the art of counseling by insisting that eclecticism was necessary.

[29]Clyde Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling: Professional Techniques for Pastors, Teachers, Youth Leaders, and All Who Are Engaged in the Incomparable Art of Counseling*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 239. Of note, following this chapter, Narramore provides an appendix dedicated to selected Scripture references for use in counseling which spans 16 pages!

[30]Stanton Jones and Richard Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 491. The author did not review each page of the book, but did refer to the subject index in which neither term appears.

[31]This demonstrates yet another complicating factor in trying to maintain a balance between two different aims. Jones and Butman even admit that they must "put unusual efforts into making our work [as psychologists within the mental health field] an extension of the Christian faith and of God's redemptive activities in the world" (460).

> around a few Bible verses. None of the existing counseling theories, religious or nonreligious, adequately plumb the depths of the complexity of human character and of the change process. Likewise, *no one approach* to studying the 'calamities of the soul' seems to grapple adequately with the wide variety of biological, psychosocial, and sociocultural variables that can lead to the development of mental illness. So there are *many theoretical options* open to counselors who desire to be distinctively Christian in what they do [emphases mine].[32]

While Jones and Butman point out various character traits and commitments that Christian therapists and clinicians should have, including a call to personal holiness, such conclusions cannot help but be influenced by the syncretism they embrace. In this case, the personal holiness embraced by the clinician and expected from the client amounts to "being attuned to the 'mystical' aspects of our faith" and a "spiritual and psychological maturity."[33]

To close out the illustration of the theological downgrade within the modern integrationist movement, one can turn to the works of authors including Mark McMinn, Megan Anna Neff, Mark Yarhouse, and others. One text in particular, *Embodying Integration*, written by McMinn and Neff and published in 2020, provides the most egregious examples of the stark contrast in tone from the eclectic counselors of the 1960s and 1970s. This "fresh look" at conceptualizing the integrationist counseling task not only reimagines soul care as an existential practice of "creating space" in order to empathize with the feelings and emotions of the client, but also affirms the idea of man's innate goodness, approving of pluralistic religious counseling, questioning the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ, and reconfiguring the main focus of counseling towards validating the human experience, personal process, and reality perceptions of the client. They state, "Expanding our worldviews and our narratives is a natural byproduct of humbly being in conversation with those familiar with an alternative story. This is the process by which critical wisdom develops."[34] What McMinn and Neff call "conversations," this author calls eclecticism and overt religious

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[32]Ibid., 459-460.

[33]Ibid., 474-475.

[34]Megan Ann Neff and Mark McMinn, *Embodying Integration: A Fresh Look at Christianity in the Therapy Room* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 17. Neff mentions that her exposure to "alternative views of atonement, sanctification, suffering, and sin" helped her become more spiritually resilient (7). She later states, "A more flexible understanding of atonement might have helped me experience my patient's sin differently" (162).

syncretism, and it leads to the place were wisdom is no longer sourced from God's special revelation.[35]

V
Syncretism's Effects within Neo-Integration[36]

In his 2024 essay entitled, "Six Crucial Confusions of the New Integrationists," Heath Lambert identifies this burgeoning movement of Christian counselors who seek to situate themselves between modern integrationists and biblical counselors. The thought-center for these neo (or new) integrationists is at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina where they refer to themselves as clinically informed biblical counselors or redemptive counselors.[37] Southeastern describes the effort of clinically informed biblical counseling as "sometimes facilitating application of biblical truths" to the lives of counselees through insights that the social sciences provide in assisting the counselor in "understanding and counseling a person's mental condition."[38] Thankfully, the counseling faculty at this seminary (similar to other Christian counseling organizations that claim a similar designation) still articulate and laud Scripture as being "necessary for understanding people" and as the "primary 'sourcebook'" for

[35]Ibid., 107. The result of abandoning Scripture is spiritual blindness and foolishness. In this "fresh look" at Christianity in the therapy room, the authors state, "It may be shocking to suggest that theology is not enough, but consider again the book you are reading . . . we are trained as mental health professionals, not theologians."

[36]This is a burgeoning field that is just now growing in published works, so a timeline for the neo-integrationists/clinically informed biblical counselor literature will not be as extensive as that within the modern integration camp.

[37]Heath Lambert, "Six Crucial Confusions of the New Integrationists," in *A Call to Clarity: Critical Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling* (Jacksonville: First Baptist Church, 2024), 149. See also, *Southeastern Theological Review*, Spring 2024: (15:1). Key individuals associated to this movement include (but are not limited to) Nate Brooks, Brad Hambrick, Eliza Huie, Kristin Kellen, Sam Williams, Michael Gembola, Jonathan Holmes, Rebekah Hannah, and Jason Kovacs. For examples of organizations that align with the clinically informed biblical counseling paradigm see the Christian Counseling Center Collaborative at https://ccccollab.com/.

[38]Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Central Affirmations of Southeastern's Biblical Counseling Program." https://catalog.sebts.edu/mime/media/24/565/SEBTS_BiblicalCounselingAffirmations.pdf. Accessed 30 April 2025.

counseling.[39] Interestingly, these stances (even down to the language) are similar to those of early modern integrationists.[40]

There are substantive differences between neo-integrationists and biblical counselors. In one such contrasting view relating to the issue of the usefulness of social scientific/psychological insights, biblical counseling organizations such as the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors outright deny that "the findings of secular psychology make any essential contribution to biblical counseling." While their membership covenant does state that secular psychological research and observations "may provide" some level of helpfulness to the counseling task, they also point out that due to the noetic effects of sin, all interpretations of such efforts by psychologists "leads to misunderstanding."[41] This constitutes a critical difference between biblical counselors and neo-integrationists. Consistently, the former group frames any helpfulness found in the social sciences with the realities of the noetic effects of sin (among theological realities). The latter group rarely does this, preferring instead to optimistically endorse the eclectic use of secular theories and methods thus leaving them more vulnerable to the compromising dangers of syncretism. Additionally, they rarely acknowledge the inseparability between a method and its corresponding worldview. Therefore, the posture of clinically informed biblical counselors emphasizes the helpfulness of the modern psychologies and typically legitimizes the mental health complex as opposed to casting a cautious eye on them as being derived from warped anti-Christian worldviews.[42]

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[39]Ibid. The use of the word "primacy" is an inadvertent way to limit Scripture's authoritative and comprehensive nature for the counseling task and open the door to other "authorities."

[40]More academic work should be done to compare and analyze the writings of the modern integrationists of the 1960s-1980s with those of the neo-integrationist of the 2020s. Regarding the findings of secular psychology, Jay Adams, the founder of ACBC, has always distinguished research psychology from counseling psychology. In this particular statement from ACBC, the former is being addressed. Psychology applied towards counseling is always rejected as illegitimate.

[41]Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, "Membership Covenant." https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/membership-covenant/. Accessed 30 April 2025. The membership covenant ends with the clear statement that counseling psychology is "in competition" with biblical counseling and any attempt at integration with "faith once for all delivered to the saints" cannot happen. This can be viewed as an implicit admission of the quasi-religious nature of counseling psychology. See also Jay Adams, A *Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* (Nashville: Zondervan, 1979), 278-279.

[42]Lambert identifies this posture as a "nuanced fascination" with what the social sciences provide. See Heath Lambert, "Priests in the Garden, Zombies in the Wilderness, and Prophets on the Wall," in *A Call to Clarity: Critical Issues in Biblical Counseling* (Jacksonville: First Baptist Church, 2024), 10. There are many examples

Regarding a call to critical thinking in the "redeeming" of psychology, Powlison noted, "Compromising syncretism *only* sees the good, and does not produce redemption. There is wrong in Psychology as in all other mixed cases. When mastered by redemptive purposes, constructive criticism will always engage wrong by offering something better [emphasis mine]."[43] Unfortunately, syncretism has resulted from the efforts of the eclectic biblical counselor when they continue to express confidence and meaning from clinical and psychological principles and insights at the expense of the Scriptures. Examples of this include assertions made by clinically informed biblical counselors such as Nate Brooks in his 2022 commencement address at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Brooks stated, "Indeed, the Scriptures were not written to give humanity the full knowledge of what God intended to reveal to man about man. When we consider the discipline of counseling, there is much the Scriptures do not reveal."[44]

Additionally, another promoter of the clinically informed approach, Eliza Huie, has spent years promoting trauma-informed therapies to Christians.[45]

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of this but a couple of good examples include the following: David Murray and Tom Karel, *The Christian's Guide to Mental Illness* (Nashville: Crossway, 2023); and Helen Thorne and Steve Midgely, *Mental Health and Your Church* (The Good Book Company, 2023). For a critical analysis of Murray's book see, T. Dale Johnson Jr. and Samuel Stephens, "A Christian's Guide to Mental Illness," *Truth in Love Podcast* (Episode 464) https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/a-christians-guide-to-mental-illness/.

[43]David Powlison, "How Does Scripture Teach Us to Redeem Psychology," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (26:3): 2012, 19. While the neo-integrationist has appealed to the phrase "redemptive counselors," possibly in the ways that Powlison spoke of here, their current arguments lack any substantive criticism (if offering criticism at all) because such critical analysis is seen as uncompassionate, mean-spirited, and close-minded.

[44]Nate Brooks, "Herman Bavinck, Patron Saint of Biblical Counselors: How an Old Dutch Theologian Helps Us Make Sense of Biblical Sufficiency" (Charlotte: Reformed Theological Seminary, 2022). https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical-counselors/.

[45]Huie is one of the most vocal proponents within the neo-integrationist camp of trauma-informed therapies. See Eliza Huie, "Episode 59: What is EMDR Therapy" *Speak the Truth Podcast*, 25 May 2020. On her personal website, she refers to herself as "clinically competent" which means that she seeks to bring a "well-rounded approach that offers experience and expertise in addressing clinical matters including trauma, abuse, suicide prevention, cultural issues, and various mental health diagnosis." https://www.elizahuie.com/. Interestingly, there are many within the secular psychologies that openly challenge the scientific validity and claims of EMDR as an evidenced-based therapy as well as challenging popular notions of trauma. See Roger McFillin "Episode 175: Is EMDR a Revolutionary Psychotherapy or

Sadly, contemporary understandings of trauma are based more on Neo-Freudian frameworks than scientific fact, no matter how much one appeals to the seductive allure of neurological or scientific explanations.[46] In her most recent work, *Trauma Aware: A Christian's Guide to Providing Help and Care*, Huie commits the kind of syncretism that Powlison warned against nearly a decade ago.[47] She does this by borrowing extensively from clinical theories and resources while both assuming and presenting such tools as being scientifically supported.[48] In the last section of her book, one where she seeks to set the larger discussion of trauma in a theological context, she discusses the helpfulness of adaptive information processing and how it explains the way the brain processes, organizes, and holds memories. She notes:

> The AIP theory explains that our brains adapt based on the situations we experience. Essentially this means that as we go through experiences, our brains take in everything about the situations, including the sensory information . . . gathered during the experience. That data is then encoded in our brains as memories, which we will then use as we engage future situations. Think of it as a filing system in your brain. Much like files on a computer, when organized properly, they can be out of sight but retrieved as needed . . . The next time you experience something

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Pseudoscientific Sham?" *Radically Genuine*. 6 March 2025 and Michael Scheeringa, *The Trouble with Trauma: The Search to Discover How Beliefs Become Facts* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2022).

[46]The hierarchy of sciences places "hard" sciences near the top in terms of operating by principles of the scientific method and the likelihood that outcomes will be less biased due to tighter controls. The "hard" sciences are set in contrast to the "soft" sciences, which do not operate by the same principles and have positive outcomes in research studies at five times the rate of hard sciences. Fanelli, Daniele. "'Positive' results increase down the Hierarchy of the Sciences." *PloS one* vol. 5,4 e10068. 7 Apr. 2010, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0010068. It is not the purpose of this essay to delve into this topic, but there have been helpful biblical resources that expound on the issue with trauma (with all of the myths associated with it), the most recent being an extensive and comprehensive dissertation. See Francine Tan, *The New Eclecticism: A Comprehensive Appraisal of the Contemporary Paradigm of Trauma*, diss. (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2025).

[47]One can skim the endorsements for the book to see that they are provided exclusively by neo-integrationists, some of which have disavowed biblical counseling outright.

[48]A quick review of the endnotes will show two main sources of support to Huie's claims. The first are authors such as Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk, and Viktor Frankl (all of whom merely theorized about trauma and whose popular theories do *not* stand up to hard scientific scrutiny). The second includes studies from the fields of psychoanalytic psychology and neuroscience.

> similar, your brain pulls that memory—with the sensory information—and adapts your behavior accordingly, based on what we learned.[49]

Under the guise of scientism, Huie (and other eclectic Christian counselors) equates the operations of the most complex (and unknown) organ in the body to that of a filing system on a desktop computer.[50] The pragmatic usefulness of such theories such as AIP (a core tenet of EMDR), Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Assessments, bilateral stimulation, finger-tapping, box breathing, and others seems to outweigh any need to support their use with empirical or objective scientific evidence or to demonstrate that such practices are biblically necessary to work towards the central end of biblical counseling, that of personal sanctification and holiness.[51]

VI
Diminishing the Christian Gospel

Even while its fascination with worldly wisdom is marketed as Christian, eclectic Christian counseling more often contributes to spiritual confusion. Such counseling avoids inquiring into or making use of clear and unambiguous counseling modes and means that are prescribed in Scripture and often lack anything uniquely Christian. This leads to the final danger of eclecticism, which is that the ultimate good that can be offered to anyone, the person of Jesus Christ, is diminished, and in its place is a gospel of emotional, mental, and holistic wellness.

Eclectic counseling focuses on what is deemed "helpful" or "good" to the counselee as opposed to turning to the Bible to provide meaning and definition for these standards.[52] There are, of course, times when what the counselee sees as good and what the Bible says is good are the same; however,

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[49]Eliza Huie. *Trauma Aware: A Christian's Guide to Providing Help and Care* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 2025), 257.

[50]J.P. Moreland. *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to Dangerous Ideology* (Nashville: Crossway, 2018).

[51]While I appreciate that Huie seeks to addresses theology, it is clear from considering her work as a whole (and examining to what extent she seeks to study and apply Scripture) that the main thrust and weight of the argument hinges on neuropsychological explanations framed by mental health concepts and terms. All of these combined tend to cloud (not clarify) the nature of the help and care that Huie is proposing to offer.

[52]At the start of my graduate biblical counseling classes each semester at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, I often write the question, "What is help?" on the whiteboard. My intention is to get my students thinking about this idea biblically, not pragmatically.

much of modern therapy (secular and Christian) focuses on the alleviation of all suffering, difficulty, or hardship to the detriment of godly aims and goals such as endurance, faithfulness, obedience, and trust in God.[53] When the aims and goals of *truly* Christian counseling are lost, and the biblical counselor is reduced to a "service provider" for a paying client, there is a heightened temptation towards pragmatic and eclectic ends. But what are those ends? What is the good that we are working to as Christians who counsel?

In *Seeing with New Eyes*, David Powlison captured the aims of true biblical Christian counseling:

> Every theory defines or assumes an ideal of human functioning by which problems are named and solutions are prescribed: right and wrong, value and stigma, true and false, good and bad, sound and defective, healthy and pathological, solution and problem . . . The Bible's truth competes head-to-head with other models. God speaks a truth that is intended to make sense of us and change us . . . we [Christians] define change as turning to a Person whom we trust, fear, obey, and seek to please. Instead of letting the goal of "health" cue our system to a medical metaphor, we set the goal of being transformed into the likeness of this Person with whom we live in relationship.[54]

This quote correctly articulates the nature, methods, and goals of biblical counseling and helps to demonstrate how Christian counsel from the Scriptures *cannot* be integrated with worldly philosophies in the guise of helpful techniques and psychological theories, no matter the intention. Christian counselors desire that their counselees grow in the knowledge of God and walk in his ways, and it is through the "sacred writings" that both wisdom for salvation can be attained and one may be "adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17; Colossians 1:9-12). However, due to their eclecticism, both the integrationist and clinically informed biblical counselor get righteousness wrong when they downplay the consequences of personal and corporate sin, which in turn focuses efforts on counseling to other ends.

Kristen Kellen asserts that the Lord created people to "flourish," a concept that her colleague at Southeastern Seminary, Brad Hambrick, calls "functional living."[55] In the same article, Kellen clarifies her stance on human

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[53]Vitz, *Psychology as* Religion, 139-144.

[54]David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 3-4.

[55]"SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As it Is and As it Could Be" 74. Hambrick notes that he has found it best to move beyond the "narrow" role of

flourishing to include people growing in Christlikeness and living for the glory of God, goals that any biblical counselor should embrace. She immediately follows up by noting, "I wouldn't say that means every session must be evangelistic or that we cannot do anything to alleviate suffering, even for an unbeliever. After all, as Mike Emlet has said, the relief of suffering is a kingdom agenda; it gives us a foretaste of the coming redemption."[56] Along the same lines, Hambrick goes on to say that the redemptive counselor should "reinforce [the counselee's] pursuit of healthiness with a pursuit of holiness...."[57] These thoughts, when taken together, offer an accurate depiction of neo-integrationist thinking. While there are points made that can be affirmed as biblical, these are interwoven with commitments that obfuscate the gospel message.

There is nothing from the counseling psychologies (in part or whole) that contributes to sanctification because these worldview-laden tools deny the realities of sin, justification, and the like. With this in mind, one wonders to what end these tools are being applied. Further, any counseling that does *not* clearly and regularly present the gospel of Jesus Christ through biblical instruction, admonition, encouragement, etc., by biblical means with the expressed intention of seeing the lost soul saved or seeing the saved soul sanctified is *not* Christian. From a biblical counseling perspective, Marshall Adkins, speaking on this topic noted, "If you're making civic righteousness the goal of counseling, that's doing something very different than biblical counselors have done . . . This is borrowing techniques from other therapeutic frameworks to aim at some other goal than God's goal of sanctification for His glory."[58] By civic righteousness, Adkins is giving a name

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teacher as a counselor in favor of viewing his role as more of an "ambassador" who embodies God's concerns. Hambrick's posture here has become more popular in biblical counseling circles.

[56]Ibid., 75. It is arguable, if not outright incorrect, to assume that the relief of temporal suffering is a kingdom agenda. While the care for the poor and ministry to the downtrodden of all sorts is supported by Scripture, one must not forget the particular and primary thrust of soul care and counseling. Jesus himself taught and modeled for us what the appropriate concerns are for the Christian seeking to disciple and counsel. See Sean Perron, *The Counseling Methodology of Jesus Christ in Johannine Literature*, diss. (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023); and Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Nashville: Zondervan, 1970), 67ff.

Adams noted, "Any such counseling that claims to be Christian surely must be evangelistic. Counseling is redemptive" (67).

[57]"SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As it Is and As it Could Be" 75.

[58]Truth in Love 509 Civic Righteousness and Biblical Counseling Dale Johnson and Marshall Adkins https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/civic-righteousness-and-biblical-counseling/?srsltid=AfmBOorOm1GeX1lyaDiDffCKWbRjqmCXbEIaRBuG_lO

to the "good" ends that clinical informed counselors work towards using the world's wisdom by "redemptively contextualizing their work."[59] Of course, the history of pastoral counseling shows us that even with good intentions, seeking to accomplish this is a fool's errand and will not lead to the gospel being proclaimed in the ways God intends.

VII
Conclusion

The tragic irony of eclecticism is that in its attempt to promote utility over truth based on subjective ideas of what is helpful, it ultimately proves that it cannot escape the reality for the very thing that it inherently dismisses . . . that being a standard of absolute truth. What is helpful, what is true, and what is right are all dependent upon the eclectic counselor "choosing" the "best" or most "useful" technique for the occasion while simultaneously neglecting (and sometimes) denying the very thing necessary for help which is *the* standard of truth as expressed in the Bible.[60] It is inescapable that we must live by a standard, everyone does, but it is incumbent upon Christians to intentionally live by God's Word.[61] Eclecticism has been demonstrated to be a self-defeating practice for the Christian counselor in that it betrays a trust in worldly wisdom to achieve God's ends, results in a religious syncretism that diminishes markers of truly biblical counseling, and, worst of all, diminishes the centrality of the gospel.

OyUJhdW-yJwtY. Adkins and Johnson are not doubting the salvation or faith of the neo-integrationist, but do question their methods, means, and goals.

[59]"SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As it Is and As it Could Be," 79. See also, Samuel Stephens. "Christian Ministry and the Mental Health Counseling Complex: Understanding Missions, Counseling, and Biblical Structures of Care," *The Journal of Biblical Soul Care.* Fall 2024, (8:2), 21-44.

[60]Credit for this thought is given to my colleague and friend, Will Richardson.

[61]Jared Longshore, ed. *By What Standard? God's World . . . God's Rules* (Care Coral: Founders Press, 2020).

On the Use and Misuse of Common Grace in Christian Counseling

Derek J. Brown*

I
Evangelical Disagreement about How Common Grace Informs Christian Counseling

A few years into my ministry as a pastor and elder at Creekside Bible Church, I noticed that many of the college and young professionals I served struggled with a tension between the doctrine of total depravity and what they saw among unbelievers outside the church. I recall one discussion in our living room with a group of about thirty young professionals when one young lady asked specifically how we are to think about the "good" things that unbelievers do. It was clear by the question and the way she framed it that this young woman was caught in a bit of cognitive dissonance.

On the one hand, this woman believed Scripture's teaching on total depravity. Apart from Christ and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, people are dead in sin (Eph 2:1-3), in a state of rebellion against their Creator (Rom 3:10-18), and unable to please God in any way (Rom 8:8). On the whole, unregenerate mankind is opposed to the true God and guilty of every kind of unrighteousness (Rom 1:18-32).

On the other hand, she knew unbelievers who seemed to be people of integrity, who loved their families and did good to those around them. In some cases, they appeared to be more dedicated to "good works" than this young woman. How could she make sense of these two seemingly contradictory realities? As she started to understand the doctrine of common grace, the cognitive dissonance abated, and she gained clarity on how God works in the world among believers and unbelievers.

But this was not an isolated incident. As I teach on common grace in both church and seminary settings, I find that many Christians respond with a similar kind of spiritual and intellectual relief as they see—in many cases, for the first time—how the doctrines of total depravity and regeneration fit together with the Bible's teaching on creation, anthropology, and divine providence. Importantly, I've seen this theological framework enable Christians to engage non-Christian thought with sharper discernment and greater clarity.

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Nevertheless, even with these tangible benefits of the doctrine of common grace, there is significant disagreement among evangelicals about how to incorporate it into the counseling enterprise. Some argue that the doctrine of common grace provides both theological justification *and* an ethical mandate for incorporating psychological insights into Christian counseling. Nearly two decades ago, Eric Johnson argued that, due to the reality of God's common grace (what he refers to as "creation grace"), Christians involved in counseling "should be eager to discover genuine truth and goodness available in non-Christian psychology."[1] More recently, but still over a decade ago, in an academic article exploring the connection between common grace and the benefits of secular psychotherapy, Lydia Kim-van Daalen wrote, "[I]t is my conviction that the Holy Spirit distributes certain blessings through secular psychotherapy as an aspect of common grace….[T]he call is to engage with secular psychotherapy in order to use its blessings for the service of believers."[2] In a 2022 convocation address, Nate Brooks, professor at Southeastern Theological Seminary, argued that common grace frees the Christian counselor to learn from unbelievers in certain aspects of counseling.[3] In a joint article, Brooks, along with other "redemptive counselors," argued that integrating useful elements of modern psychology is an act of stewarding well the resources provided by common grace.[4]

Yet, other Christian counselors disagree with this overall approach to common grace represented in the above examples. Heath Lambert argues that some evangelicals do not take into sufficient account the noetic effects of sin and therefore too readily attribute the Holy Spirit's work to certain insights of secular psychology that do not deserve such attribution.[5] Others have voiced concern that misapplying the doctrine of common grace in counseling can lead to a kind of theological and methodological syncretism.[6]

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[1]Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 115.

[2]Lydia Kim-van Daalen, "The Holy Spirit, Common Grace, and Secular Psychotherapy," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (2012), vol. 40, no. 3: 229, 234.

[3]Nate Brooks, "Herman Bavinck, Patron Saint of Biblical Counselors: How an Old Dutch Theologian Helps us Make Sense of Biblical Sufficiency," accessed July 17, 2025,https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical counselors/.

[4]Nate Brooks, Brad Hambrick, Kristen Kellen, and Sam Williams, "SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As It Is, and As It Could Be," in *STR* 15.1 (Spring 2024): 73-86.

[5]Heath Lambert, *Biblical Counseling and Common Grace* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd's Press, 2024), 23.

[6]Earnie Baker, "Presuppositionalism, Common Grace, and Trauma Theory," in *The Journal of Biblical Soul Care,* vol. 8, no. 1 (2024): 64-89.

I take the latter perspective. Over the last few years, some evangelicals have appealed to the doctrine of common grace as both a theological warrant and an ethical mandate to utilize the insights and discoveries of modern psychology. While fully embracing a biblical doctrine of common grace in this article, I will argue that, due to the conceptual overlap that exists between Christianity and modern psychology and the nature of Christian counseling, the doctrine of common grace itself cannot provide theological *warrant* or *obligation* for integrating psychological insights into the Christian counseling enterprise. At best, common grace provides a theological *explanation* for how unbelieving psychologists can make accurate observations about human thought and behavior.[7]

II
Defining and Defending the Doctrine of Common Grace[8]

How shall we define common grace?[9] Wayne Grudem defines common grace as "[T]he grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation."[10] John Frame says that common grace is "God's favor and gifts given to those who will not be finally saved."[11] John Murray

[7]Common grace should also prompt regular thankfulness to God for the many ways he blesses the creation and provides us with many things to enjoy. My focus in this article, however, is the doctrine of common grace and its relation to Christian counseling.

[8]Portions of section II were adapted from "The Biblical and Theological Foundations for the Doctrine of Common Grace," previously published at With All Wisdom, April 30, 2025, https://withallwisdom.org/2025/04/30/biblical-and-theological-foundations-for-the-doctrine-of-common-grace/.

[9]According to Herman Kuiper, the Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) is responsible for "discovering" the doctrine of common grace (see H. Kuiper, *Calvin and the Doctrine of Common Grace* [Goes, Netherlands: Oostebaan and Le Cointre, 1928], 2). This does not mean that the doctrine was invented by Calvin, but only that he was the first to give it a deliberate and theologically robust treatment (Kuiper, *Calvin*, 2). Not everyone believes that Calvin provides a strong enough biblical foundation for the doctrine of common grace. After a brief examination of Calvin's biblical justification for the doctrine, Graham Cole concludes, "Calvin's biblical warrant for his idea of common grace is unconvincing." See *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 111. Cole's doubt about Calvin's exegetical foundations for the doctrine of common grace can also be seen in his chapter, "The Holy Spirit, in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary,* ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 407-08. My aim in this section of the article is to provide the biblical and theological footings that Cole finds lacking in Calvin.

[10]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 657.

[11]John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 68n16. Frame notes on page 176 that the Noahic covenant is sometimes called the covenant of common

writes, "So, the term 'common grace' should rather be defined as *every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.*"[12] While there are elements in each definition that we can distinguish slightly from one another, there is a mutual agreement among these theologians concerning the basic nature of common grace: it is a reality that encompasses *all* people, regardless of their redemptive relationship to Jesus Christ.

Also, we see that common grace is defined as "favor" and "gifts" and that which is "enjoy[ed] from the hand of God." In other words, common grace is inherently good and a source of earthly benefit, not something that one would naturally despise as a source of sorrow or harm. Common grace, therefore, does not encompass *everything* that occurs under God's providence. Rather, the doctrine assumes a clear distinction between that which is intrinsically good and desirable (legitimate earthly pleasure, temporal benefits of various kinds, social stability) and that which is intrinsically evil and undesirable (pain, suffering, societal unrest, sorrow, personal turmoil).[13] Common grace, then, is God's goodness to his image-bearers, expressed through his creation, by which both believers and unbelievers experience temporal blessing and benefit. Due to the reality of sin, however, Christians must exercise discernment in classifying elements of creation under the category of common grace.[14] We will see the significance of this last point as

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grace. Commenting on the Noahic covenant's relation to common grace, Robert Letham writes, "This [Noahic] covenant displays common grace; God's benevolence extends to the whole human race, irrespective of the redemptive status of any part of it: 'God blessed Noah and his sons'" (Gen 9:1) (*Systematic Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 295. In scholastic theology, *gratia communis* was defined as God's "nonsaving, universal grace by which he bestows his favor on creation in blessings of physical sustenance and moral influence for good" (Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 355).

[12]John Murray, "Common Grace," *WTJ*, vol. 5, num. 1 (1942): 4; emphasis original.

[13]Nevertheless, it is important to note that defining common grace as "favor" assumes an objective definition of what constitutes "favor." On the one hand, for example, an unbelieving man who finds pleasure in adultery *is not* at that point experiencing common grace. On the other hand, an unbelieving man who finds pleasure in his marriage *is* experiencing common grace. While the unbeliever is always sinning in all that he does, good or evil (Rom 8:7-8), it is still the case that, despite his sin, he can experience the legitimate pleasures with which God has endowed creation. Common grace assumes that there are such things as legitimate pleasures that, even though the unbeliever does not glorify God, are nevertheless deemed as non-sinful enjoyment and gifts of God for his creatures (see also Matt 5:43-48; Acts 14:17).

[14]Not all evangelical theologians believe we should use the word "grace" to describe the ways in which God blesses unredeemed people. John Frame observes that the word "grace" is never used in Scripture in reference to the blessings God bestows

we move on. We now turn to Scripture to ensure that we are dealing with a biblical doctrine.[15]

The doctrine of common grace is built upon six theological truths: (1) The intrinsic goodness of the material creation; (2) God's intention for the creation to serve as a source of legitimate benefit for humankind; (3) the creation of humankind in God's image; (4) the reality of sin and man's guilt before his Creator; (5) the providence of God; and (6) the retention of creation's intrinsic goodness despite the introduction of sin and the curse into the created order.

The Intrinsic Goodness of Creation

First, we consider the creation of the world, for creation is the place *in which* common grace is expressed by God toward his image-bearers. Over the five

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on creation generally (*Systematic Theology*, 246). For this reason, Frame suggests that it might be better "to speak of God's common goodness, or common love, rather than his common grace" (246). Nevertheless, Frame is more interested in understanding how God works in the world and among unbelievers than he is in disputing over words. I follow this path as well. While I sympathize with the argument that seeks to preserve how the word "grace" is used throughout Scripture, I believe there are at least two reasons why we have warrant to use this word when speaking of how God blesses unbelievers and the creation at large. First, as Frame notes, the Hebrew and Greek words for "grace" used in Scripture can occasionally have non-redemptive connotations. Luke 2:52 indicates that Jesus grew in "favor" (i.e., grace) with God and man. Luke does not mean that Jesus grew in redemptive grace, but in an increasing display that God was blessing his life. The Greek word for "grace," then, can mean favor, and, as Frame notes, "obviously [God's] goodness and love are forms of his favor." Frame concludes: "So if God's goodness and love apply universally in some senses, the same is true of God's favor, his grace" (246). Second, "grace" is an appropriate word to describe the blessings unredeemed people enjoy because such people are, due to their sin, undeserving of such blessings. Actually, as unbelievers, we are *ill-deserving* of any good thing from God, for we only deserve eternal judgment in hell for our rebellion against an infinitely holy God. Any shred of goodness or temporal benefit we enjoy in this life—material or intellectual—is a gift of unmerited, undeserved grace. For these two reasons and because theologians for the last few centuries have used the phrase "common grace" to describe God's dealings with a fallen creation, I will use this expression throughout this article.

[11]The biblical basis for the doctrine of common grace does not enjoy universal agreement throughout church history. Herman Hoeksema has provided some of the most substantive arguments against the doctrine of common grace from within the Reformed tradition while also making disagreement over this doctrine the point of a denominational split. See Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History, and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: n.p., 1947). My aim here and in the following section is not to answer Hoeksema's every point directly. Rather, my goal is to ensure that what we believe about the doctrine of common grace is indeed the teaching of the Bible.

days preceding the creation of humankind, God fashioned an earth of exquisite beauty and abundance, a world fine-tuned for the life of both animals and humans. Once this global habitat was complete, God populated the earth with a diverse array of creatures that filled the land, sky, and sea. After a series of creative flourishes, God stepped back from his project like a master craftsman and assessed his work: "And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:10).

Contrary to Gnostic teaching and much of pagan Greek thought, which view the physical creation as the product of a malevolent being and therefore intrinsically evil, the biblical teaching is that the material creation is good, as the creation narrative makes clear with the repeated refrain "and God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:10; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25). The physical aspects of our existence were designed intentionally by God as a source of rich pleasure and satisfaction.

This divine evaluation of the created order is foundational for the doctrine of common grace. The innate goodness of creation is established prior to the fall and is preserved in some measure as we transition into a post-fall world. God had originally created the world to be a place of exquisite enjoyment, pleasure, and benefit. The goodness of creation would have been immediately perceptible to the new humans and served as a source of God-centered delight. Yes, sin had a comprehensive effect on the creation, infecting every aspect of God's masterpiece. Yet, the material world still retained an inherent goodness that could be enjoyed by both believers (1 Tim 4:4-5) and unbelievers (Acts 14:17). The fall and subsequent curse, though comprehensive in scope and devastating in their effect upon the creation (e.g., Rom 8:18-25), did not overturn the fundamental goodness of the material creation as to render it essentially evil. As we will note below, the creation retains its inherent goodness despite the intrusion of sin and God's institution of the curse.

God's Intention for Human Beings to Enjoy and Benefit from the Creation

Related to this first point is the explicit intention of God that his creation serve as a source of legitimate delight, pleasure, and benefit for his human creatures. It is not enough to say that human beings are able to enjoy the creation, but that it was God's *expressed intention* that they would.[16] The

[16]John Calvin comments, "Now when he disposed the movement of the sun and the stars to human uses, filled the earth, waters, and air with living things, and brought forth an abundance of fruit to suffice as foods, in thus assuming the responsibility of a foreseeing and diligent father of the family he shows his wonderful goodness toward us" (*Institutes*, I. 14. 2); cited in Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, Revised Edition (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 210.

existence of an inherently good creation flows from God's nature as absolute goodness (Exod 33:19; 1 Kings 8:66; 2 Chron 6:41; Neh 9:25). God's goodness is the source for both God's motive in creation and the inherent goodness of the creation.

As it pertained to the original creation, Genesis 2:16-17 makes clear that God created with human pleasure and benefit expressly in mind:

> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

While it may be easy to read this passage with an emphasis on the negative instruction ("You shall *not* eat," emphasis added), it is crucial for a correct assessment of the physical world to note that God begins his command with a positive instruction to eat freely from the abundant provision: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden" (2:16). Actually, it was *Satan's* strategy in his temptation of Eve to make it sound as though God was primarily a prohibitor of enjoyment rather than a promoter of it, which is why he framed his first statement negatively rather than positively: "Did God actually say, 'You shall *not eat* of any tree in the garden'" (Gen 3:1; emphasis added)? It should not surprise us that false teachers often promote arbitrary restrictions on legitimate earthly pleasures (see Col 2:16-23; 1 Tim 4:1-5). Also, implicit in the command to "subdue" the earth and exercise dominion over it is God's intention that man should benefit from it (Gen 1:26-31).[17] Even in a post-fall world, man still retains the responsibility and opportunity to use this resourceful creation for his benefit and the benefit of others.[18] Despite our sin, God still sustains this universe and enables all people, whether believers or unbelievers, to enjoy and benefit from the creation.

The Creation of Man in God's Image

Under this heading, we consider God's creation of man, for it is man *to whom* common grace is expressed. We see first that humankind is created in God's image (Gen 1:26). This creation in God's image signals the completion of

[17]Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 325: "This responsibility to 'subdue' the earth and 'have dominion' over it implies that God expected Adam and Eve and their descendants to explore and develop the earth's resources in such a way that they would bring benefit to themselves and other human beings….The responsibility to develop the earth and enjoy its resources continued after Adam and Eve's sin, for even then God told them, 'You shall eat the plants of the field'."

[18]Grudem, *Politics*, 322.

God's creative work, as the Creator himself deems his workmanship now as "very good" (Gen 1:31). The creation of man in God's image is an essential component to the doctrine of common grace, not only because God has given this world as a gift to his image-bearers to be enjoyed, but also because it provides the basis on which we are to evaluate intellectual contributions made by these image-bearers.

Much of what we enjoy in this life comes directly from or is undergirded by the intellectual and material contributions made by men and women who are skilled in various areas of learning, including physics, chemistry, architecture, agriculture, education, software development, and many more. Calvin reminds us that God has endowed humanity with "excellent gifts" that still shine through man, though man is fallen and depraved. We can, therefore, gladly accept these gifts from God's Spirit and thank him for them.

> Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shine in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God…Those men who Scripture calls "natural men" were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us, accordingly, learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature after it was despoiled of its true good.[19]

While the fall has tainted man's intellectual contributions so that he now has a bent toward self and can be led away into false assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality, mankind, and theological truth, he nevertheless can grasp much about the created order that is empirically true and harness that knowledge for the legitimate benefit of his fellow humans. But this truth must be quickly coupled to the truth expressed in the next section.

The Reality of Sin, Man's Corruption, and the Curse

As we also learn in the Genesis narrative, mankind sinned against God and immediately became liable to God's just punishment. Post-fall, all humankind is fallen and worthy of earthly misery, death, and eternal punishment (Gen 2:16-17; 3:17ff; Rom 3:10-20; 6:23). The moment after Adam and Eve sinned, every current or subsequent member of the human race was now wholly

[19]John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion in Two Volumes*, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles and ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II.2.15.

unworthy of any pleasure or providential favor this creation had to offer.[20] Indeed, due to our sin against an infinitely holy God, we are *only* worthy of immediate and eternal gloom.[21] It is for this reason that "grace" has been used to identify this doctrine: any legitimate enjoyment or benefit derived from this creation by any human being, however small or fleeting that pleasure or benefit may be, is a gift of unmerited favor that is bestowed purely on the basis of God's goodness, not the worthiness of the individual (see also Matt 5:44-49). Furthermore, directly related to the topic of counseling and as we will see in more detail below, sin has affected every aspect of our personhood so that human contributions in any area—material *and* intellectual—carry destructive and transgressive potential.

The Providence of God

The doctrine of common grace is also grounded in God's providence, where he restrains evil and provides good gifts to all people. Positively, he actively provides for his creatures through his general oversight of the world, supplying them with stable rhythms of fruitful seasons and food for them to enjoy (Gen 8:22; Luke 6:35; Acts 14:16-17). He establishes people in their places of habitation so they can partake in the blessings of family life, marriage, work, exploration, and a myriad of other temporal blessings (Gen 2:24; Acts 17:26; Matt 5:45; Ps 65:5-13; 104; 136:25). Negatively, he establishes governments and restrains sin for the sake of social stability (Gen 4:15; 11:6; 20:6; 2 Thess 2:7) and holds back his wrath (Matt 19:8; Acts 17:30; Rom 3:25).

Furthermore, we learn from Scripture and experience that unregenerate people can do some measure of relative, earthly "good," or what theologians have called, "civic righteousness" (2 Kings 10:29-31; Luke 6:33).[22]

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[20]It should be noted that Adam and Eve were never positively worthy of the temporal blessings they received from God prior to their sin. Even their pre-fall existence was a gift of God's grace, for they had done nothing to incite God to create them or bless them with life.

[21]While there will be positive afflictions meted out against the unrighteous in hell (i.e., eternal *fire*), one of the most despairing aspects of eternal judgment will be the *removal* of all that is good. This is one reason why eternal judgment is referred to as "death." Life provides you the capacity in which you enjoy God's good creation; death is the removal of life and therefore the removal of any capacity to enjoy God's goodness. This distinction between life and death is found in the very first command of Scripture (Gen 2:16). Bruce Demarest writes, "Several Greek words metaphorically connote ultimate spiritual ruin, *the loss of everything good*, and perdition in hell" (*The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997], 31, emphasis added).

[22]The extent to which unregenerate people can do good is a matter of some debate among Reformed evangelicals. I follow the Westminster Confession of Faith at this

Unregenerate people can also know some aspects of truth (Rom 1:20; Matt 23:3-4) and even experience the non-salvific blessings of the Holy Spirit (Num 22:1-24:25; 1 Sam 10:9-11; Matt 10:5-8).[23]

The Retention of Creation's Inherent Goodness Despite Sin and the Curse

Finally, the doctrine of common grace relies on the truth that creation retains some inherent goodness despite the fall of humankind and the universal curse. Despite the prevalence of dualism throughout the history of Western thought,[24] Judeo-Christian tradition has always held, more or less, to the idea that God's creation, though marred, is still intrinsically good. This is not to suggest that everything we experience in creation is good, for Scripture and experience remind us that there is such a thing as evil in the world. We also know that creation itself is liable to becoming disordered so that, at times, the structures of the creation do not function the way they were designed to (Rom 8:18-25).[25] Nevertheless, there is a continuity between the pre- and post-fall creation, so that a recognizable good still exists in the creation (1 Tim 4:4). This truth allows us to say that both believers and unbelievers can experience temporal blessings in this life, because those blessings are grounded in God's good creation.

This last point requires the introduction of another category that will be pivotal in our discussion of common grace and its relation to counseling. Because we are grounding common grace in the goodness of God and his original creation *vis-à-vis* the doctrine of total depravity, we must tie our discussion to the concept of *legitimacy*. This category is essential because it is not enough to say that *any* enjoyment, material benefit, or intellectual

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point which teaches that good works done by unbelieving people can provide temporal benefit to themselves and others, but do not please God in and of themselves because the works do not come from a heart of faith: "Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: and yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God" (*WCF*, 16.7).

[23]Portions of this list were adapted from John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 247-48.

[24]Dualism in this context refers to the idea that humans are made of a material component (the body) and a spiritual component (the soul or spirit) and that the latter is superior to the former. Because of our soul's superiority to the physical body, the argument goes, it is man's ultimate goal to shed the body and finally achieve a purely spiritual existence. This was the view of the Platonists and the Neo-Platonists, and is usually the view of ancient and modern Gnosticism.

[25]Here I am thinking of diseases, human deformities, natural disasters, and so on.

contribution is a blessing of common grace, for this would inevitably link sinful activity and falsehood to God, his original creation, and his intentions for the creation.

The truth of man's sin and guilt (see previous subsection) guards us from becoming overly optimistic about the contributions of unbelieving humanity. Due to the pervasive nature of sin, *every* human contribution carries the potential for error and evil. This reality requires that we constantly practice discernment to ensure we rightly identify elements of God's common grace in creation and not attribute common grace to anything that is false or evil.[26]

For example, if a man finds pleasure in adultery, we cannot say that this pleasure is a gift of God's common grace. If a worldview is espoused in a book that undermines biblical doctrine, then those ideas cannot be classified under the heading of common grace. In both cases, we have an *abuse* or a *perversion* of God's gifts rather than a *legitimate* use of them. The doctrine of common grace, therefore, does not sanction sin, nor does it endorse unbiblical truth claims. We can only say that common grace is functioning when a person is enjoying or benefiting from the creation in accordance with the truth and the way God has designed and ordered the world to work.[27]

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[26]Concerning the issue of counseling and psychology, Jay Adams notes that common grace cannot be used to justify contradictory doctrines: "Of course all truth is God's truth. But there is only one touchstone for determining whether a given statement claiming to be true is, indeed, true: does it square with God's standard for truth—the Bible? And, when compromisers talk about all truth as God's truth, they call it 'common grace.' They abuse this concept too. They mean by such use that God revealed truth through Rogers, Freud, Skinner, etc. God does of course, restrain sin, allow people to discover facts about His creation, etc., in common grace (help given to saved and unsaved alike), but God never sets up rival systems competitive to the Bible. And he doesn't duplicate in general revelation (creation) what He gives us in special revelation (the Bible). That is not common grace" (*A Theology of Christian Counseling* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], 7). See also Lambert, *Common Grace,* 42.

[27]These distinctions assume that common grace is functioning when the creation is working according to its God-given *telos* (i.e., end, goal). For example, in the case of the man finding pleasure in adultery, his physical pleasure is possible because of the way God has designed the human body to function in the experience of sexual intimacy. Nevertheless, God did not design the human body to function sexually *outside of* the marriage relationship. Therefore, sexual intimacy in the case of adultery has not been enjoyed according to its *telos* and is therefore an illegitimate use of this aspect of God's creation. In the case of a worldview that undermines biblical doctrine, we can see that God's intellectual gifts are at work, but to the degree those gifts did not fulfill their God-given *telos* (they produced falsehood rather than truth), we cannot say that we have, in this case, an example of common grace. In this way, then, any so-called contribution of common grace must be assessed according to sound biblical and systematic theology.

III
Common Grace as Theological Explanation, Not Theological Warrant

Having provided a biblical and theological defense of the doctrine of common grace, we now move to our discussion of common grace's relation to counseling. The thesis of this article is that the doctrine of common grace offers a theological *explanation* for how modern psychology can make true observations about human thought and behavior, but it does not provide a theological *warrant* or *obligation* for integrating psychological insights into the Christian counseling enterprise. I will now support this argument in four steps.

First, I will demonstrate that there is near-total conceptual overlap between Christianity and modern psychology's counseling concerns. This conceptual overlap demonstrates that modern psychology offers an alternative approach to Christian discipleship and must be evaluated vis-à-vis this competitive context. Importantly, it is central to my argument that we view counseling as a subset of discipleship, rather than as something unique or separate from it. I will explain the significance of this point in more detail below.

Second, I will argue that these two systems must yield radically different outcomes in interpretation (diagnosis) and application (intervention) due to their divergent theological and philosophical foundations. In this section, I will also account for how believers and unbelievers can, despite these foundational differences, make similar observations about human behavior and thought patterns.

Third, I will demonstrate that psychological interpretations of human thought and behavior attempt to operate in the realm of special grace and therefore constitute a rival philosophy to Christianity.

Finally, I address how passages in Acts and Titus relate to the doctrine of common grace, biblical counseling, and modern psychology.

Conceptual Overlap Between Christianity and Modern Psychology

First and fundamentally, there is near-total conceptual overlap between the counseling interests of Christianity and those of modern psychology. So comprehensive is the overlap that modern psychology may well be characterized as "naturalistic discipleship" in contrast to "spiritual"[28]

[28]By "spiritual" here, I do not mean that which merely relates to the inner person (which is a common connotation in our contemporary society), but that which relates to the Holy Spirit. "Paul's use of the term 'spiritual' connects it not primarily with the human spirit but with being endowed with God's Spirit. That Paul can use the term without special explanation not only in 1 Corinthians but also elsewhere

discipleship. Modern psychology is a comprehensive framework for observing and interpreting problematic human behavior and then applying remedies to address these issues.[29] Biblical counseling is also a comprehensive framework for observing and interpreting problematic human behavior and then applying remedies to such issues. Psychology aims to direct the mind, heart, and life of the counselee toward a particular end; so does biblical counseling. Psychology trades in the realm of thought, motivation, desire, relationships, appropriate behavior, happiness, and inner peace. These are all essential aspects of Christian discipleship and are therefore under the jurisdiction of Christ and his Word.

As I noted above, it is crucial to understand counseling as a subcategory of discipleship, rather than as an activity distinct from it. That is, counseling is simply "intensive" or "focused" discipleship where a Christian receives intentional, tailored, biblical instruction on specific and serious problems in their walk with Christ and their relationships with others. However, due to modern psychology's collapsing of the immaterial and the physical, so-called mental problems are often viewed as medical issues that require professional treatment. Thus, counseling, by definition, is viewed by most as an activity that deals with matters *outside* the religious sphere and requires professional specialization beyond theological and pastoral training. This category confusion hides the reality that modern psychology attempts to do everything that Christianity does, only from a naturalistic foundation. The table below (Table 1) lists some counseling concerns of Scripture alongside those of modern psychology.

suggests that the term had sufficient currency in the early church. The use of the expression in the early church was unprecedented; while it occurs in secular literature before the NT, it is not used there to designate any kind of higher, spiritual experience" (Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Theology for the People of God (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 123.

[29]This language of "comprehensive framework" needs to be qualified a bit. There is no one, unified "psychology." Rather, there are many different schools of psychological thought that each attempt to explain human behavior according to a particular model or theory. Indeed, some psychologists, recognizing that there is no "core" set of theories that unifies the psychological enterprise, opt for an "eclectic" approach in developing their counseling methodology. My point here is simply to say that these modern psychologies *attempt* to provide a comprehensive framework within which to understand human thought and behavior.

Table 1: Conceptual Overlap in Counseling Concerns Between Christianity and Modern Psychology

Christianity[30]	Modern Psychology
Suffering (Rom 8:18-25; 2 Cor 4:16-18)	Suffering/Trauma[31]
Romantic Relationships (Prov 5:15-23; Song of Solomon)	Romantic Relationships[32]
Family Relationships (Eph 5:22-6:4)	Family Relationships[33]
Friendship (Prov 18:24; 27:9)	Friendship[34]
Conflict (Matt 5:23-24; Rom 15:5)	Interpersonal Conflict[35]
Grief/Loss (Rom 8:18-25; 1 Thess 4:12-16)	Grief/Loss[36]
Motivation (Prov 1:7; Matt 6:1; 22:37-39; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17)	Motivation[37]
Work (Gen 1:26-31; Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:23)	Work[38]
Satisfaction (Eccl 2:24; Ps 90:14)	Satisfaction[39]

[30]It is possible to include many more verses in each category. The aim here is simply to highlight that modern psychology is dealing with issues that are directly addressed in the Bible.

[31]Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

[32] Nathanial Branden, *The Psychology of Romantic Love: Romantic Love in an Anti-Romantic Age* (New York: Tarcher, 2008); Justin K. Mogilski and Todd K. Schackelford, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology and Romantic Relationships* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[33]John Gottman and Nate Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Harmony, 2015).

[34]Mahzad Hojjat and Anne Moyer, eds., *The Psychology of Friendship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[35]William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, tenth edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2017).

[36]J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (New York: Springer, 2018); Robert A. Neimeyer, *Living Beyond Loss: Questions and Answers about Grief and Bereavement* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2025).

[37]Richard M. Ryan, *The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation*, Oxford Library of Psychology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[38]Paul M. Muchinksy and Satoris S. Howes, *Psychology Applied to Work*, twelfth edition (Northfield, MN: Hypergraphic, 2018); John Arnold, Iain Coyne, Ray Randall, and Fiona Patterson, *Work Psychology: Understanding Human Behavior in the Workplace* (Harlow, Essex, UK: Pearson, 2020).

[39]James E. Maddux, *Subjective Well-Being and Life Satisfaction*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2025).

Parenting (Prov 13:24; 29:15; Eph 6:1-4)	Parenting[40]
Problematic Behavior (Rom 7:14-25)	Problematic Behavior[41]
Anxiety (Matt 6:25-33; Phil 4:4-8)	Anxiety[42]
The Meaning of Life (Matt 23:37-39)	The Meaning of Life[43]
Loneliness and Isolation (Prov 18:1; Heb 3:12-15; 10:24-25)	Loneliness and Isolation[44]
Food & the Body (Eccl 5:18; 1 Cor 6:12-14)	Food & the Body[45]
Sexuality (Gen 1:26; Prov 5:15-23)	Sexuality[46]
Depression (Ps 42:3; 56:8)	Depression[47]
Happiness (Matt 5:1-10; John 15:11)	Happiness[48]

[40]Haim G. Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, revised and updated (New York: Three Rivers, 2003); Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* (New York: Bantam, 2012); Sarah Ockwell-Smith, *The Gentle Parenting Book: How to Raise Calmer, Happier Children from Birth to Seven* (London: Piatkus, 2016).

[41]Laney Knowlton, *Healing from Betrayal, Infidelity, and Problematic Sexual Behaviors: A Guide to Individual and Relational Recovery* (New York: Routledge, 2025), forthcoming.

[42]Judson Brewer, *Unwinding Anxiety: New Science Shows How to Break the Cycles of Worry and Fear to Heal Your Mind* (New York: Avery, 2021).

[43]Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018); Tatjana Schnell, *The Psychology of Meaning in Life: Insights and Applications*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2025).

[44]Teal Swan, *The Anatomy of Loneliness: How to Find Your Way Back to Connection* (London: Watkins, 2018).

[45]Phillip S. Mehler and Arnold E. Anderson, eds., *Eating Disorders: A Comprehensive Guide to Medical Care and Complications*, fourth edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022); Karyn D. Hall, Ellen Astrachan-Fletcher, Mima Simic, *The Radically Open DBT Workbook for Eating Disorders* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2022).

[46]Margaret Nichols, *The Modern Clinician's Guide to Working with LGBTQ+ Clients: The Inclusive Psychotherapist* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Justin J. Lehmiller, *The Psychology of Human Sexuality*, third edition (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2023).

[47]Zindwl Segal, Mark Williams, John Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression,* second edition (New York: Guilford Press, 2013); Miriam Akhtar, *Positive Psychology for Overcoming Depression* (London: Watkins, 2018).

[48]Samuel S. Franklin, *The Psychology of Happiness: A Good Human Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); William C. Compton and Edward Hoffman, *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Flourishing,* fourth edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2024).

Anger (James 1:19-20)	Anger[49]

We see in Table 1 that psychology as an academic discipline and as a system of counseling engages with nearly every aspect of Christian discipleship and provides alternative explanatory frameworks and solutions in each of these categories.

Two Different Systems, One Common Goal

Secondly, it becomes clear when we lay the interests of biblical counseling alongside the concerns of modern psychology, that we are dealing with two different systems attempting to address one common issue—human thought and behavior. Yet, these two systems operate from vastly different anthropological first principles. Consider the following table (Table 2), which presents the contrasting theological and philosophical foundations upon which each system builds its understanding and assessment of human thought and behavior.

Table 2: Comparison of Christianity and Psychology's Respective Anthropologies

Human Person (Christianity)	Human Person (Psychology)
A physical and spiritual entity (dualism).	Primarily a biological entity (monism).
Created *De Novo* (original, without ancestor).	Evolved from common ancestor.
The mind is immaterial and exists apart from the physical brain.	"Mind" is a product of the brain's physical processes.
Inherently sinful and rebellious against his/her Creator.	Inherently good or neutral.
Needs supernatural intervention, a renewed inner person, forgiveness of sins, and spiritual discipleship.	Needs greater self-esteem, changes in routine, physical intervention (including medicine) and therapy (naturalistic discipleship).

Given these foundational differences, it would be a mistake to assume that secular psychologists in particular and psychology as an area of academic study routinely offer trustworthy, objective truths about our human

[49]Myisha Cherry and Owen Flanagan, eds, *The Moral Psychology of Anger* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018); William J. Knaus, *The Cognitive Behavioral Workbook for Anger: A Step-by-Step Program for Success* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2021).

existence. The truth is that much of secular psychological study and practice is *laden* with presuppositions that influence the student and practitioner's work. But when we consider the theological/philosophical assumptions that undergird modern psychology, as noted in Table 2, we see that the principles that are foundational to the work of psychology are in direct conflict with biblical truth.

A question arises at this point, however. How do we account for what appear to be similarities in observations between biblical counselors and secular psychologists? Heath Lambert argues that the doctrine of common grace provides the theological basis for explaining why Christians and secular psychologists often make similar observations in their assessment of human thought and behavior.[50] As we noted above, our creation in God's image, the structure of reality, God's active bestowal of his goodness upon creation, and his restraint of evil provide an environment in which both believers and unbelievers alike can "see" the same things.

Take the *DSM-V* for example. Most, if not nearly all, the descriptions of "symptoms"[51] listed in the *DSM* under each disorder are merely observations of problematic behavior on which both the biblical counselor and modern psychologist can agree.[52] The divergence in their respective assessments of this behavior, however, appears at the level of interpretation (diagnosis) and application (intervention). Consider Attention Deficit and Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD) (Table 3)

[50]Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 76.

[51]I place the word "symptoms" in quotes because I do not take most of the behaviors listed in the *DSM* to be actual symptoms of underlying physical diseases. Working from a naturalistic foundation, the *DSM* assumes that these behaviors are signs of a deeper "mental disorder" which has its determinative roots in a person's biology. To speak of "symptoms" gives the impression that psychological diagnoses are rooted in medical analysis.

[52]What constitutes "clinical" (i.e., highly debilitating) behavior *is* a matter of interpretation, however. In several places in the *DSM-V*, the authors provide arbitrary, non-scientific, non-formulaic criteria to determine if a certain kind of behavior should be classified as representing a "clinical" situation. For example, ADHD is "clinical" if six of the listed behaviors persist over the course of six months (*DSM-V*, 59). It is evident that these metrics do not derive from any necessary truths about the physiological or biological nature of the so-called disorder, but rather from the arbitrary choice of the authors.

Table 3: Differences Between Christianity and Psychology in Diagnosis and Intervention

ADHD	Christianity	Psychology
Observation	The person fails to give close attention to details; has trouble sustaining tasks; does not listen when spoken to directly; has difficulty organizing tasks and activities; avoids, dislikes, and is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (e.g., schoolwork, reports, forms, etc.); often loses important items that are necessary for particular tasks; forgetful in daily duties; often fidgets in seat or leaves seat when remaining in one's seat is expected/required; often runs and climbs in areas where it is inappropriate; often blurts out the answer before a question has been completed; can't wait their turn.[53]	The person fails to give close attention to details; has trouble sustaining tasks; does not listen when spoken to directly; has difficulty organizing tasks and activities; avoids, dislikes, and is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (e.g., schoolwork, reports, forms, etc.); often loses important items that are necessary for particular tasks; forgetful in daily duties; often fidgets in seat or leaves seat when remaining in one's seat is expected/required; often runs and climbs in areas where it is inappropriate; often blurts out the answer before a question has been completed; can't wait their turn.
Interpretation (Diagnosis)	Trouble attending to tasks can be caused by environmental factors (poor home life, illness, malnutrition, etc.), or cognitive weaknesses.[54]	Six or more of the symptoms occur within six months indicate that a person has the disorder. ADHD is classified as a neurodevelopmental

[53]The observations in both columns are taken directly from the *DSM-V*. I am using the *DSM*'s list of symptoms/behaviors because these are observations that a biblical counselor and a secular psychologist would agree.

[54]Pamala Gannon helpfully reminds us that a child's weaknesses (reduced short-term memory, difficulty with sequencing, etc.), should not be labeled as a violation of God's law and therefore no identified as "sin." Just as importantly, however, is

	But these behaviors can also be an indication of a person's heart and inner desires (Prov 4:23), for we tend to pay attention to what we love. The behaviors can also be classified as a fruit of laziness, selfishness, and born out of a reluctance to engage in that which is difficult or does not initially interest us.[55] Restlessness, a general behavior of ADHD, can be the fruit of a burdened conscience, or anxiety (Ps 55:2), both of which are significantly influenced by how we view our standing with God (Rom 5:1). But general restlessness and constant activity may also be (especially in young boys) simply an indication of high-energy.	disorder which implies that brain structure and functioning accounts for much of the observed behaviors. The above behaviors, therefore, are not necessarily linked to laziness, irresponsibility, procrastination, lack of self-control, or failure to cooperate with others. While the *DSM-V* does not provide any description of a root cause of ADHD, there is an attempt within modern psychology to locate a primary cause for ADHD in brain abnormalities.[56]

avoiding the mistake of treating sinful behavior as a mere cognitive or physical weakness. See "ADAD: Essential Medical Background and Biblical Counseling Guidelines," in *The Christians Counselor's Medical Desk Reference*, 2nd edition, ed., Charles D. Hodges (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2023), 114-15.

[54]Interestingly, the *DSM-V* concedes this point: "Signs of the disorder may be minimal or absent when the individual is receiving frequent rewards for appropriate behavior, is under close supervision, is in a novel setting, is engaged in especially interesting activities, has consistent external stimulation (e.g., via electronic screens), or is interacting in one-on-one situations (e.g., the clinician's office)" (61).

[56]For example, Amy F. T. Arnsten, "The Emerging Neurobiology of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: The Key Role of the Prefrontal Association Cortex," in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, vol. 154, issue 5 (2009): I-S43; Yuyang Luo, Dana Weibman, Jeffery M. Halperin, Xiaobo Li, "A Review of Heterogeneity of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 13 (2019): 1-12. Gannon notes that, despite extensive medical research, "no measurable biological markers have been discovered, and no objective tests have been established to detect the presence or absence of ADHD" ("ADHD," 109).

Remedy (Intervention)	Environmental factors should be remedied as much as possible (poor home-life, illness, malnutrition). The Christian must learn (be discipled) to control their minds, exercise diligence, do that which is difficult for the glory of God and the good of others, and grow in self-discipline. Christian maturity is characterized by a growing capacity to do what is right and to fulfill our responsibilities before God, even when we do not feel like it or when it doesn't initially interest us. A child's natural energy should not be considered a disorder or a deficiency. High energy is a gift from God.	ADHD is typically treated through a combination of physical interventions including changes in a person's daily routines, special accommodations from one's school or employer, the creation of external means of motivation,[57] psychotherapy, and medication that may include stimulants, non-stimulants, or anti-depressants.

What accounts for these differences in diagnoses and intervention between Christianity and modern psychology? Whereas one's observation of behavior operates primarily in the realm of common grace, interpreting these

[57]A comprehensive review of current research on ADHD in adults completed in 2008 states straightforwardly: "Anyone wishing to treat those with ADHD must understand that sources of motivation must also be externalized in those contexts in which tasks are to be performed, rules followed, and goals accomplished. Complaining to these individuals about their lack of motivation (laziness), drive, will power, or self-discipline will not suffice to correct the problem. Pulling back from assisting them to let the natural consequences occur, as if this would teach them a lesson that could correct their behavior, is likewise a recipe for disaster. Instead, artificial means of creating external sources of motivation must be arranged *at the point of performance* in the context in which the work or behavior is desired" (Russell A. Barkley, Kevin R. Murphy, and Mariellen Fischer, *ADHD in Adults: What the Science Says* [New York: The Guilford Press, 2008], 464).

observations and applying the appropriate remedy requires that each practitioner access their respective worldviews (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: How Worldview Shapes Interpretation and Application[58]

	Christianity	**Psychology**
Common Grace	Observation of Behavior	Observation of Behavior
Worldview	Interpretation (Diagnosis)	Interpretation (Diagnosis)
	Remedy (Intervention)	Remedy (Intervention)

Our deepest theological and philosophical commitments regarding the existence and nature of God, the nature and composition of human beings, the purpose of human life, the nature and extent of our problems, and other important issues shape our worldviews. The biblical counselor operates from a worldview informed by Scripture, while the secular psychologist operates from naturalistic assumptions about God and man. While observations may often be similar, the resulting interpretation (diagnosis) and application (intervention/remedy) will be markedly different because each practitioner's worldview is markedly different.

Lambert helpfully notes that, due to the noetic effects of sin, it is not guaranteed that we will agree on our observations—even what we "see" will be shaped by our deepest convictions about the nature of reality.[59] Often, however, because observations are least affected by our respective worldviews, what we "see" will often be very similar.[60]

Thirdly, it is essential to recognize that common grace operates within the realm of earthly or natural knowledge, rather than spiritual knowledge. That is, God's common grace upon sinful mankind enables people, regardless of their religious commitments, to use and enjoy this world for their legitimate *temporal* benefit. This would include intellectual contributions that enable people to assess the creation and utilize it for some amount of earthly benefit.

[58]I recognize that Table 4 could give the impression that there is a clear line of demarcation between observations and interpretations and thus a sharp distinction between the fruit of common grace and the fruit of our respective worldviews. As we will see, such a clean separation is impossible, for even our observations can be influenced by our worldview. Nevertheless, I have provided this visual aid to help the reader see how Christians and secular psychologists can often agree on observations, while diverging significantly at the level of interpretation and application.

[59] Lambert, *Theology*, 76-77.

[60] Lambert, *Theology*, 77.

Common grace, however, does not provide insight into spiritual concerns and the issues of greatest import, namely, the state of our relationship with God and matters of salvation, sanctification, the inner man, and eternal life.[61]

Yet, this is precisely where the conflict lies: modern psychology, at almost every point, attempts to operate within the realm of spiritual knowledge, or what we might call special grace (see Table 1), as it aims to address and replicate nearly every aspect of Christian discipleship.[62] Indeed, psychology, by its nomenclature (*psyche*= "soul"; *logos*="study of"), history, and stated aims, is an effort to assess the inner-workings and behavior of the individual, or, what Ed Wilde describes as one's "cognition, affections, conduct, will, and identity."[63] Yet each of these categories is *the* concern of Scripture and Christian discipleship.

Historically, the beginnings of modern psychology were self-consciously anti-Christian and sought to provide an alternative system of soul-care to the Christian one.[64] The apostle Paul warns us, however, that *any* non-Christian system of thought that attempts to address *spiritual realities* must be categorized as a deceptive philosophy that derives from human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world (Col 2:8).[65]

This warning from Paul is straightforward enough, so one wonders why there is such divergence among Christians who share Reformed convictions regarding the use of common grace in counseling. One aspect of the problem,

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[61]See Abner Chou, "Common Grace and the Sufficiency of Scripture," in *The Journal of Biblical Soul Care*, vol. 8 (2024): 19.

[62]Daalen concedes this point in the same article in which she calls Christian counselors to engage in secular psychotherapy on the basis of common grace. "Psychotherapy, thus, is not a scientific practice that is merely concerned with earthly things, but is necessarily, though not intentionally, concerned with spiritual things" ("The Holy Spirit," 234). Modern psychology's current "intentions" are irrelevant, however. To the degree that modern psychology is a system of thought that ventures into the spiritual realm, it is classified by Scripture as a rival philosophy that Christians must reject (Col 2:8).

[63]Wilde, "Why Common Grace is Not Enough for Christians Who Counsel," 59n5.

[64]Richard Lint, "The Age of Intellectual Iconoclasm: Revolt Against Theism," in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed., Andrew Hoffecker (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 298-301; also Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 15-17.

[65]The deceptive philosophies that are according to "human tradition" and the "elemental spirits of the world" (Col 2:8) are best understood in the context of Paul's letter to the Colossians, to refer to human attempts to address spiritual realities apart from divine revelation. As a religious being, fallen humanity is continually seeking transcendent realities, yet always operating independently of God's special revelation and therefore constantly falling into error when it comes to spiritual realities. It is precisely at this point that Christians must be on guard not to be taken captive by these alternative approaches to the basic questions of religion.

as we have seen, is that there is a failure to account for the conceptual overlap that exists between the concerns of Christianity and the concerns of modern psychology. Another aspect of the problem is that there is also disagreement on the *nature* of counseling, which leads to differences in how to utilize the doctrine of common grace in the *work* of counseling.

Nate Brooks, for example, suggests that counseling is not exclusively about spiritual matters. Therefore, whenever there are concerns within counseling that pertain to our functioning as creatures (and not our functioning as Christians), we are free to learn from unbelievers. Brooks first quotes Herman Bavinck who, similar to Calvin, chides Christians who reject the wisdom of unbelievers as rejecting the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[66] Brooks then applies this view of common grace to counseling.

> If counseling is solely about spiritual matters, then [in] using Bavinck's grid, there would be absolutely nothing for Christians to learn from the unregenerate in terms of building counseling models. However, given that counseling involves a diverse number of observations, skills, and topics that are not solely within the domain of spirituality, Bavinck opens the door to learning from unbelievers in those aspects of counseling that appertain to this earthly life.[67]

The disagreement, then, is about what constitutes the counseling task and, therefore, what areas a Christian counselor might have the freedom to learn from unbelievers in light of God's common grace. An important point in this article, however, has been that counseling, as a subset of discipleship, is always a spiritual activity that is ultimately concerned with spiritual issues, and that psychology, as an alternative system of thought, aims to replicate Christian discipleship along naturalistic lines, providing an alternative model of soul care.

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[66]Nate Brooks, "Herman Bavinck, Patron Saint of Biblical Counselors: How an Old Dutch Theologian Helps us Make Sense of Biblical Sufficiency," accessed July 17, 2025, https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical-counselors/.

[67]Brooks, "Herman Bavinck," accessed July 17, 2025, https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical-counselors/. See also Brooks, "Everybody Integrates: Biblical Counseling and the Use of Extrabiblical Material, in *STR* 15.1 (Spring 2024): 19: "In truth, no counselor can consistently hold that the Bible contains all information necessary for counseling because counseling is an inherently anthropocentric discipline. Its focus on human transformation traffics in everything that involves being human, topics that exceed the specific teachings of Scripture."

Therefore, due to this conceptual overlap—or rather, psychology's encroachment on biblical territory and distinctively Christian areas of discipleship—combined with the reality of psychology's naturalistic philosophical foundation, we cannot assume that the so-called discoveries and insights of modern psychology are, *de facto*, operating within the realm of common grace. Inasmuch as these insights are the fruit of *interpretation*, they will likely be in opposition to biblical truth. Why? Because once we venture into our respective worldviews when assessing issues of Christian discipleship, we are venturing outside the realm of common grace. I will apply this point to the area of religion to underscore the importance of accurately assessing the issue of common grace and its relevance to the counseling task.

To assume, for example, that common grace provides theological warrant or obligation for integrating psychology into counseling is much like using common grace to justify incorporating the insights of Islam (or any other non-Christian religion) into our worship and formulation of Christian doctrine. Christians historically have rejected such conceptual sharing precisely because we see Islam as attempting to operate in the spiritual realm, and the fact that Islam's truth claims intersect directly and at multiple points with Christianity.

Methodologically speaking, therefore, we would say that it is neither *justified* nor *required* for Christians to incorporate the theological assertions and anthropological insights of Islam into our doctrinal formulations or corporate worship. Why? Because fundamentally, each system claims to teach the truth about God, man, man's purpose and destiny, correct worship, humankind's greatest need, and Scripture is sufficient for each of these concerns (2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:3-4) and antithetical to rival truth claims on each of these points.

Furthermore, it is *in these areas specifically* that the unregenerate mind is most likely to go astray. Having rejected the truth about God's existence, man now suffers from a debased mind and affections that are bent in the direction of *false* worship and unrighteous conduct, rooted in the worship of self (Rom 1:18-32; Eph 4:18). A strong antithesis, therefore, must be maintained between Islam and Christianity precisely because Islamic truth claims are attempting to address spiritual realities which are the sole jurisdiction of Christ and Scripture.

I use this comparison between Islam and Christianity to demonstrate why I do not think it is unnecessarily provocative or disparaging (to Christian integrationists) to say that modern psychology constitutes a rival *religion* to Christianity and why, for this reason, the integrationist project should be abandoned.[68] Secular psychology attempts to do everything that Christianity

[68]Some may object to my reference of psychology as a rival religion since "religion" assumes a claim to revelation, a form of worship, an ethical code, sacred texts, and

does, only from a naturalistic foundation. It is for this reason that biblical counselors have intuitively repulsed the integration of Christianity and psychology over the last few decades.

The most important question is not whether common grace may or may not provide the environmental and epistemological basis for similar observations between Christians and secular counselors. Rather, the deeper concern is that secular psychology has, from its inception, sought to offer insights, diagnoses, and remedies specifically in the areas that are the sole property of Scripture. David Powlison's account of how professional psychologists and other medical professionals gradually replaced pastors in the area of counseling highlights the overlapping theological and philosophical concerns of psychology and Christianity.

> In the century after the Civil War, the professional roles of asylum superintendent, psychological research scientist, and charity worker transmuted into a new secular psychotherapeutic pastorate. Professional jurisdiction over American's problems in living gradually passed from the religious pastorate to various medical and quasi-medical professions: psychiatry, neurology, social work, and clinical psychology. Pastoral retreat and subordination mirrored the advancing authority of those secular professions offering and administering psychotherapy, psychotropic medication, and psychiatric institutions. The 'therapeutic' was triumphant. Psychiatry and psychotherapy displaced the cure of souls, reifying the medical metaphor and so ordaining 'secular pastoral workers' to take up the task. Emotional and behavioral ills of the soul that once registered dislocations in a moral agent's relationships to God and neighbor were re-envisioned as symptomatic of a patient's mental and emotional illness. Worry, grumbling, unbelief, lovelessness, strife, vicious habit, and deceit came to be seen through different eyes, as neurotic anxiety, depression, inferiority complex, alienation, social maladjustment,

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the like. But, as John Frame notes, it is notoriously difficult to define "religion" and to distinguish it sharply from philosophy because both categories have multiple overlapping elements. It is for this reason that Frame approaches his massive work on Western intellectual history on the assumption that "the basic questions of philosophers are religious in character" (John Frame, *The History of Western Thought and Philosophy* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015], 7. It has been my argument in this article that the questions of psychology are religious in character. Whether we classify modern psychology as a religion or a philosophy, it still falls under Paul's warning in Colossians 2:8.

> addiction, and unconscious ego defense. Hospital, clinical, and office displaced church and community as the locus of cure.[69]

This "transmutation" was no mere historical coincidence. The replacement of the pastorate by the psychologist and medical professional in the area of counseling was due to the fact that both systems aimed at the same target: helping people deal with their minds, hearts, and wills, and all the troubles therein. In other words, *naturalistic* discipleship sought the same goals as *Christian* discipleship. From the post-Civil War era through the twentieth century in America, psychology has increasingly encroached on the territory of pastors, who have conceded their rightful domain to a competing theological/philosophical system. The biblical counseling movement has been a theological crusade to reclaim ground that is rightfully the property of Christian ministry.

A concern at this point could be that framing this discussion in such strongly antithetical terms will undermine the usefulness of common grace and reintroduce the cognitive dissonance I mentioned at the start of this article. Dennis Johnson is concerned that a failure to maintain a proper tension between the Bible's clear spiritual antithesis and the influences of common grace upon regenerate people could lead to a host of theological and practical problems.

> If we deny or minimize the profound impact of the spiritual antithesis, we may uncritically accommodate our thought to a non-Christian worldview, naively adopting beliefs, attitudes, and methodologies that reflect their origin in the reductionism of unbelief and therefore distort our grasp of God's truth….On the other hand, if we deny or minimize the motif of common grace, we run the risk of intellectual arrogance, a defensive isolation from the culture in general and the academy in particular. Such isolation deprives Christian theologians (and Christian thinkers in other disciplines) of important resources for testing and correcting our own ideas and interpretations. A devaluation of God's goodness in common grace may also foster an anti-intellectualism that despises God's general revelation in the created order and his providential dealings in history. Spiritually, ignoring common grace may foster attitudes of suspicion, antipathy, and contempt toward non-Christians.[70]

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[69]David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010), 22.

[70]Dennis E. Johnson, "Spiritual Antithesis: Common Grace, and Practical Theology," in *WSJ* 63 (2002): 77.

I sympathize with Johnson's concerns at many points. However, even these concerns do not necessitate that biblical counselors adjust their methodology or commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture to avoid these potential pitfalls.[71] The doctrine of common grace enables us to recognize that unbelievers may and often do acknowledge truths about creation and our human existence. The doctrine, therefore, has great explanatory power, and it frees the Christian from the cognitive dissonance that can arise when we consider the doctrine of total depravity alongside the legitimate and beneficial intellectual contributions that unregenerate people make.

What the doctrine of common grace does not do is *obligate* Christians to utilize the so-called insights and discoveries of modern psychology in their counseling practice. As we have seen, due to the conceptual overlap between Christianity and psychology's counseling concerns and the naturalistic foundations upon which psychology is built, the project of integrating these insights into a Christian counseling methodology is fraught from the outset.[72] As Lambert has noted, determining what constitutes a gift of common grace is a challenging, complex task that requires careful study and clear thinking, guided always by Scripture.[73]

I mention Johnson's article because his concern touches on the question of how Reformed counselors might learn from non-Christian psychology.[74] Although this inquiry is not the primary focus of his article, Johnson explicitly raises the question and highlights the need for Christian theologians to apply the doctrine of common grace to the field of practical theology. For this reason, I believe it is wise to engage with his biblical argument under a section entitled, "Apostolic Endorsement of Pagans' Theological and Ethical Pronouncements."[75]

In this section, Johnson uses Paul's address to the philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16-31) and his affirmation of a Cretan prophet's epithet against his own people (Titus 1:11-13) as biblical examples of how God's common grace "enables non-Christians to perceive and articulate truths."[76] As I will note below, however, it is not enough merely to observe the apostle Paul using the

[71]Johnson is not suggesting that biblical counselors change their methodology. I am engaging with Johnson's article because he presents biblical arguments for how common grace operates among unbelievers while also suggesting that common grace should have some influence in our practical theology.

[72]See Doug Bookman, "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: Nelson, 1994), 63-97.

[73]Lambert, *Common Grace*, 36-45; 79.

[74]Johnson, *Common Grace*, 78.

[75] Johnson, *Common Grace*, 85-86.

[76] Johnson, *Common Grace*, 85.

insights of unbelievers. What we must ask in each case is *why* and *how* Paul used those insights.

Let's first consider Paul's address to the men in Athens. We start with the "why" question. In this evangelistic encounter, Paul quotes two philosophers well-known to the Athenians to demonstrate that their idolatry contradicted their understanding of God's nature. He highlighted this contradiction, not merely to embarrass these men, but to help them see that the God Paul preached was indeed the one true God. Regarding the "how" question, Paul does not merely "use" insights from a pagan philosopher; he extracts the statements from the worldview in which they were uttered and places them with a Christian theistic context. The statement, "For we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:28) did not mean the same thing in the mouth of Aratus as it did in the mouth of Paul, for Aratus was a pantheist, while Paul believed that God was distinct from his creation.

In this case, then, we might ask how common grace is at work. Was it operating on the fact that these ancient philosophers were able to say something *somewhat* true about God? This is what Johnson suggests: "Although the Stoic concept of the Logos is an inadequate reflection of the God who reveals himself in Scripture, Paul hears in such pagan thinkers *echos of truth* about the nature of God that are *accurate and clear enough* to expose the folly of pagan idolatry."[77] Even here, however, the "truth" of these statements is not fully realized until they are placed within the Christian worldview where God is seen as the Creator who is distinct from his creation and is thus "father" to his image-bearers.

Yet, even if we are able to identify aspects of common grace in this narrative (a difficult task given the nature of the statements themselves and their conceptual overlap with Christian theology), this passage does not give us warrant to incorporate so-called insights from unbelievers into our theological method, nor obligate us to do so. Paul's use of one pagan's partially true statement about God to undermine another pagan's belief system for evangelistic purposes is hardly a justification to incorporate pantheistic metaphysics into Christian doctrine.

Applying this passage to our discussion of counseling, Paul's engagement with the philosophers in Athens does not justify integrating the insights of naturalistic psychology into our counseling methodology. On the contrary, this incident provides a model for how to utilize the so-called insights of modern psychology to demonstrate its own internal incoherence so that people will turn *from* that system and embrace Scripture as God's sufficient Word for our counseling needs.

What about Paul's use of a statement from a Cretan philosopher who said of his own people, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Titus

[77]Johnson, *Common Grace*, 85.

1:12). To answer the "why" question first: Paul acknowledges this statement as true to highlight the need for Titus to sharply rebuke the Cretans so they might walk obediently in the faith (v. 13). Concerning the "how" question, it is interesting to note that this statement is merely an *observation* of Cretan behavior. In light of what we have already examined regarding the distinction between observations and interpretations and how each operates in relation to common grace, it should not surprise us that Paul would affirm such a statement as true, for it did not come laden with interpretational freight.

Considering Paul's example vis-à-vis our discussion of counseling, we can certainly affirm that secular psychologists can and do make many true observations about human thought patterns and behavior. However, if we apply each element of this example in Titus to our discussion of counseling, we conclude that Paul is *only* providing biblical precedent for using the insights of modern psychology to correct those who have been influenced by it. In Crete, Paul used a Cretan's own testimony of the unsavory behavior of his fellow Cretans to underscore Titus' need to reprove Christians in Crete who were acting in such ways. This would be like a biblical counselor using a psychologist's observations about the logical contradictions within psychology to rebuke Christians who are enamored with its so-called insights.

In this regard, I think of psychologist Allen Frances' statement that present definitions of what constitutes a mental disorder are not helpful for determining who is sick and who is not sick,[78] or psychiatrist Thomas Szasz' observation that the shift of definitions of what constitutes an illness, not empirical research, is what has created the "myth" of mental illness.[79] Each of these observations can be used by Christian counselors to help counselees see more clearly the sufficiency of Scripture and the insufficiency of modern psychology. What this example in Titus does not do, however, is oblige the Christian counselor to incorporate the alleged insights of modern psychology into his counseling methodology in the name of common grace.

IV
Conclusion

This article argues that the doctrine of common grace provides a theological *explanation* for how unbelieving psychologists can offer true observations about human thought and behavior, but it does not supply Christians with a theological *warrant* or *obligation* for integrating those same insights into the Christian counseling enterprise. The doctrine of common grace is a biblical

[78]Allen Francis, *Saving Normal: An Insider's Revolt against Out-of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, and the Medicalization of Ordinary Life* (Boston, MA: William Morrow, 2014), 16-17. Francis was a contributing author to the *DSM-IV*.
[79]Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (New York: Harper, 2010), 12-13.

doctrine, rooted in the goodness of God and his creation, a robustly Christian anthropology, divine providence, and the doctrine of sin.[80] It informs our development of a coherent synthesis between total depravity and our experience in the world, where unregenerate people operating from non-Christian worldviews can understand true things about the creation. Nevertheless, the doctrine of common grace does not place a mandate upon the Christian counselor to adopt any alleged psychological insight, adjust his methodology, or loosen his commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling.

[80]Rejecting integration is not a rejection of common grace, but rather the correct application of it. Lambert helpfully notes, "It is important to be clear that any disagreement is not about the reality and celebration of common grace. The disagreement is about whether it is possible to trade the things of heaven for the things of earth when it comes to counseling troubled people" (*Common Grace*, 81).

Παρακαλέω: The "Gift" of Biblical Counseling

Cliff McManis*

I
Introduction

Are you a Christian counselor or a biblical counselor? If you are, hopefully you have the God-given, divine enablement called *parakaleó* (παρακαλέω), the gift of counseling (cf. Rom 12:8). Counselors with this gift are uniquely empowered to help others on a personal level with an efficacy and proficiency not common to all. The Holy Spirit has specially energized such saints to bring personal comfort, guidance, and encouragement to countless others who need help along life's way. If you are functioning in the role of formal counselor but do not have this gift, you might not be reaching the potential that God intends for this position of ministry. In fact, you may be doing more harm than good. This article seeks to explain what the gift of *parakaleó* is according to the Bible as well as explain why it is a prerequisite for those who want to excel in the formal ministry of biblical counseling. Through a fresh study of the term *parakaleó*, this article also seeks to complement and augment the pioneering work of Dr. Jay Adams (1929-2020), who laid the foundation and framework for a distinctively biblical approach to counseling. While Adams' foundation was thoroughly solid, biblically speaking, that foundation was not exhaustive,[1] and as such it neglected to prioritize the significance of gifting for counselors. Adams emphasized training instead.[2] And for decades Adams' followers have emphasized training over gifting as well. I will argue that a balanced biblical approach requires training those who are gifted.

If you are a counselor or regularly do counseling as a ministry, when was

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[1]Adams himself admitted in his groundbreaking book, that his system was not complete and he was open to input from others to round out his counseling model. He wrote, "Much work yet remains to be done to construct a full and organized system of biblical counseling" *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1970), xxii; Adams made similar admissions in his later writings, for example, see, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 92, and *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 97.

[2] He also emphasized formal certification. His certification served to validate the training involved. But the training and certification to be an effective biblical counselor was not informed by the prerequisite of having the gift of counseling. One could easily be trained and certified yet not have the gift of *parakaleó*.

the last time someone asked you if you had the gift of counseling? Or, have you ever been asked if you had the gift of counseling? Did you know there was a specific spiritual gift called "counseling"? Have you ever asked yourself if you had the gift of counseling in light of Romans 12:8 which lists *parakaleó* as the supernatural, God-given capacity for helping others?

Now in its seventy-fifth year, the biblical counseling movement has done much to bless and edify the church of Christ through the ministry of helping people. But one area that remains underdeveloped is the recognition of the gift of counseling represented by the term *parakaleó*. The need or prerequisite for aspiring counselors to possess the gift of *parakaleó* is not discussed much, if at all. Failure to recognize *parakaleó's* divine imprimatur to serve as the overarching paradigm of biblical counseling has handicapped the movement to a degree, thus hindering its ability to reach its full potential. The movement's deficiency with respect to gifting manifests itself in three primary areas, which include the following: (1) an overemphasis on the word *noutheteo* in contrast to the significance of the word *parakaleó*; (2) an overemphasis and confidence in sheer human training over against spiritual enablement through divine gifting; and (3) an overemphasis on egalitarianism versus specialization in counseling.

II
The Limits of *Noutheteo*

Jay Adams burst onto the counseling scene with the publication of his 1970 groundbreaking book, *Competent to Counsel*. It was the systematic formalization of his views vetted through experiences he had over the years with hands-on training in hospitals and mental institutions, instruction he received from mental health professionals (including psychologists and a psychiatrist), counseling experiences he had as a local church pastor, and his assignment to teach *Poimenics* (the shepherding work of the pastor) at Westminster Theological Seminary.[3] The end result was a very specific and novel approach to Christian counseling, undergirded by a biblical worldview and tailored for local church pastors and church workers. This fresh approach to Christian counseling Adams called "nouthetic."

Adams' Distinctive

A key distinctive in Adams' method was its "directive" approach in contrast to the passive or "non-directive" approach of the ubiquitous Rogerian methods of the day, as well as in contrast to widespread Freudian principles that downplayed and even dismissed personal responsibility. Adams declared that true Christian counseling, according to the Bible, needs to be direct,

[3]Cf. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xi-xxii.

forthright, authoritative, objective, and even corrective.[4] By "directive" he meant "simply telling counselees what God required of them" according to Scripture.[5] Counselees were not to be inactive, blame-shifting victims. Instead, they were to see their problems and struggles in light of God's Word and implement change in response to God's demands as delineated in Scripture.[6]

Directive counseling, then, was highly confrontational, and the counselee was expected to replace old habits and wrong patterns of behavior with new biblical habits and holy patterns of behavior.[7] Much of the directive or confrontational counseling that the counselor directed at the counselee would be the exposure of sin. Adams proposed that "people who come to counseling invariably are people with great moral difficulties."[8] Or, as he stated elsewhere, explaining why people have problems and why they need counseling: "The ultimate cause is sin."[9] He called his model the "sin model" as opposed to the counterfeit Freudian model which Adams called the "medical model."[10] Freud, an avowed atheist, explained away all sin by calling it "sickness." This "directive," confrontational approach to counseling Adams called "nouthetic confrontation,"[11] taking its name after the New Testament Greek verb *noutheteo*.

Noutheteo in the New Testament

Adams introduced the concept of "nouthetic counseling" in chapter four of his book, which is titled "What is Nouthetic Counseling?" And based on his study, he wanted his fresh and novel counseling model to be known as "nouthetic confrontation" or "nouthetic counseling."[12] This was to distinguish his "biblical" model from secular counseling as well as from the

[4]Adams' approach was a direct challenge to typical Christian approaches before he wrote his book, such as the non-directive advice given to pastors by Stanley Anderson who wrote, "The counselor should listen, show no authority, give no advice, not argue, talk only to aid or relieve or praise or guide the client and to clarify his problem"; *Every Pastor a Counselor* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1949), 55.

[5]Adams, *Competent*, xiii.

[6]The Bible is replete with "directives," or divine imperatives and commands that God gives His people as He expects them to obey. God requires all of His followers to be holy, for He is holy; cf. Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet 1:15-16.

[7]Adams, *Competent*, 77.

[8]Adams, *Competent*, 13.

[9]Adams, *Competent*, 17; Adams did recognize that some problems were organically based and were to be distinguished from spiritual/sin problems; Adams admitted there were true mental illnesses (related to the brain) and that there was a legitimate place for psychology as a science; xvi, xxi, 28-29, 37.

[10]Adams, *Competent*, 4.

[11]Adams, *Competent*, 41.

[12]Adams, *Competent*, 52.

integrationist Christian models that ruled the day.[13] In the chapter he argues that true "biblical" counseling is synonymous with "nouthetic" counseling. He deduced this assertion based on his word study of the noun *nouthesis*[14] and seven usages of the verb *noutheteo*.[15] Adams concluded that the verb *noutheteo* can be rendered in English with the phrase, "confronting nouthetically," so that Colossians 3:16a should read as follows:

> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and *confronting one another nouthetically*.[16]

Compare Adam's translation above with a representative English version:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and **admonishing** one another in all wisdom (ESV).[17]

Based on some select verses, (and some rhetorical flair), Adams argued that *noutheteo* and the noun *nouthesis* are best transliterated rather than translated, since "no one English word quite conveys the full meaning" of the terms.[18] Important nuances are frequently lost in translation. This explains Adams' tenacious defense for keeping the Greek word as the very adjective to describe his philosophy and method of Christian counseling.[19] The main

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[13]As illustrated in *Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology*, Competent 11-12; 76. Many argue that the liberal American Pastor, Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), was the catalyst for Christianizing secular psychology (or psychologizing Christianity) with theology through integration of the two disciplines evidenced by his 1950 book, *Faith Is the Answer: A Psychiatrist and a Pastor Discuss Your Problems*. Others posit Wayne Oates (1917-1999) was the pioneer of integrating theology and psychology geared toward providing "pastoral care." Oates began publishing about the same time as Peale; cf. "Counseling," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity,* Vol. 1, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 704; the influence of these men and others laid the groundwork for later popular psychologically-driven Christian personalities and institutions such as the *Rosemead School of Psychology* that began in the 1950s.

[14]As used in Ephesians 6:4.

[15]As found in Acts 20:31; Romans 15:14; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:15 and 1 Samuel 3:13 of the Septuagint (LXX).

[16]Adams, *Competent*, 41.

[17]Like the ESV, all other major English translations translate *noutheteo* here as "admonish" or "admonishing" including the CSB, LSB, NASB, NKJV, and the NIV; the exception is the NET Bible which renders it "exhorting."

[18]Adams, *Competent*, 44.

[19]Adams, *Competent*, 52.

nuance Adams wanted to retain in the word *noutheteo* is "confront" as well as "rebuke."[20] Biblical counseling is about confronting sin in the counselee. At the end of his word study, Adams avers that the word *noutheteo* entails three implications that should inform Christian counseling:

(1) *noutheteo* implies there is a problem (a sin) that needs to be overcome and it demands change;
(2) *noutheteo* solves problems by verbal means, namely, a rebuke;
(3) *noutheteo* seeks to help from tender concern in a familial context.

Shortcomings

Adams' word study has some merit and is helpful in establishing a paradigm for personal counseling that is consistent with the Christian ethic. Nevertheless, it falls short in a few ways, and as such the term *noutheteo* turns out to be a deficient term by which to define the entire biblical counseling enterprise as Adams' attempted to do. The first way Adams' word study fell short is that he did not include all the biblical usages of *noutheteo* and *nouthesis* to inform his study.[21] As a result, he tried to squeeze too much meaning and nuance out of the words than their contexts allow. For example, he argued without warrant that the etymology of the verb *noutheteo*, *nous* ("mind") + *tithemi* ("to place"), inherently implies "rebuke" as well as "person-to-person verbal confrontation."[22] He also argued that the word inherently had a familial orientation to it, when in fact it does not. The etymology does not carry that much informational weight. The etymology at face value simply means "to place into the mind," which is a one-way transaction of a speaker giving information to a listener.[23] The individual context of each usage has to give nuance to the etymology whether that placement of information into the mind is always in the form of a narrow, confrontational rebuke over a sin issue as Adams maintains. Such a strained meaning goes beyond legitimate lexical and etymological limits.[24] And because of the unwarranted, strained

[20]Adams, *Competent*, 46.

[21]He neglects the noun as used in 1 Cor 10:11 and Titus 3:10 and does not mention the verb as used in 1 Thess 5:12, 14.

[22]Adams, *Competent*, 46.

[23]Louw and Nida conclude, in light of all its New Testament usages, that the base meaning of *noutheteo* is "to advise someone concerning the dangerous consequences of some happening or action"; *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based On Semantic Domains*, Vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 437; cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930), 355.

[24]Cf. D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 45; Robert L. Thomas, *Introduction to Exegesis* (La Mirada, CA: Robert L. Thomas,

meaning Adams assigns to all occurrences of *noutheteo*, namely, "confrontation," which emphasizes a personal rebuke, he is dismissive of the virtually unanimous consent of the English Bibles which render the verb as "admonish" in most cases. "Confront" and "admonish" are not the same. From Adams' perspective, to "confront" is to expose the sin that has been committed. "Admonish," as used by the Apostle Paul, can simply be a warning given ahead of time before any wrongdoing is committed (cf. Col 1:28; 3:16).

Another shortcoming of Adams' choice of calling all biblical counseling "nouthetic" is that he limits the scope of counseling. Adams' definition of *noutheteo* is primarily negative, for he says, "nouthetic confrontation always implies a problem." And for Adam's that problem is usually a sin that needs to be exposed.[25] By calling all Christian counseling "nouthetic," Adams implies that all Christian counseling is just a matter of pointing out sin in the counselee while neglecting other important elements in the counseling exchange, such as providing information where there is simply ignorance (cf. 1 Thess 4:13)[26] or providing guidance to counselees when they need wisdom in decision making (cf. Prov 11:14; 15:22; James 1:5), or providing comfort to a counselee who is dealing with grief in a time of loss or personal suffering (cf. 2 Cor 1:3-7).[27] Biblical counseling is not always negative in emphasis. It includes neutral and positive elements as well. So, while negative nouthetic confrontation can be one legitimate element of the Christian counseling enterprise, it is not an adequate umbrella term to represent the totality of all that biblical counseling entails.

And finally, calling biblical counseling "nouthetic counseling" is confusing to English speakers. Average Americans, and other English speakers around

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1987), 22; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993),185, 189.

[25]Adams, *Competent*, 44-45.

[26]In my thirty-plus years of pastoral counseling experience, much of my counseling is given to enlightening Christians where they are ignorant regarding the content of Scripture. This is especially true with respect to counseling newer believers who don't yet have a grasp of the whole Bible. Many times, when they see a truth I point out from the Bible related to their problem, they rejoice and apply it. In such cases, their problem was not motivated by rebellion towards God. Ignorance is not inherently sinful.

[27]Some suffering Christians bear is not a result of their sin as John 9 makes clear, yet the early *nouthetic* position seemed to tie all suffering directly to personal sin. Adams' journal on counseling alleges, "all suffering may be described as disciplinary…because of unchecked sin in the believer's life," cf. Howard E. Dial, "Sufferology," in *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, ed. Jay E. Adams (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1979), 20.

the world, don't know Greek and the term "nouthetic" is not familiar or practical. It always has to be explained at length upon hearing it for the first time, and many have no analogous conceptual frame of reference by which to assimilate it or remember it. It's a clunky and inaccessible term. Nevertheless, Adams' biblical counseling approach became known as "Nouthetic Counseling" and was billed as such for decades, and in 1976 he created a foundation, and later a certifying organization called the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, also known as NANC for short. Ironically, many counselors in the movement found the acronym "NANC" easier to wield than the cumbersome term "nouthetic," and thus in effect discarded the regular use of the unfriendly Greek term. With time the next generation of nouthetic counselors began pushing for change in the nomenclature of their movement to make it more comprehensible and accessible to the public, and as a result in 1993 the nouthetic counseling movement formally became "biblical counseling."[28] And on October 8, 2013 at the NANC annual meeting, 91% of the organization's members voted to change the name from the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors to the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, ACBC for short. The reason for the name change was because the term "nouthetic" was obscure, whereas the term "biblical" was clear and familiar.[29]

A Better Paradigm

In light of the practical limitations to the term *noutheteo* listed above, I suggest the term *parakaleó* is better suited to represent a more balanced and complete paradigm by which to understand biblical counseling. There are several reasons for this consideration. First of all, unlike the unfamiliar term *noutheteo*, the term *parakaleó* is actually more familiar and relatable to English speakers, as it forms the basis of one of the favored titles for the Holy Spirit, who is called the *Paraclete* in the Apostle John's writings. As such, the term has been used on a popular level throughout church history. John 14:15-17 reads as follows:

> "**15** If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Helper** [Παράκλητον, *Parakleton*], to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be

[28]Eric Johnson and Stanton L. Jones, *Psychology and Christianity: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 36-37.

[29]"From NANC to ACBC," Heath Lambert, Oct 16, 2013, biblicalcounseling.com. In 1995 Jay Adams formed the Institute for Nouthetic Studies which still exists under the umbrella of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, TN.

> in you…. **26** But the **Helper**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (ESV).

In this passage Jesus comforts His apostles, promising them that upon His departure the Holy Spirit will come in His stead and personally aid them in their ministry. The Greek term, *Parakleton*, is rendered variously by the English translations, illustrating its variegated nuances.[30] As the Paraclete, the indwelling Holy Spirit is the Vicar of Christ, who serves as the divine Helper, Comforter, Advocate, and Counselor to every believer. He is truly the most reliable biblical counselor.

Another reason *parakaleó* is a better umbrella term to represent biblical counseling as a system is its potency of meaning due to its frequency of use in the Bible. Contrary to *noutheteo*, which is a "rare"[31] word in the Bible and its meaning is one-dimensional, occurring only eleven times in the New Testament,[32] *parakaleó* and its cognates have a wide distribution in the scriptural corpus in varying contexts occurring about 143 times in the New Testament and over 90 times in the LXX,[33] and as such it had a "popular use."[34] In light of its prolific use, Thomas summarizes his study of the word by saying, "On the basis of statistics alone, παρακαλέω/ παράκλησις are among the most important terms for speaking and influencing in the NT."[35]

Paul explicitly designates *parakaleó* as a spiritual gift only once (cf. Rom 12:8), but the verb is used 109 times in the New Testament, thus providing a rich, comprehensive word bank and backdrop by which to understand the full meaning of the term. Paul himself uses the verb more than 60 times. The term *parakaleó* is a compound word made up of the preposition *para-* (beside)

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[30]Mounce's translation transliterates *Parakleton* as "Paraclete"; ESV/NASB/NKJV say "Helper"; CSB says "Counselor"; KJV says "Comforter"; and LSB/NET/NIV/NLT say "Advocate."

[31]An obvious observation stated by Moulton and Milligan in their, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1930, 1976), 430.

[32]This total includes all its cognates; Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of Greek New Testament*, 430; W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1984), 1307.

[33]Bob Kellemen, *Counsel the Word: Book One* (The Association of Biblical Counselors, 2024), 13; the verb occurs 109 times, the noun 29 times and the proper noun form 5 times in John's writings.

[34]Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, 485.

[35]Johannes Thomas, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol 3, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 23.

+ the verb *kaleo* (to call) and has the root meaning of "to call alongside of"[36] or "to come to where the speaker is" in response to a personal request.[37] Beyond the root meaning this compound word shows great versatility[38] as it is translated with many different words and phrases depending upon the context. The New American Standard (NASB) translates this verb as used by Paul with fifteen different English words, the most common ones being "urge" (23x), "comfort" (18x), "exhort" (16x), "implore" (16x), "encourage" (15x), and "appeal" (8x). Paul's usage is consistent with the way the word is used—with the same complexity and emphasis—in the Synoptic Gospels (25x) and Acts (22x).

Practically speaking, the New Testament usage of *parakaleó* flows from its usage in the classic Greek culture where it was in frequent and common intercourse, meaning primarily "to summon," "to ask," "to exhort," "to encourage," and less frequently "to comfort or console."[39] Although taken from the reservoir of the common Greek vernacular, Paul and the New Testament writers, led by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), infused the term *parakaleó* and its cognates with spiritual overtones, thereby shaping the term's historical development. Paul would routinely utilize a generic secular word and irradiate it, as he was moved by the Holy Spirit to convey his thoughts and turn it into a new specialized and Christianized term purposed to carry the freight of divine truth to his listeners. Thus, when Paul uses the term *parakaleó* and its cognates, there is a presupposed biblical worldview informing his phraseology. "The words receive their content preponderantly from the NT event of salvation."[40]

The Hebrew Bible also provides the backdrop for the New Testament usage of *parakaleó* as it is used by the LXX frequently. The LXX uses cognates of *parakaleó* to translate at least fourteen different Hebrew words depending upon the context, once again illustrating the rich potency and diversity of this weighty compound. The range of expressions represented in the LXX parallel those in its classic Greek usage, for *parakaleó* can mean "to encourage" (Deut

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[36]H. E. Jacobs, "Comfort" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, ed. James Orr (Chicago: The Howard-Severence Company, 1930), 678.

[37]Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based On Semantic Domain* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), 423.

[38]Although the term is rich with many nuances and "capable of a great deal of variation," in all its usages it steadily stays true to its root foundation, "call" (the verbal component) plus "alongside of" (the personal component); cf. Otto Schmitz, "παρακαλέω, παράκλησις" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. V, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967, 1977), 774.

[39]Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. V (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 774-776.

[40]Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 793.

3:28), "to comfort" (Isa 35:4), "to exhort" (Job 4:3), "to ask" (Isa 33:7). In contrast to classic Greek usage, *parakaleó* more frequently represents the verb "to comfort."[41] In such cases, the LXX "refers first to comfort in bereavement…to give expression to one's sympathy…for words of comfort in any human grief."[42] When used in a hortatory manner its aim is encouragement, "friendly exhortation…with no reference to distress."[43]

Despite the word's wide range in nuance, as evidenced by the fifteen different English words used to translate its occurrences in the New Testament, its root point of emphasis falls into four main areas, namely, (1) comfort-help; (2) encouragement; (3) warning; and (4) commands.[44] And on occasion there is overlap between the four. A familiar verse where the verb means "comfort" is in a beatitude spoken by Jesus:

> Blessed are those who morn, for they shall be **comforted** [παρακληθήσονται] (Matt 5:4)

The word can also refer to giving practical encouragement, as Paul often did to his disciples:

> Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was **encouraging** [παρεκάλει] them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. Therefore, I **encourage** [παρακαλῶ] you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish" (Acts 27:33-34).

The word can also be used as a synonym for "warn," as a preventative call of protection for listener's benefit. Paul's friends warned him not to go to Jerusalem, for the hostile Jews there might accost him. Paul's friends were giving him personal, loving advice; they were not rebuking him of sin:

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[41]Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 777.
[42]Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 778.
[43]Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 778.
[44]Hence, Thomas' poignant summary of the term's simultaneous etymological diversity and unitary focus: "The word overwhelmingly expresses a personal emphatic concern"; Johannes Thomas, "παρακαλέω" in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, 26.

> When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began **begging** [παρεκαλοῦμεν] him not to go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:12).

And finally, *parakaleó* is used often, especially by Paul, as a command or authoritative and urgent appeal, calling believers to obey God's truth. Paul uses the verb mostly with the emphasis on "urge" where he makes an apostolic plea to believers, insisting that they immediately comply with biblical mandates. In these cases Paul is making a clear, emphatic, clarion call to obedience in which he expects action and results. These exhortations or commands by Paul can be positive or preventative. Positively, he beseeches the saints to fulfill biblical imperatives in light of the indicatives which Christ has accomplished on their behalf. Preventively, he warns Christians to abstain from sinful behaviors that might short-circuit the worthy walk with Christ. This is the familiar two-fold Pauline pattern issued to Christians, expecting them to put off sinful behavior and replace it with right behavior. Paul uses the verb *parakaleó* with the nuance of a rebuke, calling them to stop their sinful behavior:

> Now **I exhort** [Παρακαλῶ] you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor 1:10).

The four examples above show that when Paul commanded those with the gift of *parakaleó* in Romans 12, he was charging them to do the four-fold work of biblical counseling which entails: (1) giving comfort to those who are hurting; (2) encouraging those who need hope to press on; (3) warning those who don't see imminent danger; and (4) making a strong, urgent appeal to those who are being passive, lazy, or misguided in their behavior.[45]

III
Training vs. Gifting or Training of the Gifted?

The biblical counseling movement has been a tremendous blessing to many for the past seven-plus decades. Jay Adams single-handedly exposed the folly of Christians trying to alchemize secular psychology by mixing it with the Bible. Such integration did not irradiate and purify atheistic Freudian principles for practical use, but instead poisoned the well from which church workers were watering the sheep in need of counsel. One of the greatest

[45]This fourth emphasis coincides with Adams' call to confront sin and replace it with godly habits.

byproducts of Adams' legacy is the championing of biblical sufficiency in the field of counseling. And from the beginning Adams prioritized the need for biblical counselors to be formally trained. For him training was two-fold: (1) acquiring biblical knowledge and (2) developing practical skills and methodological applications.[46] Conspicuously missing in all of Adams' writings and teaching on the topic of preparing competent counselors is the topic of "giftedness," namely, reference to Paul's specific mandate that Spirit-empowered Christians who have been given the gift of *parakaleó* are the prime candidates who should spearhead the counseling ministry in the local church.

Christians cannot do the work of the ministry in their own strength. Knowing that, God has bequeathed to the Church the gifts of the Spirit to enable believers to edify and grow the Body of Christ through God-sanctioned, supernatural means. *Parakaleó* is one of those gifts, and it is the gift of counseling. As such, any Christian aspiring to be an effective biblical counselor in the church should ask themselves, "Do I have the gift of counseling as defined by Paul in Romans 12:8?" Adams does not even refer to Romans 12:8 or the spiritual gift of counseling in his three most important books, all written in the 1970s: *Competent to Counsel*, *The Christian Counselor's Manual,* and *A Theology of Christian Counseling.* And for all the prolific training programs available through biblical counseling organizations, the requisite of gifting has not been a priority either. The emphasis continues to be on training and certification. Training and meeting standards through mastery of knowledge are good, but they don't supplant or supersede giftedness.

The Prerequisite of Gifting

I entered seminary in 1989 with about 50 other men, all of us having the goal of completing an MDiv and then entering into formal pastoral ministry in the local church. Come 1992 only 42 of the 50 graduated, as a few dropped out after realizing seminary and the pastorate were not for them. The super-majority of the 42 began working in local churches immediately upon graduation, while another small handful never entered full-time ministry despite graduating. Over the decades, many of the 42 graduates who went into church ministry have since left the ministry for various reasons. Some got "burned out" or became disillusioned and took secular jobs. Some were fired for various reasons, including being divisive and controlling. Some were eventually defrocked for being morally compromised. One of the graduates I knew well served as a pastor at a large church for a while, but eventually left his wife and kids and jettisoned the faith altogether. A handful of these graduates I studied with have gradually become *bona fide* heretics, as they have renounced the orthodoxy they were taught and once believed. Three-plus

[46]Adams, *Competent*, 60-62.

decades later only about fifty percent of the 42 graduates remained in full-time church ministry and have stayed true to what they were taught in seminary.[47]

In hindsight, there is a practical lesson to be learned here with respect to preparing and training believers for formal ministry in the local church. In my three years of full-time training at seminary, I don't recall a point of emphasis ever being made on whether a man should be gifted with the spiritual gift of "pastor-teacher" as stated in Ephesians 4:11 as a requirement to hold the office of church leader. In that chapter Paul makes it clear that Christ gave spiritual gifts to the church for its edification and growth, and the first gifts given were related to building its foundation through various offices of leadership—namely, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors,[48] and teachers. God requires that leaders in His church be spiritually gifted with a specific divine enablement suited to his formal leadership role. As I look back, I now realize that I was accepted into seminary without being formally vetted to see if I had the gift of "pastor." The emphasis and philosophy of the school at that time was primarily on "training" and "modeling."[49] There was also some emphasis for prospective ministers on the qualifications listed in the Pastoral Epistles, but that is not the same thing as God's specific requirement that His church leaders also have the spirit-empowered gift of "pastor." A man who desires to serve in God's church as an overseer must be biblically qualified according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but he must also be gifted supernaturally to serve in that capacity. You can desire to be a pastor; you can train to be a pastor; you can practice being a pastor. But if you are not specifically endowed with the heavenly enablement of "shepherding" from the Holy Spirit to be a pastor as indicated in Ephesians 4:11, then you should pursue another vocation. Men who don't have the gift of pastor should not be pastors.

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[47]The seminary has done a decent job over the years tracking and monitoring their graduates through their alumni network.

[48]Paul designates the role of pastor in Ephesians 4:11 as a spiritual "gift" using the word δῶμα, which is always translated as "gift" in our English Bibles; cf. Matt 7:11; Luke 11:13. So, according to the Apostle Paul the role of "pastor" or shepherd, is a divinely imparted spiritual gift despite what Edgar says when he claims, without biblical warrant, "Pastor is more of an office than a gift"; cf. Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 13.

[49]Some seminaries have specific and stringent requirements and prerequisites in place to help vet their prospective students with the goal of verifying their giftedness and suitability for vocational pastoral ministry. Southern Seminary is one such institution. Fortunately, my *alma mater* has since raised the bar for interested applicants.

A Personal Illustration

What is true about pastors is also true about formal counselors in the church. Believers who aspire to the role of being biblical counselors in the church should be spiritually gifted in that position. My own experience with formal training in counseling further illustrates the need for making a priority of making certain that our recognized biblical counselors in the church possess the gift of *parakaleó*. Upon getting saved at age 19 in 1985, I had the desire to go into ministry, and a big part of that desire entailed wanting to help people solve their problems from God's perspective. So, I immediately began formal education and preparation to that end, first by getting a college degree in biblical studies and then a seminary degree.

During my four years of college, I understood Christian counseling in a monolithic way in that I discerned no distinctions between various schools of thought or the prospect of disparate approaches. I was oblivious to the notion that there could be "Five Views of Christian Counseling." As a junior at my Christian college, I took two Psychology classes from Christian teachers, using a secular textbook. It was an integrationist approach. During my senior year I took a class on Christian counseling from Dr. Larry Crabb and Dr. Dan Allender, two leaders in the integrationist movement.[50] The following year I was introduced to the work of Jay Adams and nouthetic counseling, the nemesis of the integrationist ideology I had recently imbibed in college. All the while, since 1985, I was taking in a steady dose of Dr. James Dobson, through his daily radio programs, his tape ministry, as well as his written publications. By 1992 I was thoroughly eclectic and egalitarian when it came to Christian counseling: I embraced it all without partiality. Ironically, I was integrating Jay Adams, the non-integrationist, into my personally tailor-made, ecumenical integrationist model.

After seminary graduation in 1992 I began the formal process of getting certified by NANC. I began attending the conferences and required seminars. The certification standards were high. It would have taken me a few years to finish, so I decided not to finish in light of my full-time pastoral duties and a growing family. As I look back at my formal years of training with NANC toward the goal of certification, I don't recall ever having a lesson, reading a book, taking a class, attending a seminar or conference where the topic was, "Romans 12 and the spiritual gift of counseling," or any similar theme. Gifting was not a topic of concern. It was all about the training, furthering

[50]Crabb was a long-time, outspoken critic of Jay Adams because of Adams' rejection of integrating secular psychology with the Bible in counseling; cf. Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 104-105; cf. John MacArthur, "The Psychology Epidemic and Its Cure," in *The Master's Perspective On Contemporary Issues*, Vol. 2, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 14-30.

education, and logging observation hours.

The apostle Paul lists "counseling" as one of the specific eighteen spiritual gifts[51] given by the Holy Spirit to His people to help edify and grow the church. He mentions the gift in the context of graces that Christ deploys among His Body:

> **4** For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, **5** so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**6** Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;**7** if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; **8** or he who **exhorts** [παρακαλῶν], in his **exhortation** [παρακλήσει] (Rom 12:4-8).

The NASB translates the beginning of Romans 12:8 as "the one who exhorts." This refers to the Christian who is specifically gifted by the Holy Spirit with the divine enablement of what we refer to in the vernacular as "counseling." Because Paul designates it as a specific gift by name, counseling is to be distinguished from other gifts. It is not the gift of teaching, or the gift of shepherding, although it can overlap with other gifts. As a special gift, counseling is not just a general or universal Christian virtue required of every believer such as discipleship[52] or admonition. The profile of the gift of counseling is readily discerned in light of its over 230 occurrences in Scripture along with its picturesque etymology. The compound word is made up of the highly versatile preposition *para-* plus the verb *kaleo*. *Para-* carries the nuances of "from," "beside," "in the presence of," and "alongside of" depending upon the attending case.[53] It is the varying cases used with *para-* that gives the word *parakaleó* a broad range of meanings with resultant ideas that can "differ

[51]For a detailed delineation and exposition of the New Testament spiritual gifts see, Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What Are They & Why They Matter* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2018); Robert Gromacki, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999).

[52]Contrary to Ed Welch's overly egalitarian definition of counseling where he calls it the practice of discipleship which every Christian has the capacity for, cf. *CSB Life Counsel Bible*, (Holman Bible Publishers, 2023), XI-XIII.

[53]Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 10; "the *case* indicates the meaning of the *preposition*, and not the preposition which gives meaning to the case"; cf. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 554, 567.

radically."[54] Add to this the wide range of contexts that inform various nuances of the word, and the potency of this word becomes even more evident. *Kaleo* means "to call, invite, summon" on a personal level.[55] The base meaning of the rich term *parakaleó* is to come alongside someone in close proximity, meeting them where they are and speaking words they need to hear in that moment, whether they are words of comfort, exhortation, warning, or rebuke.[56] Schreiner summarizes the compound nature of the gift with this definition: "This gift is rather broad and includes urging others to live righteously and showing pastoral care to the afflicted and distressed."[57]

By way of analogy, imagine the head football coach with his arm around the quarterback on the sideline during a game whispering something into the player's ear through the helmet hole, giving advice, timely spoken, whatever the nature, enabling the team leader to carry on successfully after the verbal exchange. The head coach serves as the human Paraclete speaking personalized, tailored truth based on the game situation. That is what a gifted biblical counselor does for troubled saints in the game of life. This implies the coach needs to know the big picture as well as all the finer elements of the game, in addition to having the uncanny ability to properly diagnose, *ad hoc*, the situation, while also knowing the proper solution. And he has to have the ability to communicate all of that to the listener in a clear, authoritative, personal, and practical manner so it can be implemented. These are the dynamics and intricacies involved in the ministry of personal biblical counseling.

God specially empowers some believers with a unique capacity to excel at counseling others. Concomitantly, this means that some believers may not be gifted with the ability to counsel at a specialized level, for not all believers have the same gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-30).[58] Despite this biblical reality, there are many people occupying formal positions as Christian counselors,[59] biblical

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[54]Robertson, *A Grammar*, 567.

[55]Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 398-399.

[56]Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Evangel Publishing Company, 1974), 482-483; Thomas, *Exegetical Dictionary*, 23-27.

[57]Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 24.

[58]Paul labors in 1 Corinthians 12:4-30 to show that not all believers have the same spiritual gifts; there is variety and diversity in the context of corporate unity. He reaches his crescendo with a series of rhetorical questions in verses 29-30 by asking in effect, "Do all have the same spiritual gifts?" and Paul's answer is an emphatic "No!"

[59]In this article "Christian counseling" and "Christian counselors" are used as narrow, technical phrases in contrast to "biblical counseling" and "biblical counselors."

counselors, and Christian psychologists[60] who do not possess the spiritual gift of counseling as mentioned by Paul in Romans 12:8. I know this to be the case on a micro-level from personal experience parallel to my experience from seminary, when I studied side-by-side with many men who were training to be pastors when in fact many of them were not gifted by God for that role. Likewise, over the years I have worked alongside fellow believers in ministry who served in the formal capacity of counselor who were not spiritually gifted to be counselors. But Scripture is clear: those who do not have the gift of counseling should not be occupying the role of counselor.

The Need for Spirit-Enabled Counselors

The fact that the gift of counseling is given by God to a few, and not all believers,[61] implies that there is a need for specialized counseling in the church. There is a legitimate general work of counseling that all Christians should be involved in, which is true of the many "one another" commands in Scripture. But at the same time there are occasions when someone gifted in counseling can deploy their gift in a way that the non-gifted cannot. Routinely there are very difficult counseling cases in the church that need special attention and expertise. Here is another area where the biblical counseling movement has a lack of balance—a deficiency inherited from Jay Adams' original model. From the beginning Adams' argued, based on an imperative from one verse, Romans 15:14, that all Christians are competent to counsel.[62] By misinterpreting that verse, along with promoting a compromised word study of *noutheteo*, Adams unwittingly assigned an overly egalitarian implication to the counseling ministry. And since every Christian was "competent to counsel," there was no need for a few specialized counselors who had the unique, Spirit-engendered gift of *parakaleó.* The next generation of biblical counselors have perpetuated this oversight inherited from Adams' legacy as seen in their writings and teachings. Their repeated message to Christians is that all believers are competent to counsel as long as they have the Bible, salvation in Jesus, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and formal

[60]Christian psychologists can also be designated as Christian counselors but are distinguished by their professional training and certification in the field of psychology or psychiatry, whereas a Christian counselor may not be a professionally trained psychologist. But both Christian counselors and Christian psychologists are typically integrationists. James Dobson is a professionally trained psychologist whereas Tremper Longman is not, yet both are well-known integrationists.

[61]One of Paul's basic arguments in 1 Cor 12 is that not all Christians have the same gifts.

[62]Adams, *Competent*, 59-60.

training in counseling. There is nary a word about the prerequisite of having the gift of *parakaleó*.[63]

Over the years I have seen great damage inflicted on the Body of Christ from non-gifted, yet trained and certified biblical counselors,[64] who came into our local church with an air of over-confidence due to their formal training, and imparted completely unbiblical counsel in unbiblical ways to many church members, compounding and exacerbating the counselee's original problems. The majority of the time, these hurtful interchanges were typified by counselors who were prideful, condescending, and accusatory toward the counselee, rather than first being good and careful listeners. There was a tendency among the non-gifted, certified counselors to be myopically formulaic, accusing the counselee of having an "idol of the heart" no matter what their difficulty may have been.[65] Many times I had to come in later and clean up the mess by dismissing the incompetent certified counselor, and begin giving the counselee a remedial education and resuscitative care from a balanced and compassionate biblical perspective. Learning from those experiences, our elders began vetting our in-house counselors more carefully, putting greater emphasis on identifying and training those who were gifted with the supernatural enablement of *parakaleó* as mentioned in Romans 12:8. Our church has reaped great benefits ever since.

IV
Conclusion

Jay Adams was a gift to the church as God used him to return the ministry of the soul back to the local church by restoring full confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture for every area of ministry. Adams was a pioneer, and as a pioneer, he had a transfixed focus on laying a solid, lasting foundation in the area of counseling. But as a pioneer, he left some work undone for others to do later to buttress and complement his labors. The second and third generations of biblical counselors have enthusiastically taken up that

[63]Cf. Heath Lambert, *Counseling the Hard Cases* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2012), 2-3.

[64]Including NANC, ACBC certified counselors as well those certified by the Association of Biblical Counselors (ABC). ACBC stands for "Association of Certified Biblical Counselors." I wish it was the Association of Spiritually Gifted Counselors, (ASGC); or Association of Gifted and Trained Biblical Counselors, (AGTBC) or something comparable.

[65]Heath Lambert keenly diagnosed and admitted that there was a trend among biblical counselors resorting too quickly to telling counselees that they were guilty of having an "idol of the heart" regardless of their problem, as though there was a one-size-fits-all panacea for resolving all counseling concerns; cf. *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 146-149.

complementary work.[66] As a result, since 1970, the biblical counseling movement has blossomed and flourished in many ways, providing countless resources and formal training for local churches everywhere. Yet, despite much progress, a glaring lacuna remains in the movement, and that is the lack of appreciation for the God-ordained spiritual gift of counseling as mentioned by Paul in Romans 12:8. Paul calls this gift *parakaleó*, a word replete in Scripture, thus enabling a clear and robust definition to surface by which the church collectively can discern and identify God's profile for His choice, specialized counselors. The gift of *parakaleó* has been ignored for seventy-five years now in the biblical counseling movement. It's time to change that. The church would do well to prioritize this gift and add it to the heart of the current training programs geared toward those with aspirations for formal ministry in the church as biblical counselors.

[66]Cf. Heath Lambert's, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* and *Sufficiency: Historic Essays On The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling* (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, 2023); cf. also David Powlison's, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), *and Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson (IVP Academic, 2010).

Change Them?...Into What?[1]

Jay E. Adams*

Editor's Note: This article was originally published in 1995 in the *Journal of Biblical* Counseling. We are republishing it here to introduce our readers to Jay Adams (if they are unfamiliar with him) and because we believe this article raises a fundamental question that all Christian counselors must address: the standard by which we determine if we have truly helped someone through our counseling.

In the Fall of 1977, Dr. Jay Adams, Dean of the Institute of Pastoral Studies, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation, was invited to address the faculty and student body of the University Psychiatric Clinic in Vienna, Austria.

It's truly a great pleasure to bring you greetings from friends in the United States. The subject before us tonight has the German word *seelsorge* in the title.[2] I must do something to limit that term so that you understand what I'm talking about. That word is much larger than the subject before us. Perhaps your word *beratung* comes closer to it, but that misses it a bit, too. Because the latter word can have more of the idea of consultation (as I understand it), in which two people speak to one another on much the same level, there is still some problem.

I'm really talking about the subject of counseling (as we call it in English), a word that envisions one person bringing something to the consultation in order to help another who needs it. It also has the connotation that the counselor is in charge and moving ahead in a purposeful direction. With that brief introduction to the word and the title, perhaps you will understand where I am coming from more clearly. I'm certainly not going to cover the whole area of *seelsorge*, which involves all sorts of pastoral care.

I should like to begin by informing you briefly about the counseling situation in the United States.

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[2]The German title was "Psychotherapy and Pastoral Care" (*Seelsorge*).

Divergence and Disillusionment

In the United States today, there are no institutionalized schools of counseling.[3] The idea that any psychotherapeutic, or psychiatric, or other kind of counseling viewpoint is supreme in the United States is quite false. An article in the Saturday Review of Literature stated that there are at least 230 distinct schools of psychotherapy and counseling in the United States at the present time. When I speak of some 230 different viewpoints (or schools) of counseling, I am not talking about minor differences. The differences between these schools are vast, with each one claiming to have a corner on the truth. If you were to survey the many differences among the members of each school, I'm not sure how much higher the numbers would go. One thing seems apparent as you survey the differences between the schools: this diversity has arisen from a number of causes, and it has brought about some very interesting results. I shall focus tonight upon the principal one.

There has been a growing lack of consensus in America for the last forty years, during which time this rapid growth of diversity has taken place. This lack of consensus has troubled people greatly because it has resulted in a great deal of confusion, mistrust, and popular disillusionment over counseling. Books that pour from the printing presses, claiming to have the answers, are so common that anyone trying to keep up with the field today is constantly bombarded with new assaults upon his thinking. Immersed in a pile of new ideas and new challenges, he cannot even begin to think of reading and thoroughly understanding it all, let alone deciding who—if anyone—is right!

The general American population is becoming more and more disturbed over these differences, as popular articles and reviews indicate. People don't know if they should turn to someone with a medical orientation who believes that their problems are organic, whether their difficulties stem from sociological factors as others claim, or whether their problems have to do with environmental difficulties (as Skinner and others in the behavioristic movement say). The number of jokes and cartoons about psychologists and psychiatrists shows something of the popular concern. There is even a television program about a psychologist, Bob Newhart, who is one of the most confused people on the program. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a dramatic and important film that appeared a year or two ago, was an extremely strong attack upon mental health institutions in America. The tremendously positive reviews, not only of the participants in the film, but of the film's message, perhaps as clearly as anything have brought out this concern that has shattered the faith of the American public in counseling.

A few years ago, Zilboorg, in his two-volume history of psychotherapeutic work, made this statement: The field is "in disarray, just as it was in the beginning." His statement was in part correct and in part in error.

[3]By that, I mean widely accepted by most theorists and/or practitioners.

When he was talking about the disarray, he was exactly right; but when he said that it was in disarray just as it was in the beginning, he understated the present situation. Initially there were about three or five views to choose from, depending upon how you divided the offerings. But now—230? That's impossible to deal with!

Therapeutic Failures

An added factor has led to more disappointment and disillusionment. There is a general failure of the psychotherapeutic community to succeed in doing anything significant for people and their problems. This was highlighted two and a half years ago when one psychiatrist decided to test the ability of his fellows to diagnose problems. Into twelve of the nation's leading mental institutions in five states he sent eight persons (and I hope that the statement I am about to make is accurate) as sane as you or I, telling this one falsehood as they entered: "I heard voices." They lied about nothing else, and they did nothing to deceive in any other way.

As I'm sure most of you are aware, such hallucinations can be caused by any number of factors. Two and a half days of significant sleep loss in some people can lead to every effect that the ingestion of LSD does. So by saying "I heard voices," they were not saying anything about causes; they were simply talking about effects. No conclusions about causes should have been made without thorough diagnosis. But in how many instances out of the twelve attempts do you think they were diagnose as having a serious mental illness? Would you believe in half? Wrong. Would you believe in three-quarters of those instances? Still wrong. In all twelve instances those individuals were diagnosed as having serious mental illnesses. That was a one hundred percent failure.

This news was broadcast throughout the psychiatric community in the important journal, *Medical World News*, and it caused quite a stir. But our friend the psychiatrist was not yet through. He then announced to one of the twelve institutions that he was going to do it again, but he didn't. After a period of time he studied the intake record of this institution and discovered that after his second announcement, in the history of the institution there had never been as many people turned away as malingerers (or fakes) until that time.

Of course, this is humorous, but it is also tragic. The general public has become painfully aware of these things through the many media that continually expose them. But the psychiatric community is becoming concerned, too. Karl Menninger, perhaps our oldest and most loved psychiatrist in America, commented on this event. After eleven of the twelve

were declared to be schizophrenic,[4] Menninger said, "Schizophrenia? That to me is just a nice Greek word."

I recently wrote a chapter in a book on schizophrenia, and in this book, entitled *The Construction of Madness*, a number of different viewpoints on schizophrenia were expressed. No two were anywhere near one another. The diversity was great. There was the behavioristic view, of course, and the Hoffer-Osmond organic chemical problem view, and a number of others. But because I was presenting the Christian view and another man presented a "religious" view too, they lumped our two views together in one section. I was very interested to discover what the other religious view was. It turned out that the other writer believed that schizophrenics were people who had broken through from this earthly plane to some kind of religious plane where they were having greater religious experiences than the rest of us. While his twist was a little different from that of R. D. Laing, who sees schizophrenics as more stable than the rest of us, it was in that direction, though with religious overtones.

Why should there be so much diversity? We don't have such a lack of consensus in other fields. In fact, there is some kind of growing consensus in almost every other field. Why is it that when we start dealing with human beings we seem to become fuzzy and vague? If there were as many different points of view in aeronautics, for instance, with as many basic differences among pilots concerning the principles of flying, I can guarantee that I would not be here lecturing tonight: I wouldn't get near an airplane. That is something of the spirit of the American public today: it has backed off from counselors, with their grandiose claims and poor results. People have crashed often enough; they want no more forced landings and desperate escapes from "planes." But the question still remains: Why so much diversity in this field? I shall address myself to that question, but I'd like to tell you now about one other development.

The Crisis in Pastoral Counseling

About twenty years ago Christian pastors in America were involved in doing two things in reference to counseling. Some were under the impression that they could not help people who came to them for help, largely because of the mental health propaganda that said, "Don't touch those people if they have more than a single psychic scratch—you dare deal with nothing deeper than a scratch." Out of fear pastors simply referred everyone to a psychiatrist or psychologist.

There were others who bought the psychiatric viewpoints and tried to adapt them to their own counseling practices. They tried to incorporate into Christian counseling various psychotherapeutic principles and methods that

[4]The twelfth was said to be manic-depressive.

they found around them. But this assimilation of psychiatric views usually was done in an extremely uncritical way. You might say that these methods and viewpoints were brought in totally unbaptized. So, a disillusionment grew within the church that was parallel to the disillusionment popularly found among other people.

As the leadership in the church became increasingly concerned about what it was offering to its own people, and as they began to see the failure and the confusion all around outside, it led to a reevaluation of the whole situation. Over the last fourteen years, this has developed into a new approach to counseling that we call Christian counseling. Christian counseling is entirely fresh; it is totally different from anything that has been offered in our generation in America.

The Need for a Standard

Asking the question why there has been no consensus, particularly in this field in which people are trying to change the lives of other persons, many of us came to the conclusion that it was because there has been no standard by which this was attempted. You may say that society is the standard, or you may say pragmatically that what works is the standard, or that the counselee is the standard; but when you finally boil it all down and strip off the externals, what you have left is this: the individual psychotherapist determines the standard. The problem of subjectivity is enormous. Something from outside of the counselor and counselee is needed; something far more solidly grounded than any limited and biased individual is required. Otherwise, the kind of splits and divisions that occurred at the very beginning right here with Freud are inevitable.

You see, if Freud was the final standard (which he must have been), he could not allow heresy within the ranks. This same spirit has continued so that various new schools develop whenever there is a difference in the standard. Why do we need a standard, a yardstick, a rule? Because we are dealing with the problem of changing human lives. What man has the right or the ability to say to another, "I know how you shall live"?

What man will take it upon himself to say, "This is wrong in your life, this is right in your life, and this is how I want to change you"? Some think they can divorce themselves from the ethical issues. They think that value can be cast aside. But you can't; you continually get involved in the realm of values when you deal with people and their lives. When you endeavor to change another human being—i.e., to change his values, his beliefs, his behavior, his attitudes, his relationships—are you willing to say, "What I think his values, his relations, his attitudes, and his behavior should be like is best"? Are you willing to say that? Unless you are ignorant or arrogant, you must hesitate.

And yet from the very outset that has been the problem, hasn't it? There has been no one standard by which to bring about consensus.

If there is one school that seems to be most dominant in our country today, it is the behavioristic school under the leadership of B. F. Skinner. They maintain that it is possible to produce any sort of human being that you may want to produce. It's their view that if given the proper contingencies—the proper schedule of rewards or adversive controls (or you might prefer to say punishment)—they can control the behavior of an individual to produce any sort of person consistent with his physical limitations. In other words, they say, "We have a sausage grinder, and we can grind whatever kind of sausage you wish."

But you get four Skinnerians together in a room and ask them what kind of sausage they want, and you are going to get four different answers. Each will want the person who comes out of the sausage grinder to look like the human being that he thinks is ideal. There is no common standard for what a human being ought to look like. We sometimes read in popular writings that "psychologists say..." or "psychiatrists say...," but anyone who knows the confusion behind those statements can only take them humorously rather than seriously. The fact is that there is no agreement on the most basic issue of all—what sort of man is normal? And we won't get that norm by sociological studies either, because they will only tell us about the average attitudes and behaviors that human beings have in a given period or place.

I'm not sure that you or I want to produce more of the kinds of persons that we now are: the kind that have brought about the number of wars that our world history records, the kinds of people who do the things we read about on the front pages of our newspapers all the time. There has to be a standard, and a model that conforms to it, so that we can both know and see what a human being should be like. We have to have a picture of what a human should look like if we're going to try to change people. Where are we going to get such a picture? This is the question that Christian pastors in America have been dealing with for the past fourteen years, and they say that they have an answer.

Jesus Christ, the Standard

They say that human beings should look like Jesus Christ! They say that the Bible not only gives a description of what a person should be like in abstract terms but that Jesus Christ is the model of such a person in terms of action and speech. Indeed, in contrast to the psychotherapeutic confusion, it has been most powerfully demonstrated in America that a true consensus can be developed when there is such a standard.

In America, we have no national churches (*landeskirke*). We have only free churches, and there are many different churches in America. They are in agreement, most of them, on the major issues; but they differ on many minor questions. Now, it is interesting that in the last fourteen years this movement has swept over many different denominations with a force and power that

has led to a movement involving literally thousands of pastors and lay people (*mitarbeiters*) who are now doing counseling according to this new, Bible-based approach. They have been drawn together in a counseling consensus by the Bible.

This movement has had quite an impact in American churches, and it has also spilled over onto a number of continents. In my case, as a representative of this viewpoint, this has led to visits just this year in Ireland, Brazil, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, Germany, and Switzerland.

I am here in Vienna too, but you didn't invite me because of widespread interest. There were just a couple of people who showed interest. But the fact that we have such a large turnout here tonight shows me one thing—that you at least are curious, and I'm glad for curiosity, if nothing more. A lot of things can begin when people get curious.

I want to do one thing here tonight. As an advocate (a very strong advocate) of this viewpoint, I have something to give to each one of you, and I hope you'll take it. I'm here to hand out some candy to each of you. This candy is not soft enough to swallow all at once, nor is it so brittle that you can bite down on it and crack it readily. I hope that it will be like good hard candy that you take into your mouth and that you'll suck on it for awhile when you leave.

A Look at Nouthetic Counseling

Perhaps you'd like to know something about this Christian view, what it looks like, what it does, and how it operates. Let me give you just a few suggestive thoughts that may constitute that piece of hard candy. We call this counseling *nouthetic counseling*. We have incorporated the Greek term out of the New Testament into the title because the English language has no word that is exactly equivalent to it. It is my understanding that the German language also is deficient. This Greek verb, *noutheteo*, and its equivalent noun form, *nouthesia*, have three elements in it that correspond to the three basic factors in Christian counseling. The first element describes the person who is being counseled as responsible for his sinful actions and in need of change. So a need for change in the thoughts, attitudes, and behavior of a responsible person is the first element.

Nouthetic counseling, for instance, would be at odds with any Freudian or neo-Freudian viewpoint that makes man totally irresponsible, saying that all of his activities and motivations are carried on below the threshold of consciousness.

The second element in this word is confrontation in a verbal form. In the Scriptures it means verbal confrontation according to a scriptural norm. Previous counseling programs for pastors in America have been dominated by the thinking of Carl Rogers and his non-directive counseling, in which he teaches that a person at the core of his being has all of the essentials necessary

to solve his problems. His difficulty is that he has not realized the potential within, so the counselor's task is to evoke these answers from within him. The one heresy with Rogers is to bring in any kind of confronting force or offer any outside information or advice. And so, just as the first element of nouthesia contrasts sharply with any view of man as a non-responsible creature, so the second element contrasts sharply with Carl Rogers's view that a person needs no outside intervention.

The third element in *nouthesia* is concern. But it is more than concern; it is concern for the welfare of the individual confronted. In B. F. Skinner's view, for example, as you might find it expressed in his philosophical works About Behaviorism and Beyond Freedom and Dignity, there is only one value, the preservation of the human herd. He thinks about people as animals to be bred as any other group of animals might be. So, by the control of human life (at both ends), you must breed a new human herd. Of course, we heard talk like this before by other people back in the thirties. Now it is hooked to a more sophisticated scientific method that makes it a lot more powerful. This herd mentality contrasts quite sharply with this third element in *nouthesia*: concern for individuals. There is no place for an individual in behaviorism—that is silly sentimentality. So this new Christian approach is not eclectic; it has a standard of its own that enables it to look around and compare and contrast itself with other counseling approaches.

Change and the Heart Level

This view is also concerned with change at a level of depth. It is not concerned about changing people on the surface alone; man and his actions and his attitudes must be changed at the inner core of his being so that his set of values and the springs of his motivation are affected.

The Bible calls this inner power man's heart. It is from the heart that people's problems stem. This means that a new power from the outside is necessary for him to realize the goal of Christian counseling—to become more like Jesus Christ. In other words, Christian conversion is an essential element in this kind of counseling. If he is not a Christian, the counselee's relationship to God must be changed. He must come to the place where he recognizes that the Christian message about the cross is real. This old message from the Bible is that Christ died on the cross in the place of guilty sinners in order to transform their lives, beginning at the very heart of their being and then leading to needed outward transformation. Christian counseling has depth because it goes to the heart of human difficulty.

This old message has been found to be a very new and vital force in the lives of many people. It is altogether possible that you've even heard in the newspapers here, as others have around the world, words like "born again" that have become popular in America these days. That's precisely what we're talking about. In this counseling system God Himself is asked to give the

counselee a new life with new purposes, new goals, and new power. This counseling draws upon the wisdom of God in the Scriptures and the power of God in the Holy Spirit. Two things happen: the counselee's eyes are opened to God's standard for human living, and God enables him to begin to measure up to that standard for the first time. This is the basic Christian approach.

Under these fundamental rubrics every kind of problem that has ever crawled or walked or flown through the psychiatrist's door has similarly entered the doors of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the institution that is the principal training center for this counseling approach. Here, hundreds of pastors have been trained and, through actual observation of counseling sessions, have seen how the use of the Scriptures has transformed lives dramatically and lastingly.

That is a glimpse of nouthetic counseling. Doubtless some of you have spit the candy out already. Some of the rest of you are having a little difficulty with it sticking to your teeth. Nevertheless, I hope that you will continue to suck on it because when you deal with that question of the standard, you're dealing with the fundamental issue in counseling. Problems that have to do with people ultimately can be resolved only by their Creator and Savior.

If you think seriously at all, after you've talked about everything else you will come back again and again to the issue of the standard. I ask you not to close the door on this matter too quickly. Until it is resolved you can do nothing. You are planning to help people; fine. But that means changing them. The question is not only how, but, most basically, into what? The Christian replies, "Into the likeness of Jesus Christ." Is there any other answer?

Thank you so much. You've been a deeply attentive group, and I appreciate it.

Helping Christians Overcome Sexual Sin: A Counseling Methodology?[1]

John D. Street[*]

I
Introduction

Biblical counseling is essentially a process of *transformation in the heart of the Christian*, which then results in a change of life. Faithful ministers of the Word of God must grasp the truth of this reality if they hope to stimulate lasting change in the lives of those whom they counsel. Take particular notice of the phrase "transformation in the heart of the Christian." Many Christians today work only toward a change of behavior; perhaps a putting off of sin and a putting on of righteous behavior. While this is certainly a part of the change process, the Bible instructs us to first look at the *heart* of the person, for the heart is the source of all kinds of problems and is most certainly the initiator of sexual sin. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23).

The heart of man—that inner being of the one created in the image of God—is by nature exceedingly complex. Invisible to the physical eye, the heart remains elusive and obscure. How can anyone really know his own heart? Solomon asks the rhetorical question, "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?" (Prov. 20:9). Scripture says that the human heart is deep, hidden, and clever: "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out" (Prov. 20:5). It is also described as dishonest, calculating, and untrustworthy (Prov. 6:12–14). Here the heart is described as purposing. The Hebrew word used for "purpose" can also be translated "to plan." Contrary to the world's view of romance and emotion, the Bible says that the human heart purposes and plans.

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II
Our Deceptive Hearts

Yet the heart's chief unsettling characteristic is its capacity for self-deception. It is commonplace for the heart to assume that it is better than it really is; it is customary for the heart to believe its own innocence and to presume the goodness of its own motivations. A self-imposed form of blindness is endemic to the heart because of the effect of original sin. Further, the heart of man labors to hide its wicked intentions from being exposed. If its purposes were brought to light, then guilt would bring unwelcome pressure, forcing an unwanted change of direction.

All around us we hear voices telling us to "trust your heart" or "follow your heart." But *can* we trust our heart? *Should* we trust our heart? We need to resist the temptation to read past this question without giving it proper consideration. Using the biblical etymology of the word "heart," we ask: How much do we trust our own plans, purposes, intentions, and motivations? This is a very difficult question to answer, especially for sincere Christians who strive to be brutally honest with themselves.

Consider the words of Solomon as he reveals the peril of putting confidence in our self-knowledge: "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit" (Prov. 16:2); "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart" (Prov. 21:2).

Clearly, self-assessment tends to be intensely self-favoring, and the proud heart has no difficulty with portraying itself in favorable ways. Scripture teaches that it is possible for the pride of our hearts to deceive us (Jer. 17:9; 49:16; Obad. 3). Pride is the mask that the heart puts on. It keeps true self-knowledge hidden—the knowledge that it is deceitful, that it is wrong when it wants to appear right. Because it believes itself to be truly good, the self-deceived heart is cavalier and crafty regarding the unsavory aspects of its plans, purposes, intentions, and motivations by highlighting the more respectable and honorable ones. This kind of self-assessment can be seen in the Christian who commits sexual sin occasionally while pridefully evaluating himself based on a multitude of "good" things he does to serve the Lord.

Since we cannot be trusted to assess our hearts accurately, we must seek to understand the truth of which Solomon spoke: "the Lord weighs the heart." The penetrating truth of Scripture about the sensual heart can be seen in the words of Jesus Christ when he teaches that the heart of an adulterer and the lustful heart are essentially the same (Matt. 5:27–28). The adulterer has acted out his lurid fantasies, and the luster has not—but they are the same in God's eyes; no significant difference exists between them. It is dangerously easy to presume personal self-righteousness—until we, by means of Scripture, honestly look at our own heart. God is the One who genuinely sees our heart and all its intentions (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 20:12).

What does God see when he looks at our heart? Everything. So, when God through his Word reveals wickedness, sinful attitudes, and prideful assumptions in our heart, our so-called righteous works no longer have credibility. Rather, the good deeds are seen for what they truly are—a desperate attempt to excuse and cover up secret sensual desires. Without a doubt, the heart's natural inclination to judge itself favorably is a serious problem, and not only for the openly self-indulgent sinner but even for the most sincere and dedicated Christian. This tendency is epitomized in the person who, when caught in an egregious sin, immediately responds by pointing to someone who has committed an even worse sin. The person who adopts this type of reasoning lives with an ever-lowering standard of righteousness in his mind, even to the extent of comparing himself to the worst, most vile person who has ever lived. With this kind of thinking, nearly everyone should be able to feel good about themselves because they are, at least, better than the worst person who has ever lived. But that is not to be the Christian's rule of faith and practice! Instead, the Lord Jesus Christ is our judge of what is good and right; he is the perfect, sinless, and holy God-man whom we seek to please, emulate, and worship (Phil. 3:12–16). Yet, in spite of these truths, man continues to blindly trust his unreliable heart.

Since we have already seen from Scripture that the Lord God knows our hearts, we need to look further into his Word to gain true self-knowledge. So far, we have noted that the heart is:

- Deep, hidden, and clever.
- Dishonest, calculating, and untrustworthy.
- Self-favoring.
- Deceitful.
- Seen by God.

But beyond merely describing the heart of man, God goes to great lengths to reveal what he sees so that he can show us what we cannot see. He often does this by means of adversity, trials, and suffering. When we begin to see our heart through the light of suffering, it is both revealing and humbling. Consider why God took Israel through forty years of wilderness sufferings.

He explains his reason to them: "And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not" (Deut. 8:2). God did not take them through such difficulties so that *he* could understand what was in their heart. He is omniscient—he already knew what was in their hearts (Pss. 94:11; 139:4). Rather, he took them through such a troublesome time so that *they* would know what was in their hearts.

The Israelites, like us, believed they already knew their own hearts. This prideful assumption was deceptive, because understanding the deep

motivations of the heart begins with an attitude of humility. Israel needed their prideful blindfold removed, and it took forty years of hardship to remove it. This suggests that humility is often less a destination than it is a learning process.

III
The Role of the Heart in Sexual Sin

A fitting example of the role of the heart in sexual sin is found in the life of King David. After his secret disgrace with Bathsheba was revealed by Nathan the prophet, David later explains why this uncovering of sin needed to happen: "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart" (Ps. 51:6). God desires truth in our innermost being, but our secret heart is naturally foolish, and wisdom is foreign to it. A few verses later, David explains why it was important for God to take him through the difficulty of these trials: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). When we are finally humbled by adversity, we are then willing to take a more honest look at ourselves, as a clearer view of our heart's true intentions and motivations is revealed. Indeed, the heart crushed by grief and sorrowing over sin is the prerequisite for real and substantive change. If we are more concerned about the consequences of acknowledging our sin than of the purity of our own heart, then our heart is not ready for change. David was so broken by the awfulness of his secret sin that he cried out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). He knew that mere external change was not enough. His heart needed to change.

In another context David, recognizing the craftiness of his heart and its secret intentions, asks and answers this critical question: "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults" (Ps. 19:12). David agonizes because he knows that there are hidden faults within himself that he will not see. Within the context of Psalm 19, the answer is clear: it is only God who can truly discern—that is, reveal man's errors and hidden faults. Mankind can do this only through careful attention to God's Word (Ps. 19:7–11). These "hidden faults" are the critical missing aspects of self-knowledge that are deeply hidden within the heart. David eventually learned that he could not trust the promptings of his own heart. Why? Because they were hidden behind layers of self-righteous rationalizations.

Consider the overall story of David's life in the book of 2 Samuel. As you read the first ten chapters, it seems that everything David does is a resounding success. You could liken him to the character King Midas in Greek mythology; everything he touched turned to gold. In 2 Samuel, chapters 1 through 5, David wins the civil war in Israel and successfully succeeds Saul as king. This helps to establish his enormous popularity as the king of Israel who fights and wins impossible battles. In chapters 5 through 7, he defeats

the occupational forces of Jerusalem and brings the ark of the covenant to his new capital. At that time, he receives the covenant from God (2 Sam. 7:8–17). Israel is finally united and now has the leadership of a king who is a skilled military commander. David appears to have the unique blessing of God over all his reign. Following this, he marches out to meet the remaining enemies of Israel (chapters 8–10). He defeats the Philistines, the Moabites, the Arameans, the Edomites, and the Ammonites. There is no battle that David loses; every battle he engages, he wins soundly.

Finally, David takes a vacation from his battles (2 Sam. 11:1). He sends out his army to fight his battles under the capable military commander Joab, and David stays in Jerusalem to relax. After winning so many hard-fought battles, David surely believed he had earned his holiday. The latter half of 2 Samuel is radically different, changing from victorious celebration to devastating heartbreak and discouragement. This begins in the middle of chapter 12 when one of David's young sons dies not long after birth. In chapter 13, David's son Absalom kills his brother Amnon for raping his half-sister Tamar. Then Absalom turns on his father and incites a bloody civil war to rob him of his kingdom. This causes David to flee from Jerusalem, being pursued by the son he dearly loved. In chapters 14–19 Absalom is eventually caught and killed by men loyal to David, who is deeply grieved over losing his beloved son. In chapter 20 another bloody rebellion arises worse than Absalom's, known as Sheba's revolt, which had to be put down by Joab. Then David finally comes to the end of his reign, fighting the Philistines again. But instead of a great victory, like his defeat of Goliath, David becomes exhausted and must be rescued. Other people have to win the battle that day (2 Sam. 21:15–22). Finally, in chapter 22, David writes a psalm of the Lord's deliverance instead of a psalm regaling his great victory. He had become a humble and broken man.

IV
David's Sin with Bathsheba

What was the critical turning point of David's life? This occurs in chapters 11 and 12. It is David's sin with Bathsheba! Not only does he sleep with a woman who is not his wife, but upon finding out that she has become pregnant with his child while her husband has been off fighting his battles, he plots to cover it up. If Bathsheba's pregnancy were known, she would be disgraced for cheating on her husband. So, David devises a plan for Uriah to return home from the front lines to sleep with his wife, intending to misrepresent the baby as being Uriah's. But when Uriah refuses to leave his responsibilities as a good soldier, David's plan was frustrated. Uriah could not go to enjoy his comfortable home and beautiful wife while the ark of the covenant, Israel, and Judah were still living in temporary shelters. This is even more remarkable since Uriah was a Hittite, meaning he was a Gentile convert

to Judaism. This foreigner was more concerned about the honor of the Lord in Israel than was his Jewish king. With David's first plan destroyed, he proceeds to place Uriah on the front lines so that he will most assuredly be killed. Murder—yes murder!—is conceived in David's heart to cover up his sexual sin. This plan succeeded (2 Sam. 11:17), and David thought the cover-up was a complete success.

A secret sexual desire in the heart of David, now acted out, became the turning point of his life. Prior to his sin with Bathsheba, he had made numerous compromises in his life (e.g., 2 Sam. 3:1–4; 5:13). Earlier he had fathered six sons by six different wives. He had already collected in his harem many concubines even though God had warned the future kings of Israel to not multiply many wives to themselves: "And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away" (Deut. 17:17). But it was David's pride that prompted him to ignore God's commands. He believed in his own righteousness, which motivated his sinful compromises, adultery, and eventually murder. Before David's sin with Bathsheba, he was the hero of Israel, but afterward he became a weak and pitiful king. What was the core of his problem? He trusted his own heart, though its sinful cravings were well hidden under several layers of pride, manipulation, and self-righteous rationalizations.

Sensual desires are deceptively hidden within the heart. They are often excused or explained away by a person who has power, prestige, or wealth, any one of which enables him to indulge his provocative fantasies. Many others who do not have great influence or wealth also have the same sensual desires but lack the means to fulfill them. They may delude themselves with self-righteous thoughts, believing they are better than those who have had the opportunity to indulge their secret passions, when the truth is, were they given the same opportunity, they would indulge their lust just as quickly. Indeed, they are no better off. Remember, Jesus said that the heart of a luster is the same as the heart of an adulterer. The major recurring failure here is not taking seriously the sinful condition of the self-favoring heart, whether the lust is acted on or not.

The tragic events of King David's life have been replayed countlessly in the lives of many men and women throughout the centuries. Much like David's is the story of a Christian man who ran a massive and profitable business. In the world's estimation he was a huge success in everything he did. Together with his beautiful Christian wife and five wonderful children, they all weekly attended a great church. What more could a man desire? But his whole life changed on the day he was arrested in a police sting for hiring a prostitute, who was an undercover police officer. The following day this devastating revelation was the lead story on all the local television news programs. These broadcasts dragged his name, his family, his business, and his church through the mud. His embarrassed children refused to go to

school. His business sales dropped 85 percent in a week, resulting in the layoff of several of his employees. After several months, the banks foreclosed on his business and his home. All of this occurred even though he fully repented to the Lord, his wife, and his children. Repentance does not always exempt you from the consequences of your sin.

While in biblical counseling, this man confessed to having years of secret sexual fantasies that he never acted on. These hidden passions had been buried deeply in his heart, artfully disguised as innocent, stress-relieving times of escape. It was not until he had the means and opportunity, afforded to him through his profitable business, that he could indulge his secret pleasures. His years of secret, sensual sins eventually cost him dearly. He was, like David, a seriously broken man! Of course, these devastating sins of the heart are not limited to men. A Christian lady in her twenties became engaged to be married to a delightful Christian man. The oldest of four children, she came from a solid Christian family; her three younger siblings all looked up to their older sister. She excelled in both athletics and academics at her university. Her fiancé was studying to be an attorney in a prestigious graduate program. Two months before graduation, and three months before her wedding, a young woman living in the same dorm openly confessed to having a lesbian relationship with her. When confronted by her Christian friends, this engaged woman tearfully confessed to her sin. Her parents and siblings were in shock when they heard the news. She lost her athletic scholarship, and her grade point average took a severe hit in her last semester. In disgrace, she dropped out of college, her testimony for Christ in ruins. Her fiancé was devastated and quickly ended their relationship when he heard the news. The wedding was canceled. Later in counseling she revealed that this was something she had kept secret for several years and passed it off in her own mind as innocent curiosity. But she had allowed the influence of worldly culture to feed and nurture her sexual curiosity until she had the opportunity to personally explore this in her dormitory. How could she give up so much as a Christian?

V
Doing Battle in the Heart as a Believer

The answer to this question rests in the fact that she had permitted and even cultivated these sexual fantasies in her heart for a long time. The mind is like a garden; whatever you permit to grow and cultivate will eventually produce behavioral fruit (Gal. 6:7). In these examples, dangerous assumptions of self-trust led to major moral failures. Neither of these two individuals, at the very beginning of entertaining sexual thoughts, planned to fall into the outward sins of adultery and lesbianism. Both were convinced that they were strong Christians—strong enough to resist giving in to this kind of temptation.

This is a fatal error in a Christian's thinking, a grave miscalculation when

it comes to the purity of the heart. The apostle Paul understood that such assumptions could be misleading and potentially destructive. He did not trust his own conscience (i.e., heart). He confessed to the Corinthians believers, "For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:4). In other words, he was not aware of any wrongdoing or unconfessed sin in his life at that time, but that did not make him innocent. His natural, self-approving outlook and insight into himself blinded him to his own faults. Only the Lord is qualified to be the final judge. Unlike most people in our culture today, Paul rightfully distrusted his own heart. The human heart is full of self-justification and self-righteousness (Gen. 8:21; Prov. 16:5). We cannot trust our heart! Its self-diagnostic capability is hopelessly corrupted by the deceitfulness of sin (Prov. 20:9). Only the righteousness of Christ is the sole standard of what is pure. Like the humbled desire of King David after his failure, there must be a deep longing for a proven purity of heart (Ps. 26:2).

The insidious self-righteousness of the heart and its false presumption of its own goodness is often revealed when unexpected events arise, resulting in unintended words and actions that reveal the false assumption of the heart's innocence.

Consider this biblical example. After David was anointed king of Israel, consolidating Israel into one nation and effectively ending a bitter civil war, the Philistines decided to attack. With the Lord's help, David achieved a glorious victory over them (2 Sam. 5:17–25). With great celebration and rejoicing David ordered the ark of God to be transported to Jerusalem. The ark was placed on a newly built cart pulled by oxen, (even though the law had required the sacred ark to be carried by the sons of Kohath; cf. Num. 3:30–31; 4:15; 7:9). During transport they encountered rough ground near the threshing floor of Nachon, causing the oxen to stumble and the cart to careen sideways. As the ark began to fall to the ground, a man by the name of Uzzah (possibly the grandson of Abinadab, keeper of the ark; cf. 1 Sam. 7:1) reached out his hand and took hold of it to steady it and keep it from falling (2 Sam. 6:6). In that instance Uzzah believed he was doing a good thing. He believed his action would keep the ark from being broken or soiled by the unclean ground. But surprisingly, Scripture says in 2 Samuel 6:7, "And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God." This was alarming considering the righteous intentions of Uzzah. Why was the Lord so angered with Uzzah? What does the Lord's response reveal about the heart of Uzzah? God apparently treated his deed as a capital offense, even though Uzzah was fully convinced he was doing a good thing. David himself became angry at what had happened, so much so that he named the place Perez-uzzah (2 Sam. 6:8). The Hebrew literally means "outburst against Uzzah!" It is possible that David was angered at himself for allowing such carelessness

in transporting the ark by a clumsy oxen cart. But that does not settle the issue of the Lord's anger at Uzzah.

To the contemporary mind the Lord's action seems to be entirely unjust, yet this is not the case at all. The Lord brought a death sentence on Uzzah because of his false belief about his own goodness. Uzzah had the audacity to believe that his hand was more holy than the dirt of the ground. He presumed himself to be better, holier than he really was. The Israelites were to treat the ark as perfectly holy; *no one* was supposed to touch it, under penalty of death (Num. 4:15, 19–20).

Uzzah's false belief in his own righteousness, confirmed by his action, betrayed him. If in his heart he believed that no man was worthy to assist the Lord, and that his violation of God's command would defile the ark, he would not have dared to touch it. His attitude toward the goodness of his own heart's intentions became deadly. His heart had deceived him. He is a fool who believes in the goodness of his own heart. He is a fool who believes that the heart is a reliable guide for life. The biblical doctrine of total depravity means that every intention, plan, and purpose of the heart, no matter how good it may seem, is tainted by sin. This does not mean that the heart is as bad as it could be. Every heart has the capacity to become even worse. But it does mean that the heart is known as being unreliable and untrustworthy because of its sinful mind-set against God in every aspect of its desires. Even the heart of the Christian cannot be fully trusted. The apostle Paul did not trust his heart (1 Cor. 4:4), and the biblical author of Hebrews writes, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy about his zealous care over the flock at Ephesus so that he might avoid endless disputes and arguments with doctrinally unsound teachers: "So flee youthful passions [contextually: compulsion to argue] and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

If Timothy's heart were reliable, then Paul's warning is unnecessary. But the apostle understood the sinful propensities of his heart and Timothy's chief inclinations. As a young and passionate pastor-theologian, Timothy was inclined to engage these false teachers in debate. He could easily rationalize his purpose as being good. After all, he wants to set these men straight from the standpoint of their bad doctrine and free the church from their influence. Like Uzzah, Timothy's intentions were good on the surface. But you do not win over people to God's purposes by dispute or debate (2 Tim. 2:23–26). That is not the way of the Lord, even though it may seem reasonable to human thought.

The Christian will battle evil desires within the heart. This is a truth that theologians have understood for a long time. Before a person believes in Christ, his heart is wholly dedicated to sin, fully depraved, and in need of

redemptive forgiveness (Rom. 4:3–8; Col. 2:13–14). Such a person is unable to please God from the heart. When God redemptively forgives the unbeliever, theologians call this judicial forgiveness because the unbeliever's primary relationship to God is that of Judge. However, after a person becomes a believer, he still needs forgiveness from specific sins. Theologians call this parental forgiveness because the believer is a member of God's family; God is the believer's loving Father.

When Christians sin, they are not removed from the family, but they will suffer temporal discipline because of God's chastening (Prov. 13:15b, 21; Matt. 6:12; Heb. 12:5–11). These are sins that come from a sinful heart that has been redeemed but still possesses evil lusts and desires. This is a heart that has been judicially justified and placed in union with Christ, so from God's perspective it is perfectly holy, viewed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. But from an earthly perspective it is in the process of becoming more like what it has already been declared to be in Christ. The heart is still growing, changing, and becoming more Christlike through progressive sanctification even though it continues to struggle with pervasive evil desires and lusts.

The internal battle of sin in the heart is a reality for the believer. For the unbeliever, there is no real battle, for his heart has not yet been redeemed and given over to God. He remains in bondage to his sin and has no life in him for the battle. The author of Hebrews describes God's work in the believer's life this way: "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). When he writes that the believer has been "perfected for all time" (perfect, active tense of τελειόω), he is referring to judicial sanctification in Christ. This is a believer's salvation. All sin past, present, and future is paid and atoned for by Jesus Christ.

When the author refers to believers as "those who are being sanctified," he changes to a present tense (present, passive tense of γιάζω). This is parental sanctification in Christ. Once the believer is saved, God is not finished; he continues to sanctify him to make him more like Christ. It is the very nature of God to finish a task (Num. 23:19; Isa. 55:11). He does not abandon the believer or leave the responsibility of sanctification incomplete. God will see it to the end by revealing the evil desires of the heart, bringing about repentance and a clean heart until the believer's desires are God's holy desires.

What is the nature of the person who continues to harbor known evil desires in his heart even though he claims to be a Christian? Given the character of God and his sustained sanctifying work in the believer's life, such a person has good reason to question whether he is a genuine believer (2 Cor. 13:5). A true believer who persists with lustful desires in the heart will be miserable under the chastening hand of God. This discipline is intended to open his eyes to the truth of his hidden heart desires and to lead him to

repentance and a purging of those desires—once and for all—from his life. The experience of the one who only professes to be a Christian will be different. As time goes on, he will grow increasingly comfortable in his sin because of the hardening of his heart and searing of his conscience. Any unhappiness or misery is the result of difficult circumstances that are a natural consequence of living in sin, not because he is displeasing to God. Perhaps his spouse has discovered his secret, sordid fantasy life and the home is now a place of strife and unhappiness. The unregenerate person, regardless of painful external pressures, will continue to follow the lurid imaginings he has come to crave. Through the deceitfulness of his heart, this false believer will withdraw, retreating to the secret world of his lusts as a comfortable place of escape from the critical eye of disapproving family and Christian friends. Real motivation for change is nonexistent because he is not truly living to bring glory to Christ. Having given himself over to his lust, he lives solely and intensely for self-pleasure. Any claim he makes to be a Christian is due to pride, social expediency, or because he fears death and hell. If you are this type of person, the biblical truths of this book will not bring about the change you need until you sincerely repent and place your faith in Christ alone as Savior and Lord. Pick up the Bible and read the Gospels of Mark and John. You need to know Jesus Christ and become a true follower of him! In marked contrast, the genuine Christian will mourn the impure desires of his heart.

Pleasurable sin is short-lived for the one who is truly "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). His misery will come from an internal sense of guilt and from knowing he is living a life that is displeasing to the Lord he claims to love. Although he may become deeply mired in his sin, he fights it at every turn. His greatest discouragement is found in his apparent inability to overcome serious temptation and sin. His weakness grieves him, and he seeks help even while he is seemingly bound by the cords of his iniquity. If you are this miserable Christian, whom even now the Lord is convicting, then this article is written for you—to bring you hope and biblical change. You desire a pure heart because of the Spirit of God within you, but you must also pursue a pure heart (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14). God in Christ Jesus will provide you with the grace you will need for the purification of your heart (Prov. 3:34). But, as I suggested earlier, grace will not come without brokenness. "Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (James 4:6). Your soul must be overwhelmed with your vileness and impurities before any real change can take place in your heart and its desires. If this brokenness before God (not just before men) is not present, then you need to cry out to God to restore sensitivity to your conscience, which has been seared by repeated, unconfessed sin. This is a vital prerequisite to substantive heart renewal. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and

mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you (James 4:7–10).

VI
The Nature of True Repentance

A heart that is broken because of its sinfulness is a humbled heart. It is a heart that cares about how offensive it is to the holiness of the Lord and that is now ready for real and lasting change. Such a heart becomes keenly invested in purging its sinful and dominating desires. This must be true of your heart before you move forward.

There is an important distinction that should be made between feeling bad about your heart's impurity and being broken over it. A husband may be horrified and ashamed because his wife has discovered his secret indulgence of pornography on his computer and cell phone; does he feel badly for being caught, or is he broken over his sin? A wife might have been caught in an extramarital affair; is she angry that she has been found out, perhaps even agonizingly grieved over how her sin has injured her husband and children, or is she grieved that she has dishonored the Lord Jesus? A sorrowful pastor might confess to having a homosexual relationship once the evidence is uncovered; is this man in serious depression and anguish over the loss of a place of honor, his position in the church, and his family, or is his heart truly broken over his sin?

Often the guilty party has a certain feeling of sorrow over his sin, but it is not a sorrow that is according to God; he is not broken in his heart. It is critical to understand the necessary spiritual distinction between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10). The original New Testament language of this verse demonstrates that genuine repentance belongs to the realm of true salvation. Worldly grief or sorrow cannot repent, because it lacks regenerative grace that softens and breaks the heart.

Consider the numerous examples in Scripture of worldly sorrow: Genesis 4 records the first murder. Cain kills his brother because he is envious of God's approval of Abel's sacrifice. God judges Cain, and this judgment is so severe that Cain is severely distressed. "Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear'" (Gen. 4:13). Yet he does not repent (1 John 3:12). Esau, Jacob's older brother, was sorrowful over the careless disregard of his birthright when he sold it for a momentary meal. He shed many tears over his loss, but he was not truly broken and repentant (Gen. 27:34; Heb. 12:16–17). When King Ahab's practice of idolatry was revealed by the prophet Elijah, "he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly" (1 Kings 21:27, a

public and ancient sign of remorse and sorrow), but he was not broken and repentant, because he continued to consult false prophets (1 Kings 22:6). After betraying the Lord Jesus Christ, Judas was full of remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders of Judaism. He even confessed to them, "I have sinned" (Matt. 27:4), but he did not repent. Instead, he proceeded to hang himself.

Being distressed, sorrowful, mournful, dejected, and remorseful are not the same thing as godly repentance. Even though these attitudes may accompany genuine repentance, they are not to be confused with it. True repentance is what King David expresses after Nathan the prophet revealed his adulterous sin with Bathsheba: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). This must be a reality in your heart for genuine cleansing to occur.

What will be the evidence that genuine repentance has taken place in your heart? How will you know the difference between "godly sorrow" and "worldly sorrow"? The answer to these questions is summed up by the apostle Paul after he contrasts these two types of sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:10. In the following verse Paul continues to describe the person who has godly sorrow and repentance: "For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!" (2 Cor. 7:11). There will be an earnestness and eagerness to pursue righteousness in your life. Repentance sows an undeniable desire in the heart to proactively seek righteousness and do what is good. A broken and repentant heart is not in a static state; it is active—boldly and aggressively pursuing purity. This eagerness then turns to the pursuit of clearing yourself from the remaining stigma of your sinfulness. This does not mean you deny sin's stigma but rather that you seek to remove yourself from any association with your previous sins. In doing so you work to restore the trust and confidence of others who have been hurt or betrayed by your sin. Prior to your repentance you were indifferent and complacent concerning the impurities of your heart, but now you are alert and conscientious to any hint or suggestion of their return.

Another characteristic of a repentant heart is anger! This is what the word indignation in this verse means. Your heart is angered over the reproach of your previous evil desires. The fuel of your anger comes from the fact that the sinful desires of your heart have brought shame on the Lord and his people. This is often called righteous indignation or holy anger. It is anger motivated by righteousness in a world filled with unrighteousness. Sometimes you may hear a Christian say in anger, "I can't believe I thought that!" Righteous anger does not make such a self-favoring statement; self-righteous anger does. If you really understood the depth of the sinful desires of your heart and frailty, you would say instead, "I can't believe I don't think

that more often!" A broken and repentant heart is easily angered at its own inherent propensities toward unholy desires.

Still another unexpected characteristic of a repentant heart, according to 2 Corinthians 7:11, is fear. The object of this fear is not explained in this immediate verse but can be understood by the surrounding context. There are two equally valid understandings of what should strike fear in the heart broken by repentance. The first is built on the second. The first is the fear of repeating a sin because of the weakness of the flesh. A repentant heart does not want to sin again, but it is fearful because it knows its own careless habits. Second, a repentant heart has a deep and abiding reverence for God that comes from a holy fear of him. He will bring a temporal chastening and judgment on his children. He will not remove a child from his heavenly family, but he will bring hardship into that child's life (Heb. 12:7–11). The repentant person knows that God's chastisement comes from his love for his children. In the first verse of this same chapter Paul explains this more fully: "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

When Paul speaks of the "body and spirit," he is referring to the tangible man (body) and the intangible man (spirit). Your heart is at the very core of your intangible man. Fear and love are two sides of the same coin. What you love the most, you will also fear the most. It is like a young man who is seriously in love with a young lady. Because he loves her, he is fearful of doing anything that would displease her. Godly sorrow always involves full and complete repentance, and this includes a fear of God that grows out of a deep love for him. You cannot say you love God if you are not fearful of displeasing him. Anyone who truly loves God will be fearful of harboring any sensual impurity within the heart. Therefore, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The repentant heart is a biblically fearful heart.

Yet another characteristic of a repentant heart in 2 Corinthians 7:11 is a deep yearning, which is an intensely passionate desire or longing to restore those relationships that were broken and damaged by your sin. As a Christian, sin harms your relationship with God. It disrupts but does not sever it. You still have a parent-child relationship with him as your heavenly Father, but it suffers greatly from this disruption. The conscience of your heavy heart is plagued with guilt; repentance is the necessary step to restoring it. When you are repentant you will make every effort to ensure your relationship with God is restored to a better and more intimate state than it was prior to your sin. This eagerness will extend to your attempts to restore any relationship with others that has caused great hurt, difficulty, and alienation. Rebuilding trust is like laying siege to a fortified city (Prov. 18:19). Your broken and repentant heart will do whatever is necessary, for as long as it takes, to rebuild the

relationship. Restoring damaged relationships becomes the yearning of a repentant heart.

Still another characteristic of a repentant heart is zeal. This characteristic also comes from a sincere love of God and others (Matt. 22:37–40). Your heart is zealous for God, and you will hate anyone or anything that would bring reproach on him (Ps. 139:21–22). A deep passion for righteousness will grow in your heart that was missing when you were still rationalizing and excusing your sinful desires. You will cringe and be repulsed by all injustice. A burning passion in your heart will motivate you to see that righteousness and goodness prevail. This is not a zealous defense of personal rights that is often fueled by selfish desires; rather, it is a passionate defense of good for others and the righteousness of God. A broken and repentant heart is not passive; it is actively zealous.

The last characteristic of a repentant heart in this verse is closely associated with zealousness because it passionately desires justice. It is translated as "what punishment" and means a desire to see punishment applied where it is necessary and appropriate. Sometimes it is translated as a desire for "avenging of wrong." This final characteristic is a critical aspect of a heart changed through repentance. The heart that hides all types of sinful and sensual desires is guarded and self-protective. But the repentant heart does not seek to protect itself. It is so willing to see sin punished or avenged that it does not matter what it personally costs. This heart is open to experiencing whatever consequences that may come about as a result of its sin.

An important qualification is necessary concerning a heart that is eager to see personal sin punished: a rightfully repentant heart needs to understand the theological problem of penance. Some Christians will indulge in self-flagellation when they know they have committed a vile sin. They feel they must pay a kind of emotional penance by experiencing some type of self-imposed suffering. Whether it is through self-denial or by imposing on themselves an attitude of perpetual despondency, they believe they have to pay God back for what they have done wrong. This will often cause a person to wallow in self-pity and adopt a "woe is me" attitude toward life. Good theology will not allow a believer to do this. Jesus Christ has already paid for all the sins of the believer (Heb. 10:10–12). To assume that you can add more payment for your sins by your self-imposed suffering makes the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ meaningless. It is a gross violation of good theology because it undermines the atoning work of Christ.

Furthermore, it will not be helpful in the prevention of future sin. "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:23). When Christians practice penance for their personal sin, they betray a misplaced trust in the flesh in order to gain

favor with God. This fleshly indulgence in self-appointed suffering will not gain God's favor, neither will it be sufficient to restrain future temptation. Real repentance denies that the flesh has the capability to pay for and conquer sin; instead, it is zealous to see God's justice served even if it involves a personal cost.

VII
Conclusion

The conclusion of the matter is this: you cannot trust your own heart to know itself. The only reliable guide for self-knowledge is the Word of God. Your sinful heart is not only difficult to understand but also deceptive—it will lie to you (Prov. 28:26). It is as full of rationalizations for sin as it is prone to cast itself and its motives in the most favorable light. Godly men throughout Scripture have learned to distrust their hearts while relying only on God's revelation to understand the heart's central motivations (Eccl. 7:20). God is the only righteous judge of your heart.

Any dominating desire of the heart that replaces the desire to love and serve God foremost is an idol. It may not be an idol of wood or stone, but it is just as destructive. A heart idol will demand worship (1 Cor. 10:6–14). Your heart is full of controlling voices that will call for your complete allegiance. Chief among them are the voices that awaken your sensual desires. They will promise you pleasurable fulfillment but will deliver only death (Prov. 16:25). Your soul dies! Your relationships die! Moreover, your body may die from a sexually transmitted disease. It is time to identify your idol and repent. The Lord can purify you of sexual idolatry when you permit the Spirit of God to use the truth of his Word to change your heart.

PASTORAL INSIGHTS

Why Pastors Must Pursue Excellence in Counseling

Ken Schultz*

I
Introduction

The young pastor sits in his office engaged in sermon prep for this Sunday's worship service, parsing out the nuances of the "I AM" statement of Jesus. He is super-excited about the passage and can't wait to share what he's learning because he is pretty sure he has come up with something no other pastor has ever thought of and can't wait to bring that nugget to his people. He is indeed in his happy place. He loves the solitude of biblical study, which really invigorates and edifies his soul. He hears a knock on his door and his contentment quickly turns to agitation. He gets up, opens the door to reveal a woman who is obviously in despair.

He notices the young woman as a regular attender of their Sunday morning worship services. She is crying, even shaking a bit. The pastor invites her to sit down and simply asks, "What's going on?" He realized his office did not have any tissues but ran and grabbed some from the foyer and she quickly made use of a handful of them. Over the course of the next several minutes, she readily unloads on the preacher with all of the events in her life that have become overwhelming. She has a two-year-old child and a brand new, six-week-old baby. She is not getting much sleep. Her husband works late, and she doesn't get much help from him. She is constantly at the behest of her children. The pastor notices the extremely dark circles around her deeply sunken eyes. She expresses in very clear terms that she didn't want another child, but her husband insisted. She feels guilty about feeling that way, and her demeanor shifts to extreme despair as she reveals to the unsuspecting pastor that she saw pornographic pictures on her husband's phone just the day before. She wonders what's wrong with her and why she's not enough for her man that he would seek pleasure elsewhere. She now feels unappreciated, unwanted, unattractive, overworked, overwhelmed, and over it! She is swirling in all the thoughts invading her mind and heart, which lead her to say to her pastor, "I can't handle this anymore, and I don't know what I'm gonna do."

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He does what he can. He prays with her, offers to talk to the husband, and gives a referral to a counselor in town. She thanks the pastor but leaves with little hope. He resumes his faithful study for Sunday morning. Later, the pastor reflects on the woman's plight and how he wishes he could have helped her more. He realizes that in his nearly eight years of higher education, he had no ministry training in helping his flock through ongoing counseling. He soon understands his need to increase his ability to help those in crisis with the truth of God's word—the Bible, which has meant so much to him.

Dear Pastor, if this describes your frustration, take heart! As a biblically astute, weekly proclaimer of his truth, you are well equipped to help your people deal with their struggles. In fact, armed with Scripture, you have all you need to help your struggling people—even those like the unexpected woman who shows up at your door, seeking help and hope. In this article, I want to show you why and how you should pursue biblical counseling to enhance your overall shepherding of your flock.

II
What is Biblical Counseling?

Biblical counseling stands unique in many ways when compared to secular or mixed approaches. Hopefully, the following descriptors will motivate the pastor to see the need for his church to implement a biblical counseling ministry. First, biblical counseling is the personal discipleship ministry of God's people toward others under the oversight of God's church. This assumes a church has a discipleship plan and counseling can be an important part of that plan by discipling people through their struggles.

Next, as the name indicates, biblical counseling is dependent solely upon the sufficiency of God's word through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is used in the overall teaching and discipleship ministry of the church, which makes biblical counseling a natural companion piece. Moreover, biblical counselors speak the truth in love and apply Scripture to the need of the moment to help forge new disciplines that will alleviate their symptoms. By ministering Scripture, the biblical counselor comforts the suffering and sometimes calls sinners to repentance thus working to make them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ. Biblical counseling puts the counselor on the front lines of biblical ministry in the lives of believers.

III
Four Reasons Why Pastors Should Pursue Biblical Counseling

For His Own Edification

Pastoral ministry has demands that can drain even the fullest soul, if left unattended. The pastor serves his flock at a moment's notice, so he never

turns off his cell phone. He persistently fulfills his many duties like preaching, teaching, visiting, preparing, administrating, leading, helping, and training. It is no wonder the pastor is prone to spiritual depletion amid weekly ministry responsibilities. As he gives, sacrifices, and gives more, he puts his own spiritual well-being at risk.

The pastor who puts in this effort for the benefit of others will surely need to be nurturing his soul with the word of God. This dichotomy of man insists that the material and immaterial aspects of man interplay, so the stresses on the body will affect the soul. The weariness of the body can morph into the weariness of the soul. Biblical counseling uses the word of God to enrich the spiritual condition of those going through daily stresses of ministry.

Sometimes the pastor needs his own spiritual revival due to the personal hurt brought on by the actions of others. Perhaps he is going through a season of bitterness and resentment as his work for others is met with opposition. He grows weary of the daily battles to move the church forward. Soon, bitterness sets into his soul, creating a hard heart for people and ministry. Moreover, his family notices the weariness and toll the ministry work is having on their loved one. His once happy, optimistic view of the church is quickly fading. Where will this man turn for his own help? Biblical counseling training and practice will help the pastor in his own spiritual health. Jesus needed time to nourish His soul (Luke 5:16 et. al.), so the pastor must find a way to nurture his own soul, and biblical counseling can provide the means to accomplish just that.

To Provide Real *Help* to his Flock

First, your struggling counselee needs genuine help. People in the church listen to all sorts of unbiblical counsel throughout the week, which should bother the pastor. Any popular media platform is filled with self-help podcasts and video blogs, which offer temporary relief to the itching ears of those searching for help for their struggles. People who are searching for answers to their struggles are hearing from a wide variety of counseling approaches, most of which are godless. Godless, secular voices are having a significant effect on the way your flock thinks about their problems and the means for dealing with those problems. Struggling people need to hear substantive counsel, which is often absent from the voices on Spotify, YouTube, TikTok, or even co-workers and family members. In their desperation, they will listen to anyone who makes sense on the surface. If their pastor is unable or unwilling to help them with their soul's turmoil, then they will listen to anything and anyone with the latest self-help method. These approaches are stepping into your arena, my friend!

The very first chapter of Psalms vividly shows the contradictory nature of two approaches to counseling with the contrasting adjectives of *wicked* vs.

godly. I highly encourage pastors and their churches to be the persons and places where their people go to find substantive help for their personal struggles. The church must not abdicate this responsibility to the ungodly! The wisdom of this psalm clearly discourages atheistic advice, and the pastor would do well to follow suit. The person who follows ungodly counsel will progress toward further hopelessness (chaff in the wind), while the one who follows God's counsel will stand strong. The anxious person really desires to stop worrying and the addicted person strongly desires to stop and overcome their habit altogether. Biblical counseling, at its core, seeks to reflect the essence of this psalm by using godly counsel to help people in their time of need. Biblical counseling gets to the heart of the counselee's behaviors, which sets them on the path to standing strong.

Moreover, I've heard it said with some regularity, "We all need counseling." Such an honest assessment of our fallen condition has been the mantra of those in my counseling circles for decades. No doubt, people need help from time to time. Help when others sin against them. Help when dealing with the pressures of life. Help with workplace demands. Help with hurtful relationships. Help with intrusive thoughts. Help with addictions.

Second, your flock needs your help in more ways than just when they're going through physical distress. Pastoral classes in seminary provide lots of practical insights for coming alongside people in their time of physical distress. I recall one professor telling our class that all hospital visits should include prayer, reading a Bible passage, and being sensitive to the person by keeping the visit short. Pastors know they will be called upon to come to the hospital bedside as someone awaits to enter surgery and pray for them before the orderlies take them away, rolling them down the hallway, and out of sight. The pastor will make other hospital visits to pray with another person who is recovering from another procedure in the comforts of a double-patient hospital room. The pastor finds joy in helping his flock in times of physical distress.

Third, it will take much effort for the pastor to help his people. If pastors are going to help their people, he must minister in accordance with what Scripture teaches about the essence of help. Help, *boëtheō,* means to come to someone's aid in their time of distress. Helping those in spiritual distress will require significant effort on the part of the pastor and when he does, he mirrors the efforts of those who launched the early church. The Apostle Paul reminisces about his own toil and effort for the Colossian church, "We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me (1:28-29)." Paul put in relentless effort to plant and serve his churches.

Luke's example is compelling: "In every way I've shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive

(Acts 20:35).'" Luke provides three general considerations for ministry leaders who desire to help those who are unable to help themselves.

Luke claims it is *necessary* to help the weak. I've sought to provide a rationale for pastors to help their people with their spiritual struggles, and this verse underscores the need by stating it as an absolute requirement. The "weak" are those who are unable to help themselves and need an external mechanism to assist them. The weak have a need—sometimes many needs. The needs of the people demand pastoral competency in using the Bible to help these struggling folks. A pastor has many expectations placed upon him from the church and himself and must be mindful of the spiritual needs. The pastor would be wise to note the manifestations of such weaknesses of his congregate such as anxiety, depression, anger, stress or the like and be prepared to help them with God's Word.

Helping the weak will require hard work (labor). Here, the pastor is mandated to put forth significant energy, which Luke deems an absolute trait for those who seek to serve the Lord. Hard work should already be indicative of the minister who, no doubt, has been laboring for the Lord, so Luke's statement here should serve as a reminder to continue with significant effort. There is no room in the pastorate for idle men!

Serving the Lord is equated with selfless giving. The pastor who serves the Lord should do so without the expectation of receiving anything. The tireless efforts of the pastor towards his flock should stem from the root of selfless giving, instead of selfish expectations. Luke cites the words of our Lord to motivate believers to give—and keep on giving—because it is better than what you could possibly receive in return.

In the context of counseling, hard work will accomplish some important things. It is quite likely that your parishioner has been dealing with his struggles for a long time. Perhaps he's been dealing with anxiety or lust for nearly his entire life. It is illogical, even prideful, to think that one or two trips to your office will solve a lifetime of problems. Therefore, you will need to meet with your person for several sessions in order to minister God's word effectively and to see the fruit of spiritual disciplines begin to be harvested your counselee's life. This will require a strong work ethic.

The pastor should biblically counsel his people for their benefit. Counseling often occurs within the marketplace, based on a for-profit business model, including remuneration from insurance companies. Certainly, pastors should be financially compensated, but the attitude of the minister should be that of selfless service, not personal benefit. Partly for this reason, churches who provide counseling services free of charge demonstrate this principle well. The pastor should lead his church to utilize biblical counseling.

Although the pastor is well informed about the need and means of help their people in their times of physical distress, he likely lacks training in how to aid his flock's depression, anxiety, anger, marital problems or the like.

Spiritual distresses like these require spiritual help from a pastor. The pastor might do his best to help with some familiar verses but succumb to the notion that he simply cannot help his parishioners as well as a professional counselor can. I encourage pastors to learn how to help their people biblically, so they do not pass them off to a godless, man-centered, worldly approach for dealing with those with spiritual problems.

To Provide Real *Hope* for the Pastor and His Flock

The struggling parishioner is lacking hope. When someone is in personal, inner turmoil, hope seems so far out of sight. Emotions, feelings, and general lostness bring about a false assurance in the mind that things cannot possibly get any better. From his perspective, depression, despair and anxiety can make hope appear to be nothing but a pin-hole-sized light in a black room. However, this person is in the throes of a lie because there is hope to be found and the biblical counselor has the ability to minister this hope to him!

We turn to Paul's encouragement to those who seek to build up the weak (Rom 15:1-4). Some familiar themes move throughout this passage as those we've explored earlier like sacrificial, hard work for the weak ones. From where is the stronger person supposed to glean his ability to bear the weaker person's burdens? Toward where does the strong direct the weak? From what source do the stronger and weaker person glean their hope so they can really accomplish this burden-bearing task? One might automatically conclude that the pastor's ability to help the weaker person rests within himself—after all, he is the stronger believer. Paul might be the epitome of a strong believer, but even he relied on an outside source for his content in helping the weak—the Scriptures.

Paul's key statement acknowledges the Bible as the source of hope in his own life. God's word provides what pastors need to minister hope to the struggling person: "For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures (v.4)." Like the Apostle Paul, Biblical counseling understands the Scriptures provide hope for any circumstance your people will face. When the minister uses God's word with precision to address specific problems, hope becomes a refreshing reality.

To Strengthen His Overall Ministry

The Bible should permeate all aspects of the church's ministries. Children hear Bible accounts from the very first stages of mental development, while teenagers study it within their various youth programs. The preacher on Sunday morning proclaims what he has exegeted throughout the week. Why would he then recommend counseling that uses something other than the Bible? A pastor who embraces biblical counseling will see how the Bible can

be the source of his well-rounded ministry, including his personal ministry called biblical counseling. He publicly preaches the Word.

However, the pastor preaches, but he often does not know how that seed is developing. He does his job of spreading the word and trusts God's Spirit to move the hearer to action. This is one type of ministry of the word of God.

Biblical counseling rounds out another type of the pastor's ministry of the word, but in a private way. Once the pastor learns some biblical counseling skills, he will see how his public and private ministries will enhance one another and help him become a complete practitioner of God's word. He will learn how to minister the word in such a way that the counselee internalizes truth, which will help the pastor to see how the seed is growing in his flock. Something he misses simply by proclaiming it on Sundays.

The pastor will learn how to impart the Bible effectively to the counselee. He must take off his "Sunday morning preaching" hat and put on his more subtle "ministry of the Word" hat. In counseling, the pastor should not simply tell the counselee what to do and what not to do. Nor is biblical counseling where the pastor simply spews Scripture verses at the problem or gives commands of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." Biblical counseling is not merely talk therapy. Instead, the pastor must learn to bring the Scriptures to bear upon the need of the moment through biblically-driven conversations. He will have to listen well to what the counselee is saying, instead of thinking about what he's going to say next. Listening well will help the pastor to build a caring, empathetic relationship with the struggling soul he seeks to help.

As the pastor engages in the practice of private ministry to the Bible, he will clearly see how the Scriptures come alive in the lives of his parishioners. Therefore, the practice of biblical counseling will moisten dry preaching because he will see how the word can be applied to people in a very specific way. He can then preach on Sunday mornings with greater relevance and confidence that the people are positioned well to be doers of the word during the week, instead of being only Sunday morning hearers only. He will discover renewed energy, excitement and purpose in his preaching ministry.

IV
Back to Where We Began

My hope is that this material will encourage pastors to seek biblical counseling training to enhance the personal discipleship ministry within his church. When he does, he will grow in confidence and competence to help people at their most dire time. Perhaps the next time someone comes to him with a significant crisis, he will confidently minister God's word to them in a manner that provides genuine help and hope.

Mind vs. Brain:
Gaining Biblical Clarity on the Difference

Greg E. Gifford*

The 90s marked a watershed moment for mental health. On June 7, 1999 the White House held a conference on Mental Health.[1] The first lady, Hilary Clinton said these words: "this is an historic conference, but it is more than that; it's a real signal to our nation that we must do whatever it takes not only to remove the stigma from mental illness, but to begin treating mental illness as the illness it is on a parity with other illnesses."[2] This conference is evidence of the lack of clarity on the mind and the brain. The brain was conflated with the mind and the mind with the brain. In this short article, I aim to show you that the Bible differentiates between the mind and the brain and then I while draw out potential dangers of not understanding the Bible on this matter.

The Mind

The mind, according to the Scripture, is more than just your thoughts. It is a "way of thinking, *mind, attitude,* as the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being."[3] Take, for instance, Romans 12:2 (a well-known verse):

> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. [Emphasis Added]

Paul's argument is for the inner mind (i.e., "*nous*") to be totally transformed. This stands in juxtaposition to a mind that is of this world, as mentioned in Ephesians 4:17 or Colossians 2:18. The unbeliever's mind is existent, yet blind to eternal realities (Titus 1:15). But the redeemed mind is being renewed, according to Ephesians 4:23.

In each of these instances, we see that the mind is closer to what you and

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[1]"White House Conference on Mental Health," accessed February 4, 2021, https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/textonly/WH/EOP/First_Lady/html/generalspeeches/1999/19990607.html.

[2]Ibid.

[3]William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 680.

I would most likely call an *attitude* or *disposition*. If we use the term *mind* as the Bible uses it, then we mean the immaterial aspect of who we are that typically refers to the faculty of cognition.[4] However, the heart is also said to think, have intentions, and to purpose throughout the Scripture. Thus, the Bible would paint your mind as part of your inner person, which is most frequently called your heart.[5]

The Brain

The brain is an organ of the human anatomy. It is tangible, organic, and observable. When the Bible speaks of the brain, it would correlate to our outer man or body. Passages that teach this dichotomy are evident throughout the Scripture from the account of creation (Gen 2:7) to the time of death (2 Cor 5:8-9). Our outer person is indeed wasting away, but our inner person should be renewed day-by-day (2 Cor 4:16-18).

The organ of the brain is a physical, outer person reality. It is not the mind, and it stands in contrast to the mind. To be most biblical—which makes us most accurate—we should speak of the brain as the outer person and the mind as the inner person.

The Confusion of the Mind vs. the Brain

At the same White House conference mentioned above, Dr. Steven Hyman said these words:

> We have also learned some very important facts about these illnesses, and if I can just encapsulate them briefly, it's that these are real illnesses of a real organ—the brain. Just like coronary artery disease is a disease of a real organ—the heart. We can make diagnoses, and these diseases are treatable.[6]

Note, Dr. Hyman is speaking of the immaterial mind at a "Mental Health" conference all the while referring to the mind as an organ. If you confuse the two, like Dr. Hyman has done, then you will confuse the treatment of people. Let me say that again, *if you misunderstand people then you will misunderstand how to help people.* Therein lies one of the greatest dangers of misunderstanding the mind versus the brain.

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[4]Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:11, 3:14, 4:4, 10:5, 11:3; Philippians 4:7. νόημα, ατος, τό (since Hom.; also, LXX; En 5:8; Just.; Ath, 27, 2). that which one has in mind as product of intellectual process (BDAG, 675).

[5]Genesis 6:5 and Hebrews 4:12 for examples of the heart being the source of cognition.

[6]"White House Conference on Mental Health," accessed February 4, 2021, https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/textonly/WH/EOP/First_Lady/html/generalspeeches/1999/19990607.html.

The Dangers of Confusing the Mind vs. the Brain

Biblically, the mind cannot get ill as in a pathological disease or sickness infecting the mind. To be insane is possible, as evidenced throughout the Bible.[7] Yet, insanity is a reference to faulty senses. Literally, your senses are not working as they should. Thus, you are considered "out of your mind."[8] Yet, insanity is not mental illness. Mental illness is defined as, "health conditions involving changes in thinking, emotion or behavior (or a combination of these)."[9] Of note, the terms "health conditions" speak to the biological etiology of these mental illnesses. It is beyond the scope of this article to critique mental illness in full, but mental illness ideology is directly an outworking of the conflation of the mind and the brain.

The immaterial is not—and will never be—*infected* by the material. It can be *affected*, but not *infected*. For instance, the body can undergo some significant organic change that influence the inner person: cancer, pneumonia, broken bones, and so forth. However, cancer cannot infect the mind. Do you see the difference? One of the predominant dangers to misunderstanding the mind and the brain is to accept, part and parcel, the entirety of mental health ideology. The White House Conference of 1999 is an example of that.

A Way Forward

The way forward is understanding people as the Bible has described them. I have shown you that the Bible differentiates between the mind and the brain and to misunderstand this has certain dangers. The dangers are that we will misunderstand people. To fundamentally misunderstand people is to fundamentally fail to help them. Despite benevolent intentions and sincere compassion, we cannot help those that we do not understand. To get people wrong, we will get their problems and solutions to their problems wrong. A biblical anthropology stands central to a Christian worldview because when we change the nature of people, we change the nature of the Gospel. People's problems are no longer a matter of salvation/sanctification; they are a matter of the body and physiological treatment.

Let the Bible inform your understanding of the mind versus the brain, and you will see clearly through the lens of Scripture how God views people. This view allows for clarity, yes, but accuracy. To conflate the mind with the brain, as some are doing, is to neglect what the Bible says about people. A

[7]Cf. Acts 12:15, 26:24-25; 1 Cor 14:23 and John 10:20.

[8]See passages in footnote 7. "Be mad, be out of one's mind beside δαιμόνιον ἔχειν and as a result of it: *have no control over oneself*" in BDAG, 610.

[9]"What Is Mental Illness?," accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness.

neglection that results in confusion and a lack of clarity. May God's authoritative Word give us clarity on how to view people, all for His glory![10]

[10]For more on this topic please visit my Podcast, "Transformed" on any podcasting platforms or my forthcoming book, *Lies My Therapist Told Me* (Harper Collins, May 2025).

The Sufficiency of Christ through His Body: The Local Church as the Ideal Ecosystem for Biblical Counseling

David "Gunner" Gundersen*

The Sufficiency of Christ

We believe in the sufficiency of Christ for all Christian ministry. "All the riches of wisdom and knowledge" are found in him (Col 2:3). Only by abiding in him can we bear fruit (John 15:4). All things will finally be united in him (Eph 1:10). Christ is head of his church, and the only growth that finally matters is our growth into him (Eph 4:11–16).

But how do we grow up into Christ? By what means do we become conformed to his image (Rom 8:29)? I want to explain how the sufficiency of Christ for struggling believers is expressed to us through the God-ordained work of his body, the church. I want to show how a local church's gathering, preaching, ordinances, fellowship, serving, and shepherding create an ecosystem that supports and stirs our spiritual health as we give and receive biblical counsel.[1]

Vertical and Polemical

Sometimes, we unwittingly talk about "the sufficiency of Christ" as though he only rains grace directly from heaven. We might picture Christ working independently, even individualistically, without relational or ecclesial means. In this conception, the means of grace appear personal and private—my learning, my prayer, my seeking, and my repentance. The Spirit, in this model, only applies his conviction and comfort in the secret places of the heart. The ministry of Christ appears vertical, a straight line from heaven to earth, only running through the direct channel of a "personal relationship."

Or we might promote the sufficiency of Christ only in polemical terms—against secular theories and therapies, against the spirit of the age, against the

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[1]Parachurch ministries and other churches can be helpful partners assisting with intensive, extended, or specialized soul care needs. My aim is not to discount the universal church or dissuade pastors from partnering carefully with good external resources when necessary. Each local church, however, holds the sacred privilege of serving as headquarters for the embodied spiritual care of her own people.

hubris of hypotheses that defy the knowledge of God. With this emphasis, we are rightly acknowledging one vital element in the body—its antibodies. Good discernment recognizes and combats errant values so that we are not "led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3).

Sufficiency through Community

Both emphases above are essential. Christ does minister directly to each believer by his word and Spirit. His fullness does expose shallow philosophies, whether they be old traditions or fresh trends. Yet we must remember that in much of Christ's daily work, his means of grace are *relational*, *communal*, and *church-shaped*. In other words, his sufficiency is expressed and experienced through the giving and receiving of mutual church ministry over the course of our lives together. The sufficient grace of Christ does not just shower on us vertically, or protect us polemically, but so often flows to us horizontally, a nourishing river sourced from heaven yet delivered by the many human instruments God uses in each of our lives.

Head and Body

During a heavy season in pastoral ministry, my friend Andy loved me well. We had lunch every week, shared our hearts, talked through a David Powlison book together, and celebrated July 4th with our families. When I was in a deep valley, Andy set up a trip to visit Yellowstone National Park. When my sabbatical was announced, he stood up and urged the church to give me space. Andy was not afraid to tell me when I believed lies, or could lead better, or needed to work less and rest more. Whether it was playing disc golf or talking about depression, Andy was there, a "friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov 18:24).

But who was ministering to me? Was it Christ, or was it Andy? Peter, Paul, James, and John would all decry the dichotomy. It was Christ, through Andy. It was Andy, animated by Christ.

Christ, the head, has a body—the church. When he physically ascended to heaven, he anointed his people with his Spirit. His Spirit-filled church now remains on earth as the visible embodiment of our veiled king, bearing tangible witness to his grace and truth.

In God's own plan, head and body function together. Christ the head leads and nourishes his church; his church then displays and extends Christ's ongoing ministry. Through this process, the church-in-training grows up to match the full maturity of the Son of God. This full maturity develops not just through private interactions with God, or robust defenses of beleaguered doctrines, but also through mutual ministry in all the activities of faithful church life.

This means the sufficiency of Christ for counseling must include rather than exclude the work of his body. The sufficiency of Christ should center,

rather than sideline, the local church. Surprisingly, it is through his own frail people that Christ performs his unfailing ministry to us. His grace touches our lives through the faltering hands we extend toward one another.

Every Part Matters

From legs to lungs, knees to nose, toenails to eyebrows, Christ uses each of us. Paul says it often—perhaps became we need convincing: "each part" (Eph 4:15); "many parts" (1 Cor 12:20); "varieties of gifts," "varieties of service," "varieties of activities" (1 Cor 12:3). When Peter was younger, he once envisioned himself a lone warrior in the army of Christ, stronger than all the rest (Matt 26:33). But as a more seasoned saint, he saw God's plan unfolding through Christ's body, the church: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10).

Our offerings may seem small—a guest room for Elisha; a cup of cold water in Jesus' name; a word well-spoken; a gentle answer that turns away wrath; a quiet apology offered and accepted (2 Kings 4:8–10; Prov 15:1; 25:11; Matt 10:42; Eph 4:32). Yet these, and many more, are the sacred exercises that build up God's people—including those exchanging formal counsel. No matter how insufficient our individual contributions, the way Christ shows himself sufficient includes rather than excludes the combined activities of his church—large and small, planned and spontaneous.

As sovereign of creation, Christ could grow a Christian *ex nihilo* if he wanted. Or he could assign us our own siloed counseling rooms, with conversations far more concentrated, controlled, and personalized, where the topic is always and only us. Yet he has chosen to deploy a community, a body, his church. This fact makes the local body of Christ—"when each part is working properly"—the ideal ecosystem for biblical counseling (Eph 4:15–16).

It starts with gathering.

Gathering for a Change

For the average Christian counselee, what is their most important meeting of the next seven days? Their counseling session, or the gathering of their church? It can feel like the counseling conversation is the *sine qua non*. Is not this the focused time where hearts are opened, burdens shared, problems diagnosed, comforts given, and scriptural remedies applied? Sessions and services are not mutually exclusive, of course—there is no either-or. We all know the stories where a last-ditch marriage intensive or a stint in the right kind of rehab became the main way God turned a trial or a train wreck into a testimony. Yet the question above provokes us to recalculate the spiritual benefits baked into our regular gatherings.

Consider two Christian counselees. The first is being counseled within her own church family. Her regular diet includes preaching, singing, prayer, and

sacraments; greeting, fellowship, service, and care. The second is mostly isolated, only sporadically visiting various churches, for any number of reasons. Both have counselors committed to Scripture. But are their counseling experiences the same?

When you are in the hospital, you do not just get isolated treatments targeted to your problem; you also practice normal activities that sustain and promote life—eating, drinking, sleeping, and moving. You keep doing everyday things even while you are getting specialized help.

"The habit of some" is to overlook gathered worship as a central means for spiritual growth and encouragement (Heb 10:24–25). But individual soul care without gathered worship is like taking supplements without eating meals. Yes, the supplements may be helpful. Yet gathering with a healthy church is the Christian norm as it nourishes our faith, refines our love, and builds our hope and endurance for the long journey home.

Nourished by the Preached Word

That long journey home can be arduous. Like walking into a headwind takes more energy, struggling believers need more immediate help. The preached word is meant to fill our tanks, while repainting the lanes of wisdom, reinforcing guardrails, and clearing off important signage bearing witness to God's good promises.

Each week's scriptural meal is meant to nourish, comfort, and challenge us. When I was a teaching pastor, members going through difficult times would often talk about a sermon being encouraging—even when it was not focused on their most pressing problems. In other words, the sermon did not have to share the label of their current struggle. It might just soften their heart, sow a new idea, biblify their expectations, gird them for battle, or reframe their perspectives.

Our sufficient Christ speaks through his faithful shepherds who feed and warn his sheep. Yes, the pulpit may seem more general, and the counseling room more specific. Yet the same Spirit convicts and comforts each of us through our pastor's public proclamation. Done rightly, preaching and teaching are always more than public counseling, but never less. Paul taught "anything that was profitable" (Acts 20:20). Titus was to "teach what accords with sound doctrine"—the attitudes, virtues, habits, and roles that match and adorn the gospel (Titus 2:1). Until Christ returns, he serves as our "Wonderful Counselor" (Isa 9:6) as his Spirit convicts, guides, and renews us through his preached word.

Faithful preaching and careful discussion also model personal Bible study. Few skills are more important than a congregation—who are all counselors and counselees in training—learning to self-feed. The pastor is a public student, always showing his work, training his fellow disciples in the art of biblical study. "Rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15), teachers can

make every week another exercise in the school of observation, interpretation, and application.

Baptism, Communion, and Counseling

Not only do we receive verbal grace in the church, we also receive visible grace. Only in the local church do we observe baptism and communion, depicting the greater story in which we participate. Both are tied into typical counseling-oriented needs. For example, identity issues are common in counseling, and every baptism reinforces our new creation identity as those dead to sin and alive to God. It can remind us of our own conversion, while drawing us out of ourselves to welcome a new believer to the faith we share. Imagine two women walking together on a Tuesday morning, one wrestling with assurance. Together, they revisit Sunday's baptism and the symbolic passage from death to life. Though doubting, she remembers she is a new creation. The baptism drives it home, a precious asset in counseling. Yet no counseling conversation outside the church ever witnesses this dramatic reminder.

Likewise, done properly, communion is laced with common counseling themes: love and sacrifice, guilt and forgiveness, estrangement and reconciliation, and hostility and peace. A believer trained in the practice of communion will be nourished and warned, fed and protected, with his conscience rewashed and restored. Even the wise fencing of the table provides a good test for those facing a fork in the road. Cohabiting couples, interested in Christ yet not committed, when lovingly kept from communion, may be brought into the fold over time—or may have the hardness of their hearts revealed.

The Orchestra of Spiritual Fellowship

I have worked with believers who enjoy supportive fellowship outside the counseling room and those who do not. For those who do, when we meet, they highlight other sources of fellowship, encouragement, and refinement. Their small group prays for them. Fellow members bring meals when medical issues sideline a spouse. They glean insights from group discussions over Scripture, mixed with meaningful openness and heart-warming prayer. They are comforted by the stable faith of seasoned saints, and the zeal of younger ones.

When a local church surrounds the counseling room like this, I am not singing a desperate solo to inspire them, a sole instrument laboring to produce a whole orchestra of notes. Rather, I am one voice in a unified choir of encouragement, one heart listening and caring among a small harmony of others.

But when there is no church? The tune is mine to carry. They are tempted to rely on me for all their comfort and counsel, all their perspective and

guidance. Yet I know full well that my gifts, time, and energy are limited. I lack important experiences. I have deficits and idiosyncrasies. Yes, I can play my part, but one instrument cannot play the whole concerto.

Church Time

There are also different kinds of spiritual fellowship. For example, formal counseling can tend to be supercharged quality time. But in the church, quantity time becomes available. I once took a weeklong rafting trip on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. The first day, our guide told us to remove our watches and stow them deep in our bags. We were going on "river time." "River time" meant rising with the sun, sleeping when it set, and letting nature's rhythms set our own. No clocks allowed. Late each afternoon, someone would ask when we would have dinner. "Around dinner time," he always replied.

Formal counseling time is limited, by necessity. But church time can flex and morph, according to the need of the moment. Different locations and dynamics can shape the conversation in customized ways—and we all know that living rooms are different than counseling rooms. As a pastor, I counseled in so many settings—park benches, restaurants, kitchen tables, long walks, car rides, patios, hospital rooms, and many more. As Jesus formed his disciples through diverse, quantity time, so he shapes his body through the variety of activities we share together.

Contributors and Consumers

As we spend time together, there is a difference between a believer willing to serve—even in the smallest ways—and those who only ever seek help.
I once counseled a couple for an extended period. Along the way, they would express sheepish gratitude for the time we spent together, especially since it was free. Yet when my wife had a medical issue a few years earlier, they brought us a meal. Reminiscing about that past kindness helped remind them that they were contributors, not just consumers. They too had something to offer. A hurting hand can still hold out help; a dented tool can still be useful, even while awaiting repair. Some of the hurts are even healed through helping.

Although the prevalence of therapy in our culture has lessened the traditional stigma around counseling—sometimes even morphing into a badge of honor—it is still humbling to seek help. Yet seeking help does not diminish our dignity as God's children—it is just part of being in his family. Still, a believer's activity in the body of Christ can help keep away the shadow of illegitimate shame. In the body of Christ, the helped are not helpless, and the hurting are not giftless. As the Spirit of Christ activates the spiritual gifts of struggling members, he fosters their confidence and feeds their faith. Over

time, the Spirit even turns ours scars into gifts as his compassion shapes our own (2 Cor 1:3–7).

The call to serve is an antidote against the self-absorption and problem-centered identity that counseling can accidentally foster within the relationship. The temptations are many. Struggles can become identities. Counselors can slip into messiah mode. Solo counsel can replace the choir of community. The "magic hour" mentality can take over.

Yet the normal rhythms of church life push back against these temptations. As we are resubjected to the centrality of Christ and reexposed to the needs of others, we return to being one planet in God's solar system, rather than the all-consuming sun in our own. Everyone needs a solar system, a constellation, and a community. But no one needs its orbit centering around them. Spiritual health is undermined when we make ourselves the center of our own communities, but some measure of sanity returns when we each take our opportunities to give and receive, according to our ability, in due season.

Faithful Shepherds and Their Flocks

Finally, I know of a church whose leaders long believed that spiritual accountability was inherently harsh, legalistic, and dangerous. As a result, they let sin fester, claiming patience and kindness. Straying members were barely pursued, hurting members went uncontacted, and the worst cases received haphazard help. The shallow shepherding was diluted at best, dysfunctional at worst. Having ignored the head for years, this body's spiritual muscles grew atrophied, its immune system weak. In its frail spiritual state, they were easily "carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14).

In contrast, biblical counseling flourishes under faithful shepherds who know, feed, lead, and protect Christ's flock. I know a woman in a long-failing marriage who was only familiar with polished attractional churches programmed to resonate with people's felt needs. Along the way, she had met with all kinds of "helpers," but received no help. Then she met with a faithful, qualified pastor committed to biblical shepherding and counseling. In one hour with her new pastor and an open Bible, she received more help than all her years of empty therapy. Over time, both husband and wife began to be transformed—a church-centered testimony they shared with joy.

Conclusion

Restoring Christ to counseling means little if we do not restore counseling to the church.[2] We cannot promote the sufficient head and his perfect word to their rightful place in counseling ministry while demoting the body through which he works. A proficient Christology with a deficient ecclesiology

[2] The mission statement of CCEF is "restoring Christ to counseling and counseling to the church."

produces an insufficient methodology. A head without a body is gruesome, not glorious.

Yes, when the word of Christ is displaced by the spirit of the age, we have decapitated our ecclesiology. But stripping counseling from the church is likewise destructive, because it disembodies Christ. It severs his sufficient ministry from the very organism he created to foster it—his own ministering body, through whom he graciously works for our collective good.

To anyone who has pastored a church, belonged to a church, or been hurt by a church, this entire essay may feel like a stretch at best—even impossible. But reread Ephesians 4:1–16 like it is your first time. Is this not Paul's vision? And did he not just spend the first half of his letter explaining how the impossible is already being accomplished through the Father, Son, and Spirit? Together, are they not achieving and applying redemption from beginning to end?

When our hopes for the church grow dim, we must remember what Paul wrote right before his impossible paradigm in Ephesians 4: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:20–21).

So, is this model a stretch? More than a stretch. Will it require growth? Far more—it requires resurrection, then lifelong renewal. But is it the vision—even the promise—to which Christ and his apostles dedicated their lives and teaching? The New Testament says so again and again.

The body of Christ is not optional but essential for the counseling task. In fact, arguing that the local church is the ideal ecosystem for biblical counseling is not too big a claim, but too small. Such a claim can make it sound like a local church is merely scaffolding for the vital work of biblical counseling. Instead, here is the reality: biblical counseling was coded into the system from the beginning. Wise conversational ministry is baked into our covenant documents, from "iron sharpens iron" in the OT to "speaking the truth in love" in the NT (Prov 27:17; Eph 4:15). Biblical counseling is not the meal, served in the dish of the local church. Instead, biblical counseling is one of many sacred ingredients that together make the people of God a pleasing aroma to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we should never be satisfied with struggling believers being siphoned away from both the Scriptures and their churches when they need hope and help, leaving them awash in the world's swirling philosophies. Instead, we should assertively cultivate shepherds of character, cultures of commitment, theological depth, transparent fellowship, perceptive church members, and thicker connectivity within our local bodies. Then, bonded in Christ, a fellowship of mutual ministry can emerge, with wise counsel flowing all around, all fostered by the Wonderful Counselor himself.

The Sufficiency of Scripture for Counseling: Evidence from Oahu, Hawaii

J. R. Cuevas*

Since my sophomore year of college, I have been convinced of the sufficiency of the Scriptures for counseling. No, it is not just because of the seminary I graduated from. I believe in the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling first because the Scriptures claim to be sufficient for counseling. The words of 2 Timothy 3:16 could not be clearer: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." Are not teaching, reproof, correction, and training what constitute the counseling endeavor?

In counseling, we teach, reprove, correct, and train. To put it negatively, if counseling as you know it does *not* involve these elements, then what you call "counseling" is not counseling in the biblical sense. If the Scriptures claim to be sufficient for this work of ministry, then the Scriptures claim not only to be authoritative but also sufficient in the counseling endeavor.

Hence, Paul continues in verse 17: "…so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Contrary to what some ministers may think, counseling is indeed a part of the pastoral duty. Paul himself defended the integrity of his pastoral ministry to the Ephesian elders by saying in Acts 20:31 that he did not cease to "admonish each one with tears." He told the Colossian Christians that the proclamation of Christ involved "admonishing every man." If the man of God is equipped by the Scriptures for every good work involved in the pastoral task, and if counseling is a part of that task, then it follows that the Scriptures are adequate to equip a minister for counseling. Scripture is sufficient for counseling because it claims to be sufficient for counseling.

But the intention of this article is not to give a biblical defense for the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling. My goal, rather, is to highlight the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling as I have witnessed it in Oahu, Hawaii—a region of our nation that does not enjoy a heritage of biblical counseling.

This is an important topic for me because I am from this region. Having grown up in Honolulu, I went to seminary with the goal of one day returning to Oahu to help further the gospel here. As my life was transformed by the Word of God, I wanted desperately to witness the Word of God have the

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same effect on the people of Hawaii. I wanted to see biblical counseling have its God-intended effect amongst the saints in Oahu.

I am not suggesting that pastors in Oahu have never counseled from the Scriptures. What I am saying is that biblical counseling as we know it today is apparently an alien movement on this island. I was first told this a few years before I returned to the island (I returned to Hawaii in the summer of 2021) by the then Executive Director of the Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention. He was excited about my counseling background because, from his observation, biblical counseling (and relational discipleship) were very much lacking on the island, and that pastors were ill-equipped for the task.

In the four years I have been here, my observations corroborate with his. Having taught several biblical counseling workshops in churches or Christian organizations (where members from several different churches were present) across the island, I have often heard the remark that the material I taught was new. They loved it, but it was novel to them. They had never seen someone use the Scripture itself to address the various issues typically associated with counseling. Pastors have told me that they are ill-equipped for counseling while others have also admitted that they are more comfortable referring people to professional counselors or therapists for various issues.

In this remote region of the United States, the more traditional way of getting counseling is indeed to "see a professional"—someone outside of the church who has some kind of license or certification. Personally, I have never had the agenda to undermine professional therapists and counselors, or to actively discourage people from seeing professionals or therapists. I have never tried to get these organizations to go out of business or take their clients from them. I have never written about these organizations or professionals. I have personally never discouraged people who wanted to go to one to go to one (mainly for liability reasons), nor have I ever personally encouraged someone to stop seeing a therapist or professional counselor they were seeing. I do not think that this is the church's job on this island. And if it happens to be, that is not what God has personally placed on my heart as far as how I truly desire to minister here.

My goal in returning to Oahu was simple—to expose people to the sufficiency and efficacy of God's Word to the people of my home region, so that the Word of God might perform its work in the lives of the greater church in Hawaii (cf. 1 Thess 2:13). So, when saints happen to ask if I am available for counseling, I have done my very best to make myself available.

Over the last four years, I have received counseling requests through three different avenues. First, some would contact me directly through the ACBC website who were looking for counseling. Second, I have received several counseling requests from students at the Christian school where I worked as a teacher. Working as a high school teacher provided—and continues to provide—numerous opportunities for counseling. Third, and most recently,

I have received and continue to receive counseling requests from church members and attenders from the church where I currently pastor.

Through these three avenues, I have personally witnessed the wisdom of biblical counseling. Jesus says that wisdom is vindicated by her children (Luke 7:35). When it comes to biblical counseling on Oahu, its effectiveness is evidenced by its children—namely, the impact that I have seen it have in the lives of God's people on the island. Not once have I ever had to defend the wisdom of biblical counseling here. I simply would do it and would allow the wisdom of Scripture to speak for itself, very much like Solomon allowed his wisdom to speak for itself before the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10).

I have personally seen the evidence of the biblical counseling's effectiveness in the lives of the people in Oahu. Over the last four years, people here have sought pastoral counseling for all sorts of issues: marital counseling, pre-marital counseling, divorce counseling, eating disorders, depression, decision-making, self-mutilation, domestic violence, abuse recovery, family strife, conflict resolution, college counseling, anxiety, parenting (and grand parenting), mental health, loneliness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and more. In all these counseling sessions, I did not label myself as a biblical counselor. I never even aimed to distinguish myself from other types of counselors. I simply provided counsel from the Scriptures, plain and simple.

I do not formally partner with any secular or professional therapist or counselor. Again, I am not anti-them. I just do not work with them. I did not need to. In many of these cases, the individuals who came for counseling mentioned that they did not need or want to get any other type of counseling other than the biblical counseling they were receiving. They felt sufficiently equipped to deal with the issues at hand.

In some cases, the individuals (who were Christians) who happened to be concurrently seeing a professional therapist or counselor mentioned that the biblical counsel they received was far better, more helpful, and more concrete than the ones they were receiving from the professionals. This illustrates that true biblical counsel really is effective in equipping God's saints to handle life's problems. And such is evidence that once God's people can taste God's Word for what it is and experience the impact that it can have on their lives, they only want more of it. It is as if so many individuals here were crying the words of Psalm 119:103, "How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth." From my experience, many who have tasted the Scriptures in the realm of counseling have grown to want nothing other than the Scriptures for counseling.

I have also seen the evidence of biblical counseling's effectiveness in the realm of training and equipping. As mentioned earlier, I have had several opportunities to lead workshops on the topic of mental health in the wake of the post-COVID rise of mental health issues amongst youth. In these

workshops, I aimed to equip educators and youth workers to help youth struggling with mental health issues through the Scriptures.

During these workshops, the teachers and administration have expressed how much more equipped they felt to both think about and handle the issues at hand through the material I provided, which was mainly Bible verses! Some expressed how surprised they were to see how the Scriptures addressed issues related to counseling.

In our school in particular, teachers and administrators have expressed how there has been an increase in the overall health of the student atmosphere, and how our high school students seem to be mentally healthier than they ever were before. Former graduates have also noted this same observation about our current students. This has shown me that pastors can truly equip the saints (in this case, Christian educators) through the Scripture for the work of ministry (in this case, the ministry of counseling). At the school where I work, we have yet to hire a formal school counselor. Even the students themselves have said that they do not see a need for school counselors because of the pastors who are available on-site.

The greatest evidence of the sufficiency of the Scriptures in counseling is seen in the changed lives of those individuals who have sought and received biblical counseling personally from my ministry. It was Paul who said

> You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor 3:2-3).

I attribute none of the success to my own abilities or strength (John 15:4-5). The only explanation that I have for the success that I have seen in the realm of biblical counseling in Oahu over these four years is that the Scriptures truly are sufficient for counseling.

It is because, according to Psalm 19:7-8, the Word of God truly can restore the soul, make the naïve wise, rejoice the heart, and enlighten the eyes. It has been a tremendous joy to witness such a happening on the island where I grew up, even where there was no previous strong heritage of it. I pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to do His work on this island by equipping more laborers for the duty so desperately needed here.

BOOK REVIEWS

Gaye B. Clark. *Loving Your Adult Children: The Heartache of Parenting and the Hope of the Gospel*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. 163 pp. $16.99 (paper).

Roderick Phillips*

Introduction

Gaye B. Clark is a registered nurse and has worked with young adults for more than twenty years. Gaye is a widow and a mother of two adult children, and a grandmother of three little ones.

Summary

Clark divides *Loving Your Adult Children* into two sections: (1) the gospel (faith, repentance, grace, hope, and church) and (2) the fruit of the Spirit (patience, goodness and kindness, gentleness and self-control, faithfulness and joy, and peace and love). Her goal in structuring the book this way is "to enhance [the reader's] relationship with Christ and, as a result, strengthen the bond with [their] adult child" (4). For clarity, Clark identifies an adult child as a biological or adopted child "of parents who are twenty-one years old and up, living outside the home, and financially independent from their folks" (1). Still, much of her insight and application will resonate with those whose children still live at home, though under a separate set of obligations (1-2). She is clear that this is not a parenting manual, but "an invitation to renew your love for Christ and show how that love can inform your parenting" (3).

The first section consists of five chapters centered on how the gospel must first work in the parents' own hearts before it can overflow into their relationship with their adult children. In the first chapter (Faith) Clark addresses the idolatry that can creep into parenting. She warns against making our children the focus of our hope and identity, reminding us that they ultimately belong to the Lord. "Rest in Christ alone" (22) is her charge. In chapter two (Repentance), parents are challenged to model genuine repentance, not only before God but also toward their children. She warns, "Don't let it be said of you, 'I never heard my parents apologize to me'" (33). In chapter 3 (Grace), Clark highlights the difficulty of extending the same grace to our children that we so readily receive from Christ. She says, "we

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love to speak fondly of grace, how much we love it, need it—especially when we are its recipients. But when called to extend grace, well, that's another thing entirely" (49). In chapter 4 (Hope) she draws from Hebrews 6:19-20 to remind parents of the secure anchor they have in Christ, even when their relationships with their children are strained. "Psalm 56:8 says God counts our 'tossings' and saves our tears in a bottle. He never wastes our pain. Not one drop" (57). In Chapter 5 (Church) Clark emphasizes that the local church is "one of the greatest allies for Christian parents of adult children" (69), offering support through the preached Word, fellowship, elders, and small groups.

The second section explores the fruit of the Spirit and "how they might serve us in our relationships with our adult children" (84). In chapter 6 (Patience), Clark reveals how our impatience often masks deeper frustrations, writing, "[Your] real beef is with God" (89), and then offers eleven practical suggestions to cultivate gospel-rooted patience. In a day when "goodness and kindness seem naïve and unwise," Chapter 7 (Goodness and Kindness) encourages parents to pursue these qualities anyway, without expecting anything in return (101). In Chapter 8 (Gentleness and Self-Control), Clark reinforces that gentleness and self-control both restrain and guide our words and actions. They "often work together to grant us pause to consider the circumstance that threaten to provoke us" (118). Chapter 9 (Faithfulness and Joy) teaches parents of adult children to trust in Christ and find joy even when their child is suffering "the corrective but redemptive consequences of their choices" (133). Finally, in Chapter 10 (Peace and Love), Clark draws from Philippians 4:5-7 by outlining three steps toward peace: reasonableness, freedom from anxiety, and resting in God's work in our hearts. She also challenges parents to "serve a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what the person brings to [them]" (148).

Critical Evaluation

Clark writes with vulnerability and authenticity, drawing deeply from her own experiences. Her honest reflections make the book more pastoral than prescriptive. Rather than showcasing the failures of her children, she consistently focuses on her own growth and dependence on Christ, making her voice feel like that of a faithful Christian friend sitting beside you and pointing you to God.

The book is refreshingly Christ-centered. Each chapter immerses the reader in gospel truth, not as a quick fix for parenting problems, but as the essential reality that must shape the parent's heart first. This is not a manual to "fix your kids," but a devotional resource that calls parents to continual transformation in Christ. Clark succeeds in her aim to "point both the parent and the adult child to an everlasting love, an everlasting hope: Jesus Christ" (4).

Each chapter concludes with thoughtful reflection questions that are both practical and spiritually probing. Clark frequently supplements her teaching with personal illustrations and helpful lists that make her points easier to grasp and apply.

While the book is well written, a couple of minor drawbacks are worth noting. First, readers with adult children still living at home may find the content less directly applicable. An appendix or brief chapter addressing that specific situation could have added broader value. Second, the book ends somewhat abruptly. A final chapter summarizing the key themes and offering a "next steps" guide would have provided a stronger landing.

Conclusion

As a parent of four adult children—some walking with the Lord and some not—I found this book timely and deeply encouraging. Rather than leaning on pop psychology or trendy advice, Clark offers a Scripture-saturated resource that moves the heart to hope in Christ. It fills a long-standing gap in Christian parenting literature—ministering to the hearts of parents of adult children, not just their strategies.

Loving Your Adult Children is accessible, heartfelt, devotional, and profoundly gospel shaped. It reminds us that "our horizontal relationships, adult children included, are best cared for by pursuing our vertical relationship with God" (156). I wholeheartedly recommend this resource—for parents of adult children to read together, for small group discussion among parents of adult children, and for use in the counseling room. One can only hope a follow-up might be in the works: *Loving Your Aging Parents: The Heartache of Being an Adult Child and the Hope of God.*

Steve DeWitt. *Loneliness: Don't Hate It or Waste It. Redeem It*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2024. 159 pp. $14.99 (paper).

Chris Gee*

Loneliness is a problem as old as the Garden of Eden, yet this "not good" state that Adam first experienced seems to only be increasing as a topic of conversation today. Surveys and census data show a declining percentage of married people in America and many other parts of the world. Articles by psychologists and psychiatrists contend that social media, instead of curing the problem of loneliness, actually aggravates it. Pastors minister to a growing number of people who voice their difficulty in making friends, fitting in, finding a spouse, and connecting with other church members on a deep level, despite their best efforts.

Steve DeWitt offers a biblical and practical work that addresses this prevalent problem of loneliness head-on. As a man who was single until his mid-forties, DeWitt has felt the pain of loneliness, and during his time as a single person, he searched the Scriptures for arrows to sling against this ever-present foe.

The content of this book is organized in a threefold structure of problem-solution-impact. DeWitt begins with the problem of loneliness: it is a product of the fall of Genesis 3 and thus out of sync with God's design for humanity (chapters 1–3). He then offers the solution to loneliness: the gospel of Jesus Christ (chapter 4). Third, after describing the problem and solution, DeWitt moves on to explaining the impact of the gospel on a person's life, which is a transformation from being selfish to loving, from being self-serving to others-oriented (chapters 5–10).

This threefold structure roughly follows the three main arguments of the book. As DeWitt discusses the problem of loneliness, he argues that the pain of loneliness is meant to drive people toward what is good and holy. He explains, "loneliness creates internal energy. It is a strong emotion. I respond to it negatively, and even sinfully, by coping with the pain in sinful or destructive ways. Or I can leverage that energy as motivation toward a more profound engagement with God and others" (45–46).

The second main argument of the book is that the gospel is the solution to loneliness. DeWitt contends that the ultimate cause of loneliness is being

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out of fellowship with God. He explicitly states, "The organizing principle of this book is that the gospel of Jesus restores us to our Creator God and provides a pattern to follow of love (which diminishes loneliness) and community with others (which enhances belonging)" (50). The gospel gives lonely people the relationship their hearts pine for most: friendship with God.

The third key argument of the book is closely tied to the second. In the Gospel, Christ proves to be the greatest example of love and service. DeWitt argues that it is this kind of love and service that lonely people must show to others to effectively combat their loneliness. He explains, "As we invert our natural desire to be loved and choose to love and serve others, the love of God *through* us lessens the loneliness *in* us" (86).

This book sits on a relatively sparse bookshelf of Christian works on loneliness. Its main contribution is framing loneliness as a result of the fall. Beyond that, it is mainly a book about loving and serving one another, with few fresh insights. This book is not groundbreaking or original. However, it is biblical and helpful. It is also quite brief, so it serves more to point readers in the right direction rather than provide an in-depth analysis of biblical texts or provoke deep thinking on the subject matter.

While this book will be helpful for anyone because everyone, at one point or another, experiences loneliness, there are three categories of people who will particularly benefit from this book. The first is married pastors and spiritual leaders. Pastors, elders, disciplers, counselors, and small group leaders minister to many single people, and they may not quite understand or remember the sting of loneliness. This book will help these spiritual leaders walk in their people's shoes and empathize more lovingly.

The second group of people who will find this book particularly helpful is new Christians. The book clearly explains the gospel and the relational implications of trusting in Christ. Principles taught in this book, such as imitating the love of Christ, showing hospitality to other Christians, and killing pride, will be beneficial to new believers as they begin to live life with their new church family and perhaps deal with the pain of losing friends from their lives before Christ.

The third category of people who will be greatly helped by this book is self-centered people who feel lonely. DeWitt bluntly tells readers that to make friends, they must prove themselves friendly. He gets to the heart of the matter when he explains that the real source of people's loneliness is their lack of love, not the church's lack of love (or perceived lack of love). Certainly, self-centered people will not want to read a book that tells them the problem is the person who stares back at them in the mirror. However, this direct confrontation with biblical truth is exactly what they need. Pastors and spiritual leaders can keep a few copies of this book handy to pull off the shelf and give to people who bemoan a lack of deep relationships in their

lives and are blind to the fact that their own selfishness is what keeps their relationships shallow.

This book will be helpful to married spiritual leaders, new believers, and self-centered people because it has pronounced strengths. The first major strength of DeWitt's work is that it clearly explains the gospel and how lasting victory over loneliness is found in believing it. Readers who are looking for quick tips on how to avoid loneliness will be disappointed; instead, DeWitt helps readers "locate [their] loneliness in the grand story of redemption" (147). He shows how no number of human relationships will ever fill the void in a person's heart. Only God can fill that void, and thus, the critical need of every person is the vertical reconciliation found in the gospel. Furthermore, DeWitt skillfully explains how the gospel means death to self, the "me-monster," the very monster that destroys friendships and keeps people lonely.

The second major strength of this book is explaining what to do with feelings of loneliness. DeWitt argues that "loneliness isn't a sin; it's a sensor. In this way, it is a friend like a check engine oil light is a friend if we don't ignore it but use it to make healthy adjustments in our lives" (42). A section entitled "How to Waste Your Loneliness" outlines and explains bad responses to this check engine light (36–40). These responses include isolation from people since they have rejected you, obsession over friendship and family, and distraction through entertainment and hobbies. This section is effective because it forces readers to be introspective and to examine whether they are responding to the heartache of loneliness in healthy ways or unhealthy ways.

The third major strength of this work is its pastoral wisdom. DeWitt writes as a pastor of nearly thirty years and draws from both his personal experience struggling with loneliness and his pastoral experience ministering to many in the same battle. He gives the perspective from the pulpit and the pew, from the counselor's chair and the counselee's couch. His wealth of experience ministering to people allows him to write bluntly at times yet disallows him from ever writing harshly. The way he shepherds through his pen serves as a positive example for any spiritual leader who reads this book.

While this book has many strengths, it is not without weaknesses. DeWitt's argumentation is easy to follow for the most part, yet some sections are muddled. A prime example of this is DeWitt's motif that the shame of nakedness due to the Fall results in loneliness. In a confusing line of reasoning, DeWitt argues that Adam and Eve were originally naked and unashamed before God and each other, then sin brought shame, which necessitated clothes, the clothes covered Adam and Eve's true selves, and their unwillingness to be their true selves to each other led to loneliness. He introduces this theme when he writes, "In the story of loneliness, clothes are simply fashionable hiding. Clothes hide the most personal parts of our

bodies. They are barriers between who we are and who we hope people see us to be. They are emblematic of the social barriers we both hate and desperately need, lest people discover who we truly are" (31). DeWitt goes on to argue that this these "social barriers" are what lead to loneliness. While this may be true, Dewitt makes too much of the Genesis 3 story. Is the story of Adam and Eve having their eyes opened to their nakedness and feeling ashamed really a story about loneliness? Is loneliness even a valid application of this story? DeWitt argues unconvincingly that it is. Perhaps this unclear argument would have been more of a mild irritant in the book had DeWitt discussed it only once, but he chooses to weave it in throughout the entire book. It was unhelpful to build his arguments on this shaky foundation.

Another weakness of the book is its shallowness of insight. The second half of the book, the practical portion, feels like skipping a stone across a lake. For example, the chapter on loneliness in leadership offers five causes of loneliness in leadership and four cures. Each cause and cure is mentioned with very little explanation, biblical support, or provocation toward deeper thinking. Furthermore, each cause and cure is not specific to people in spiritual leadership. Overall, the chapter only scratches the surface of both the problem of loneliness in leadership and the solution.

Because the second half of the book lacks insight, it is somewhat ineffective in giving practical helps. DeWitt effectively gives the big picture principle that greater Christ-like love and service is what is needed to combat loneliness. However, he does not adequately explain how to practice this love and service. For example, the section entitled "Gospel Friendship" merely points out that the apostle Paul had many friends and that friendship is enriching and necessary (132–34). So much more should have been said about biblical friendship because almost everyone picking up a book on loneliness is looking for direction on how to make friends. DeWitt excels in showing the ugliness of loneliness and how to avoid it, but he falls short in showing the beauty of friendship and how to obtain it. The final chapter has a promising title, "Tips on Redeeming Loneliness," but it mainly reiterates points made earlier in the book. There is one new section on social media, but this section is only three paragraphs long and inadequate in its explanation of how social media compounds the problem of loneliness.

Despite these shortcomings, Steve DeWitt has served the church with a practical book that is not afraid to talk about ache of loneliness. Though lacking in depth, the book gives pastoral wisdom and gospel clarity. Those who read this book will be challenged to love others deeply, and, as a result, will experience less loneliness and move toward the relational fulfillment their Creator designed for them.

Jay E. Adams. *Competent to Counsel*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970. 287 pp. $4.50 (paper).

Bruce Blakey*

Fifty-five years ago, Jay Adams wrote a groundbreaking book. It was groundbreaking in that it established a biblical standard from which the biblical counseling movement began. But Adam's book was more than groundbreaking because it is still relevant today.

As Adams explains in the book, his thinking was formed in the early years of his ministry, and this book is the fruit. As a young pastor wanting to help people in his church, and later as a professor at Westminster Seminary, where he prepared lessons and exegeted passages, he began to question how counseling was being practiced in the church. Also, as Adams says, a significant influence on his thinking came when he participated in a summer program under the direction of psychiatrist O. Hobart Mowrer through the University of Illinois. During this summer, Adams learned much about psychiatry, especially its weaknesses, and he saw the inside of mental institutions. As a result, Adams began to formulate his thoughts on biblical counseling.

Specifically, Adams began to question the concept of what is known today as "mental illness." He did not buy into the medical model that was being proposed, which takes away personal responsibility, contributes to a victim motif, and abandons the reality of sin. In other words, Adams saw the beginnings of what we are still dealing with today—yet on a much more advanced and widespread level than what Adams observed in the 1960s.

You get all of this just in the introduction to the book! If you desire to counsel people according to the foundational presupposition that the Bible is the objective and inerrant Word of God and therefore the standard of all faith and practice (which Adams also explains in the introduction), then you can hardly wait to continue reading.

Rather than give a running commentary on the rest of the book, I will highlight certain aspects that should interest those who want to help others through biblical counseling. There are sections that deal with psychiatry, mental illness, and different forms of psychological counseling, which are helpful, but a more current resource that addresses current secular views might prove more helpful.

Nevertheless, here are some points from Adams that are particularly relevant, presented in the order in which they appear in the book.

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The Role of the Holy Spirit in Counseling

Adams points out that we are aiming at change and growth in people's lives, and only the Holy Spirit can produce the fruit that the Bible speaks of. Therefore, the counselor must be committed to using the Word in counseling because that is what the Spirit uses to bring about change.

In fact, Adams says that, "Counseling without the Scriptures can only be expected to be counseling without the Holy Spirit." Also, remembering that the Holy Spirit is sovereign can encourage the counselor by reminding him that his ministry does not depend on his own ability. The counselor, therefore, should be patient, knowing that the Spirit works in his own time.

A Definition of Nouthetic Counseling

Adams derived the name "nouthetic counseling" from the Greek word *noutheteo*, which is generally translated as "admonish." Adams points out that this ministry is for all in the church (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16) but particularly for pastors. Adams devotes one chapter to the subject of "The Pastor as a Nouthetic Counselor."

Adams lays out the basic elements of nouthetic counseling. This method of counseling presupposes a problem—there is something that needs to change. This problem is addressed through verbal confrontation, with the counselor emphasizing what the counselee must do. Motivated by love, the counselor offers instruction intended to benefit the counselee. Scripture is the key to the counsel (2 Tim 3:16) and requires personal involvement and investment, as seen by the tears of the apostle Paul (Acts 20:31). Love is the ultimate goal (1 Tim 1:5).

Adams goes on to list some suggested reasons why nouthetic counsel might fail, and he concludes by highlighting the qualifications that counselors must possess, namely goodness, knowledge, and wisdom (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16). This indicates that some believers can only counsel so far, and again shows the need for trained pastors to see this as a normal part of their pastoral ministry.

Adams has many other helpful things to teach in this important volume, such as the importance of seeing sin as *the* issue with which the counselor and counselee must deal. This is really good news, however, because the Bible provides answers for sin. The counselor, therefore, should never minimize the counselee's expression of their sin.

Adams also points out how the counselee cannot say "can't." The Bible provides solutions to problems, not just ways to adapt to them. Adams also stresses the importance of helping the counselee to develop discipline in their lives, with the counselor providing a model to follow.

Additionally, Adams provides practical help with child training, parents counseling their children, and even a complete chapter on training Christian

school teachers in the basics of nouthetic counseling. There is one more section, however, I would like to highlight.

Communication

Anyone who has done any counseling knows that communication is often mentioned by the counselee(s) as the major problem, and they are looking for some techniques to help in this area. Adams explains why we have communication problems and does a masterful job of tracing the problem back to the root, which is found in the Garden of Eden. In this section, Adams points out the origins of blame shifting. This section will help any counselor get beyond the surface issues, address the counselee's proclivity to blame others, and help him get to the core of the issue.

Adams then turns to God's solution in Ephesians 4:25-32. Here we are taught to lay aside falsehood, anger, and resentment, and attack problems with the goal of reconciliation. Anyone who has received much training in biblical counseling is, no doubt, very familiar with using this passage to help counselees think right and learn to communicate in ways that edify rather than tear down.

Adams acknowledges that his book was just a beginning, and he recognized that some of his original work would need to be built upon and expanded. Most recently, some biblical counselors have emphasized the need to address suffering as well as sin as a problem that Christians face. Additionally, not everyone will agree with referring to counselees as "clients." (Some may not even like calling them "counselees.") Also, some might take issue with some of the techniques Adams refers to, such as the "conference table" for resolving family problems or the "code of conduct" chart for raising children.

Overall, Adams' work deserves a regular read because it is foundational and hits so much on the same basic issues we deal with now—fifty-five years later. This book is a strong testimony to the sufficiency of the Scripture.

Heath Lambert, ed. *A Call to Clarity*. Heath Lambert, 2024. 191 pp. $3.99 (paper).

Cliff McManis*

Dr. Heath Lambert is a pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida, an author, and a Fellow with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). Lambert is the editor and publisher of this volume, and he authored the *Introduction* as well as two of the six chapters. Lambert clearly states the purpose of the multiauthor book in the *Introduction*: to clarify the main issues in the current ongoing intramural dispute among various factions in "the biblical counseling movement." The "biblical counseling movement" began with the work of Jay Adams in the 1960s (21).

Lambert says the dispute is over the meaning and application of "biblical sufficiency" (vii) by those who claim to be biblical counselors. Lambert's camp holds to complete biblical sufficiency, whereas detractors in other camps hold to varying degrees of integration. Those who hold to any form of integration Lambert calls "syncretistic" (iv). More specifically, Lambert says the current integrationists are a new breed in that they wield a fresh theological argument to justify their syncretism. Integrationists of past generations mixed biblical truths with artificial ideas leeched from their misguided views of "general revelation." The new generation of integrationists does the same with the doctrine of "common grace." For the sake of argument, Lambert says there are three different camps within the biblical counseling movement who are participants in the debate whom he labels as the Deniers, the Pretenders, and the Defenders (iv-vii).

The Deniers are the "New Integrationists" and the antagonists in this book. Lambert calls them "dishonest" (v-vi), "cunning," and "wrong" (v). They are wrong because they make false assertions and are dishonest because they willingly redefine biblical words and ideas. They are cunning, for they are trying to initiate a coup at the leadership level of the biblical counseling movement.

The second group constitutes the Pretenders. They are biblical counselors who pretend that there is no debate going on in the movement regarding the definition and application of biblical sufficiency as historically understood within the movement. They ignore the real issues out of compromise (vi).

The third and final group are the Defenders, which is Lambert's group. It

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includes the four co-authors of this book, who are all fellow pastors with Lambert at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville (vii). This group "is trying to defend the traditional understanding of biblical counseling," which rejects integration and syncretism, champions biblical sufficiency, preserves honesty, and follows in the footsteps of the movement's pioneers, such as Adams, Mack, and Powlison (v).

Lambert concludes the *Introduction* with the promise that the Pretenders within the biblical counseling movement will inevitably be exposed for their misdirection, denials, and mischaracterizations (ix). Lambert exhorts the reader to stick to objective facts and avoid being clouded in thinking by personalities or emotion. Truth will win out over time. Overall, Lambert's *Introduction* presents this work as categorically polemical, and he comes out swinging as a result. He is ready for the fight and not afraid to grapple with his antagonists, the Pretenders. Interestingly, in the *Introduction* the Pretenders remain nameless. This omission piqued my interest, and I wanted to read on to discover just who these Pretenders and Deniers are that I need to be leery of as a long-time biblical counselor.

After the *Introduction*, the first article is written by Lambert. The book looks more like a theological journal than a traditional book. There are no numbered chapters, just titled sections or articles by the different authors. Lambert's opening article is Puritanesque and titled, "Priests in the Garden, Zombies in the Wilderness, and Prophets on the Wall: The Current State of the Contemporary Biblical Counseling Movement" (1-35). In this article, (which was inspired by David Powlison), Lambert calls himself a "prophet on the wall" (18). His job is to protect the integrity of the biblical counseling movement by warning the legitimate biblical priests of compromised biblical counselors who are nothing more than "zombies." Zombies masquerade as true biblical counselors but are really "wolves in sheep's clothing" for they reject biblical sufficiency and twist the true meaning of "common grace" (25). Zombies also attack faithful counselors like Lambert because he is a prophet who speaks loudly, warning true biblical counselors of the danger of zombies. Again, like his *Introduction*, Lambert keeps the compromised, dangerous zombie counselors nameless. Although at the end of the article, after calling them "wolves," he says many of them are people he knows and are even his "brothers and sisters in Christ" (34). Lambert concludes his article by calling the guilty, compromised zombie counselors to repentance (35).

The second feature article is by Pastor Austin Collins and is titled, "Psychological Charlatans and Common Grace" (37-75). Inspired by Charles Spurgeon's late nineteenth-century battle against the "downgrade" influence of theological liberalism among churches in his day, Collins says today's Christians must similarly resist the tide of any teaching that deceptively undermines the doctrine of sufficiency. The nameless zombies in Lambert's previous chapter are explicitly called out and named in this article. These New

Integrationists are compromisers spoiling the biblical counseling movement at the highest level. They have drifted from the sufficiency of Scripture and call themselves "redemptive counselors" (38, 63, 66). They justify integration by redefining the doctrine of sufficiency (40), twisting the meaning of "common grace," and by misrepresenting the view of Jay Adams on both matters. Collins sets the record straight. The guilty, misleading perpetrators include four professors from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina: Nate Brooks, Brad Hambrick, Kristin Kellen, and Sam Williams (38, 148). Another dangerous zombie is Jeremy Lelek, the president of the Association of Biblical Counselors (68). There are others as well (38, 66).

The third article is by Pastor Mark Shaw and is titled, "Conveying God's Love, Wisdom, and Power Through Biblical Language" (77-93). Unlike the other articles, Shaw's has only one footnote (80), so he confines his citations to Scripture instead of outside sources. Shaw's main argument is that biblical counselors need to preserve the language of the Bible when helping people. This means counselors will routinely have to translate the secular language used by counselees to show how God understands the problem and solution in his terms, as found in Scripture. Compromised counselors mix biblical language with secular theories and vocabulary. They think God needs help. And as a result, they undermine the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, who only uses God's Word to bring about change. Words and language matter. Precision matters. God owns human language, and he has communicated to us in the Bible sufficiently all matters pertaining to life and godliness (84). God's Word is the only reliable resource for biblical counselors for it is true, powerful, and loving (92).

The fourth article is by Pastor Sean Perron and is titled, "Mislabeling Counseling and the Great Commission" (95-123). Perron, like the other authors in this book, seeks to bring clarity to the biblical counseling movement at the most fundamental level. He argues that some popular counselors are calling themselves "biblical" when they are not. They are not true biblical counselors because they mislabel the phrase "biblical counseling." Jeremy Lelek of Metroplex Wellness and Counseling (101) is "unethical" (103) for he mislabels his product by redefining the phrase *biblical counseling* (104), as he mixes secular psychology practices with the Bible. He twists Scripture to do it (103). Nate Brooks of Southeastern Baptist Seminary "mislabels" by falsely alleging that true biblical counselors, like Adams, Mack and Lambert, practice integration (110). Perron shows clearly why both men distort the facts. Perron concludes the article by reminding biblical counselors that knowing Christ personally provides all needed sufficiency in counseling (119).

The fifth article is by Pastor Ryan Trzeciak and is titled, "The Misguided Hope of Mental Health" (125-146). In this article Trzeciak exposes the folly

of modern psychiatry and psychology due to its false worldview which is based on an errant anthropology. Secular psychiatry wrongly views the human constitution by conflating the inner and outer man (131). Scripture teaches that a human is one being, made in God's image, constituted of the physical (a material body) and an immaterial inner man (called the heart and mind). Thus, a human is spiritual (inner) and material (outer). Secular psychiatry denies man's dichotomous nature, eschewing the inner, immaterial soul, and sees man as a one-dimensional physical, biological entity, that is the byproduct of evolution. As a result, secular psychiatry equates the immaterial mind with the physical brain. So, they diagnose all mental problems as being physical, medical problems. Trzeciak shows the folly of this view using Scripture (127) as well as studies in modern psychiatry (136-137). He also shows how secular psychiatry offers a pseudo hope, whereas the Bible offers the only true hope through the work of Jesus the Savior (146). He closes his article by critiquing a book by two zombie pastors, David Murray and Tom Karel, Jr (140).

The sixth and final article is written by Lambert and is titled, "Six Crucial Confusions of the New Integrationists" (147-181) and it is a critique of the counseling philosophy propagated by several professors at Southeastern Theological Seminary (150). The counselors at Southeastern call themselves "redemptive counselors." Lambert has six criticisms. First, they misrepresent traditional integrationists and biblical counselors (152). Second, they distort the meaning of "integration" (156). Third, they misrepresent what biblical counselors believe about extra-biblical information (163). Fourth, they misrepresent Jay Adams (165). Fifth, they are confused about the doctrine of sanctification (170). And sixth, they minimize the importance of the doctrine of sufficiency. Lambert goes on to warn his readers again of the dangers of the New Integrationists, the "redemptive counselors" (177), the faculty members of Southeastern Seminary, who are the dangerous and deceptive "zombies" he mentioned in his first article. He closes by calling them to repent of the hurtful mischaracterizations they have made about biblical counselors through "reckless" and "irresponsible" assertions (179-180).

The title of this book says it is a "Call to Clarity." In the *Introduction* Lambert says the authors' goal is to bring clarity to the current debate within the biblical counseling movement by exposing the core issues and by properly reestablishing the proper definitions of key terms. I think they were successful. The authors made it clear that the heart of the debate is over the topic of "biblical sufficiency"—its definition and application. All five authors clearly and succinctly define and defend the doctrine of sufficiency in a biblical manner. They also make it clear that biblical sufficiency in biblical counseling is being undermined by covert integrationists who misuse and twist the meaning of "common grace" while hiding their true identity as syncretists. These New Integrationists are also critical of classic biblical

counselors and misrepresent those who started the movement, such as Jay Adams and others. This book is a needed and helpful warning to all biblical counselors, reminding us to always be discerning of everything we read, hear, and watch. I recommend this read to all pastors and Christian counselors.

As for weaknesses in the book, there are no glaring ones. But I have two suggested improvements. First, Lambert comes across as overly defensive in all three chapters he wrote compared to the articles written by the other men. An objective, third-party editor could have easily ameliorated much of the unnecessary steam coming from his pen, which would have brought his presentation balance. He has much excellent content and is a good writer. He admits in his final article that he feels "hurt" by his detractors (179). It shows.

Second, Lambert feels strongly compelled to defend a "movement." He explicitly refers to the "biblical counseling movement" twenty-six times in his first article. He calls it, "our movement" eight times. He says he is a "prophet on the wall" for the movement and he is even the "conscience" of the movement (15). Those are grandiose claims. Who made him the conscience, prophet, and guardian of the biblical counseling movement? Why is it his movement? Who is the "our" in "our movement" (9)? Did Jay Adams try to start a movement? I think Jay Adams was just trying to be a faithful Bible teacher, pastor, and seminary professor, and God blessed his efforts. Pastors, like Lambert and his colleagues, need to prioritize overseeing, guarding, protecting, feeding, and leading their local church, not any amorphous, unwieldy, ecumenical, global movements. No small, self-designated committee can micromanage an undefined mass of individuals that has no finite identity. Paul told the elders at Ephesus to prioritize shepherding over their local church (Acts 20). Peter told local church elders to focus on shepherding and overseeing the finite number of sheep God has allotted to their charge that constitute their local church (1 Pet 5:1-4). Pastors are charged by God to shepherd the local church, not man-made movements or institutions. Jesus promised to build only one institution, and that is the Church (Matt 16:18). That should be our focus.

Brad Hambrick. *Navigating Destructive Relationships: 9 Steps Toward Healing.* Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2024. 276 pp. $18.99.

Reviewed by Tyler Sultze*

Navigating through life is a difficult task. It is often made more difficult when we encounter twists and turns we were not expecting, or even roadblocks that impede our progress. These obstacles are sometimes caused by relational conflict. While many may have experienced a "dishonoring relationship" in their lives, some have, unfortunately, been caught in what can be described as a "destructive relationship."

Brad Hambrick, Pastor of Counseling at The Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and council member of the Biblical Counseling Coalition, has authored *Navigating Destructive Relationships: 9 Steps Toward Healing,* to help those struggling within a destructive relationship. In his book, he seeks to counsel Christians through their suffering so that they are not merely survivors of a destructive relationship but salt and light in the world for God's glory. After providing an overview of the book, I will discuss both its strengths and weaknesses.

Overview

Navigating Destructive Relationships is a curriculum workbook designed to be used within a G4 group. The author defines G4 as, "A peer support and recovery group ministry (for example, like AA or Celebrate Recovery) built on two 9-step models that allow individuals to invest a season of their life to overcoming a life dominating struggle of sin or suffering" (1). The "G" in G4 stands for gospel-centered groups, while "4" expresses the types of groups (recovery, support, therapeutic educational, and process) the curricula features. The nine steps are meant to be "the gospel in slow motion" (248), as G4 believes, "it is through the gospel that God transforms lives as he gives us a new heart" (3). A destructive relationship follows the rubric for a suffering-based group where the goal is "to bring forgiveness, comfort, and hope," to those, "painful experiences for which we are not responsible" (3).

The nine steps for the suffering-based group are: (1) "Prepare yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering," (2) "Acknowledge the specific history and realness of my suffering," (3)

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"Understand the impact of my suffering," (4) "Learn my suffering story which I use to make sense of my experience," (5) "Mourn the wrongness of what happened and receive God's comfort," (6) "Learn my gospel story by which God gives meaning to my experience," (7) "Identify goals that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering," (8) "Persevere in the new life and identity to which God has called me," and (9) "Steward all of my life for God's glory." Throughout the book, each step often has multiple parts that further elaborate on the step to help the reader work through their suffering or apply the gospel to their specific circumstance. At the end of each chapter, the author provides group discussion questions to solidify the teaching of the chapter and provide an opportunity for care between the members of the group.

Hambrick defines a destructive relationship as, "one where your loved one is committed to a pattern of abuse, control, addiction, or comparable choices that severely impact your life" (10). He is careful not to conflate one's sin with the suffering he or she is experiencing, but is aware of the influence of sin can still have upon a sufferer. For example, he brings out the following basic principle for those living in a destructive relationship, "Being in a destructive relationship is suffering, not sin, but we need to be aware of the ways that suffering creates temptation so that we do not cede more power to this relationship than it already has" (14). With his careful and thoughtful definition, he provides a nuanced approach to those dealing with a destructive relationship without automatically blaming the sufferer for some sin.

Each step along the way helps one maintain purpose and appropriate expectations as they grow in their understanding and application of truth. Step six gives the following goal to illustrate this:

> At the end of this step, I want to be able to say… "I have already told you the false narrative I drew from my past [review step 4]. Letting go of that story, identity, and set of beliefs left me with only God and the trusted friends I've invited on this journey with me. It was good (and scary) to begin rebuilding my life from that foundation. Now I am beginning to understand my hardships and my future in light of the hope the gospel brings [examples of life lessons from Step 6]" (142).

Such clearly defined and measurable desired outcomes structure the book and make it easy for one to follow along. With the many variables that go into navigating a destructive relationship, Hambrick helpfully provides simple structures within each step to assist in moving one along in the process of change.

Strengths

Navigating Destructive Relationships: 9 Steps Toward Healing is a helpful and important book that fills a void in the biblical counseling publishing world. In its focus, it balances not being too specific as to limit its readership (that is, it is not merely for those in a physically abusive relationship), and yet not so broad that everyone finds themselves in a destructive relationship. The book engages a demographic and audience that can sometimes be missed or overlooked. When looking for a resource faithful to God's Word to help those within a destructive relationship, this book will prove to be a valued asset.

Hambrick does a masterful job of saturating his book with Scripture to instruct, motivate, and encourage the reader toward change. In stating how the book is to be used, he says, "Keep this book with your Bible and expect to move back and forth between the two as you read" (5). These devotionals require the reader to have their Bible ready to read and reflect on the Scriptures. Such intentionality teaches one to depend upon and apply God's Word to their lives in various circumstances. It is meant to instill the habit of regular Bible reading and meditation to renew one's mind and bring about greater growth in godly living.

While seeking growth in those navigating through destructive relationships, another strength of the book is its slow, patient, careful, and methodical approach to change. The goal is not for one to merely complete the curriculum and move on. The reader is repeatedly reminded not to rush through but to move at a speed they feel is manageable. Hambrick creates an atmosphere of grace where people are allowed to grow and make decisions at their own pace.

One particular perk of the G4 series of books is that Hambrick has recorded videos on his website that correspond to each chapter of the book. Before you read, he encourages you to watch the video of him teaching the material. Through these videos, Hambrick's gift for biblical counseling shines through. He knows and connects with what people are going through in a destructive relationship and graciously shares his heart. The tone with which he counsels exhibits patience, compassion, truth, and heartfelt care. If you watch the videos before reading the chapter, you might find (as I did), that you hear the author's voice while reading the words on the page. Having a set of videos to go along with the curriculum adds a much-needed personal touch to people trying to navigate through destructive relationships.

Weaknesses

Hambrick does an excellent job of basing his steps on gospel principles and clearly provides gospel hope to those he is counseling. The book, however, does lack a simple, clear articulation of the gospel. It appears that it is

assumed the reader already knows the gospel and while it is stated that the steps are, "the gospel in slow motion," (248) they are worded in such a way as to make them a response to one's understanding of the gospel rather than the gospel itself. A brief and succinct statement upfront on what the gospel is may help those who have a faulty or misguided understanding. If the gospel is the instrument of change in one's life (and I and in full agreement with Hambrick that it is), let us not assume that people know it, but let us state it clearly, so that the good news of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done permeates the whole of our biblical counseling.

One of the most, potentially, controversial parts of the book comes in the chapter entitled, "The Divorce Decision," (238). As part three of step eight, this chapter focuses specifically on those in a destructive relationship in their marriage. Hambrick recognizes there are many different views regarding divorce, but he tips his hand to his own view when he says, "But God also hates abuse, addiction, and everything else that destroys the lives of those he loves. Sometimes divorce is wise, appropriate, and livesaving" (238). He goes on to say, "But even when divorce is a legitimate option, that does not mean it is the option you should choose" (239). Part of this decision will affect one's relationship with their church.

While the author tries to help one think through this decision, he recognizes that it should not be done in isolation. In trying to help the counselee garner as much support from the church's leadership as possible, he advises to, "Involve your church leadership as early as possible. As we mentioned above it took you months, maybe years, to arrive at your decision" (241). With this statement it appears one converses with his or her church leadership only after the divorce decision has already been made. Is it ever advisable to include church leadership in the decision-making process? Would this allow the church leadership to fulfill the role God has given them to shepherd the flock under their care and, at the same time, demonstrate one is willing to submit to the leadership? Hambrick does understand and promote in the end that, "The church is your long-term source of care and spiritual family" (220), but I believe it would be better if there were also ways to encourage one's relationship with their church all along the way.

Conclusion

Overall, Hambrick is to be commended on providing a biblical, accessible, wise, and compassionate curriculum to help people navigate through destructive relationships in their lives. He is winsomely able to chart a course through the difficult circumstances of destructive relationships to comfort the sufferer and point them toward the necessary change God intends for their life. Whether used in the context of a G4 group (as it is designed) or by a pastor counseling a member of the church placed under his care, *Navigating Destructive Relationships* will prove to be a beneficial resource filled with

applicable truth from the Scriptures that seeks to point suffering saints towards Christ so they might be sanctified and God would receive all the glory.

Mack, Wayne. *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling: Utilizing the 8 "I"s to Promote True Biblical Change*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2021. 159 pp., $17.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by James R. Street*

Dr. Wayne Mack served the Lord in a variety of roles including pastor, professor, writer, and biblical counselor. He received theological training at Wheaton College, Philadelphia Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. He is most well-known for his many years of experience and faithful ministry in biblical counseling. For many years, Dr. Mack served as the chair of the graduate and undergraduate programs in biblical counseling at The Master's University and Seminary. In the final chapter of his life, Dr. Mack spent his days as the Director of ACBC Africa and an elder at Lynnwood Baptist Church in Pretoria, South Africa. He passed into the presence of the Lord recently on August 10, 2025. Dr. Wayne Mack was a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ who cared deeply for his church.

Mack wrote *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling* to equip the mature believers to help the immature, and the strong to help the weak. Addressing the subject of biblical counseling primarily from the perspective of methodology, the book is summarized well in the subtitle: *Utilizing the 8 "I"s to Promote True Biblical Change*. Mack desires all those in the church who aspire to be better biblical counselors or disciplers to know how to incorporate the tried-and-true method of the 8 "I"s of counseling into their interpersonal ministry endeavors. He has written this 159-page book specifically for laymen, counselors, and pastors of various stripes.

Mack organizes his book around the 8 "I"s, devoting one chapter to each one. The Introduction to the book provides an overview of the 8 "I"s: involvement, inspiration, inventory, interpretation, instruction, inducement, implementation, and integration. After listing and defining each one, he grounds the methodology of the 8 "I"s into the broad categories of systematic theology. In chapter 1, Mack recounts the value of the 8 "I"s, demonstrating their nature and impact in the biblical counseling process.

Chapter 2 describes the first of the 8 "I"s, involvement. According to Mack, involvement is an important first step in biblical counseling because it allows the counselor to communicate love and care to the counselee, rather than presenting himself as someone who is only interested in fixing a

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problem. Mack explains, "Effective biblical counselors take a *people-centered* approach. It's more about the person than the problem" (46).

In Chapter 3, Mack lays out the second of the eight "I"s: inspiration. Inspiration is about delivering hope to the counselee. "Hope motivates change" (62), and true hope is only found in the pages of Scripture.

Chapter 4 delineates inventory. Good biblical counselors must spend ample time asking questions to learn as much as they can about the counselee and the problem the counselee is experiencing. Mack provides a useful acronym, PREACH+D, to help counselors know the kinds of questions they should be asking (for example, physical, resources and relationships, emotional, actions, conceptual or cognitive, historical, and desires).

Chapter 5 transitions to interpretation. Once the counselor learns all there is to know about the counselee and has a grasp on the nature of the problem, he can sift through the information by looking for themes and then evaluating them carefully through the filter of Scripture. The Bible, not secular theories or ideologies, is the standard for interpreting the problems people face.

Chapter 6 introduces the subject of instruction. The goal of all biblical instruction in counseling is that the counselee will grow in Christlikeness. Therefore, all instruction must be biblically-rooted, biblically accurate, and biblically sound.

Chapter 7 discusses inducement. Mack encourages all biblical counselors to secure the commitment of their counselees to follow through with the instruction they have received, stating that, "People usually don't change by chance—but by choice" (126).

In chapter 8, Mack describes the kinds of work counselors can assign their counselees to help them implement the instructions they have agreed to follow. Thinking through and planning helpful homework assignments tailored to each counselee and his unique situation is indispensable for the process of change to take place.

Finally, chapter 9 deals with integration. When a counselee begins to grow and make discernible progress, the counselor must help the counselee become comfortable with studying and applying Scripture, as well as integrating it into a biblical local church. Counselees must be encouraged to find accountability among fellow believers in their church and to serve others with the gifts God has given them.

Mack's short book captures the heart of biblical counseling methodology. The 8 "I"s have proven to be a successful blueprint counselors can use to help Christians work through their struggles, because each one is derived from Scripture. Mack successfully establishes this theological connection. However, his book is not only helpful theologically, but also practically. With many years of counseling experience to draw upon, Mack also provides the reader with numerous practical tips throughout the book on what to do and

what not to do in the counseling room. His insights into the means, manner, and ministry of counseling provide any reader with a valuable resource they can rely on repeatedly to help them in their counseling.

If there is any room for improvement, there are times when Mack could have supplied a few more examples or illustrations to explain the concepts he introduced. For instance, in the chapter on inventory on page 93, Mack discusses the importance of asking questions based on answers from prior questions. While his advice is sound, it may be challenging for counselors to determine how to craft effective follow-up questions. A few examples may have been useful to teach readers how to formulate improvised questions.

Nevertheless, *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling* serves as an indispensable contribution to the world of biblical counseling and Christian ministry. While the 8 "I"s are nothing new, readers will find this book to be a useful, condensed resource they can reference for sharpening their counseling skills. This is a great book for anyone wanting to strengthen their interpersonal ministry of the Word in the church.

Jay E. Adams. *How to Help People Change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. 224 pp. $12.99

David Tong*

Introduction

Jay E. Adams (1929-2020) was a pastor at Harrison Bridge Road Presbyterian Church, a homiletics professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, the founder of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (formerly known as the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors), and author of over fifty books on pastoral ministry, preaching, counseling, Bible study, and Christian living, including *Competent to Counsel, The Christian's Counselor's Manual, The Christian Counselor's Casebook,* and *A Theology of Christian Counseling.*

Summary

How to Help People Change is divided into five parts: Part I: Change in Biblical Perspective; Part II: Step One: Teaching; Part III: Step Two: Conviction; Part IV: Step Three: Correction; Part V: Step Four: Disciplined Training in Righteousness. Adams writes in the introduction of his aptly titled book, that though there are many competing schools of thought in counseling, all counselors agree that "The aim of counseling is to change people" (xi). However, the kind of change Christian counselors ought to aim for in people, according to Adams, is a change "far beyond" the "superficial change offered by secular counselors" (xii). Instead, this change must come from the Holy Spirit and its aim is Christlikeness. In *How to Help People Change*, Adams argues that this kind of change can only be facilitated by a four-step process only found in the Bible. Adams writes that this book was "specifically designed to elucidate the process of counseling in a focused and systemic way… This book presents a fresh perspective not only on how to counsel, but also on what measure to take at what stages of counseling" (ix).

In Part I, (chapters 1-5) Adams sets the tone and builds the foundation for the next four parts by creating a case for a *Sola Scriptura* approach to counseling. He claims that biblical change only comes from "the ministry of the Word" and "brings the counselee closer to the likeness of Christ" (xiii). The latter four parts are the four steps, exposited from 2 Timothy 3:14-16.

In Chapter 1, Adams starts with the understanding that counseling often begins when there is friction in relationships. Adams charges counselors,

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however to prioritize the need for reconciliation first with God through the gospel before addressing problems between other people. He maintains that to attempt to counsel without considering God and what he reveals in his Word about true living is to confuse true change with superficial behavior modification (7). Adams asserts, "that is why we must study carefully what God has said about the process of change…and be ready and willing at all times to pursue it in counseling" (9). Thus, Adams' goal is to first convince the reader that what people need is biblical change. If the reader accepts this, then it follows that the Bible is the basis for counseling.

Thus, in Chapters 2 and 3, Adams grounds the four-step Biblical process of change in God's Word, expositing 2 Timothy 3:14-16. In Chapter 4, Adams discusses the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling and denies the necessity of psychology (34). Adams concludes Part I with Chapter 5, explaining that Biblical counsel only affects biblical change if counselees make the effort to obey biblical commands while depending on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Part II (chapters 6-10), Adams introduces the first step of counseling: Teaching. In these chapters, Adams discusses the importance of teaching, what to teach, and how to teach to effect change in someone's life. In Chapter 6, Adams writes about *why* counselors must teach. He explains that the method of biblical counseling is discipleship: the teaching of, and living in submission to what is revealed in Scripture.

In Chapter 7, Adams elaborates *what* to teach. Counselors must teach God's divine and objective standard as outlined in God's Word. For true change to take root, Christian counselors and their counselees must continually commit to the absolute, sinless, and divine standards of God's Word and not rely on subjective, shifting, and flawed human opinion. Adams asserts in Chapters 8 and 9 emphasize *how* to teach. To properly teach, biblical principles must be thoroughly exposited while elevating dependence on God (not short fixes or human expertise) to effect long-term, lasting, legitimate change. Adams warns in Chapter 10 that effectiveness can only be unlocked if counselors are personally involved, personable, communicate illustratively, and resourceful in methodology to aid instruction (97).

Part III speaks of the necessity and role of biblical conviction, the task of bringing a case against a counselee for his sin, and biblical change. In Chapter 11 Adams explains that conviction is necessary for change and is God's way of demonstrating he cares about his relationship with his children. Conviction only comes about by the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of the Word. In Chapter 12, Adams defines conviction as the objective exposure of evidence that reveals sin and uncovers hidden guilt. Chapter 13 discusses data gathering and the interpretation of personal problems through biblical categories and using biblical terminology (123). In Chapter 14, Adams

stresses that Scripture must be deliberately and skillfully used to bring conviction in Christian counseling (125).

Part IV explains the correction process from conviction to repentance to restoration, nearing the final process of change. Chapters 16 and 17 define correction and the goal of correction: repentance. Chapter 18 examines the act of confession, its purpose, and the goal of true reconciliation (not for shallow cathartic Freudian relief). Chapter 19 deliberates on the necessary result of repentance and forsaking sin. This is the radical, self-denying, willingness to abandon disobedience. Chapter 20 concludes the correction process. After the previous steps have been appropriately ascertained, vetted, and confirmed, full restoration to affected parties of the counselee's sin becomes the highest priority as part of the correction process (165).

Part V is the final step in the process of change: establishing a disciplined practice of righteous living. In light of the end of the process, Adams cautions in Chapter 21 that this step is crucial and not to be rushed. In order for lasting biblical change to continue from this point, Christian counselors must help "counselees" establish new patterns of biblical righteousness. Adams writes, "Change is not complete until the fourth step is accomplished or at least well on its way... It is not enough to put off the old ways, even if one guards against them by radical amputation. There must be an equal and opposite, positive effort to put on new biblical ways in the place of the old ones discarded. One cannot really put off the old without replacing it with the new" (173). Adams reemphasizes the Spirit's work in Chapter 22, that righteousness, or "conformity to God's biblical standard," can only be produced with the help of the Spirit. Chapter 23 grounds righteous living in a discussion of the doctrine of justification. Christ has freed believers by declaring the righteous ("justification") and by working to make them practically righteous ("sanctification"), enabling them to resist temptation, change one's former ways, and live a life that is pleasing to God. Adams reiterates in Chapter 24 that biblical training in righteousness is to put off old sinful habits and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, put on new, God-honoring patterns of life that flow out of a heart aligned with God and his purposes. Adams concludes in Chapter 25 by saying that the Bible, if properly handled and depended upon by counselors, will prove itself to be the only source of real change in believers.

Critical Evaluation

Adams' goal in this book is to "elucidate the process of counseling in a focused and systemic way " (ix). Adams accomplishes this task successfully—not only in clarity but with propositions that draw distinct dividing lines that should edify and convict any Christian to follow the method he outlines in this book.

Overall, Adams writes clearly and concisely. The verbiage Adams uses is

not academic, esoteric, or highly philosophical, but simple, straightforward, and lucid. It is also evident that Adams was not a theoretician but well-experienced in his vocation as a pastor and counselor. His illustrations, case studies, and hypothetical counseling dialogue are instructive and helpful in illuminating his argument. However, the strength and distinctions of his method come from the necessity of the gospel and God's Word (*Sola Scriptura)*, dependence on God's involvement in counseling, and commitment to God's standards and expectations for counselors and counselees.

One of the strengths of Adams' method for change is that its foundation is the gospel message. Adams' method hinges on the premise that true change can only start with the gospel and continue from the authority of Scripture alone. Even while explaining this method, Adams refuses to include sources outside of Scripture. Instead, he chooses specific Scriptures and explains them by using illustrations and counseling scenarios. Adams not only teaches *Sola Scriptura*; he practices it. Because the structure of Adams' method is simply an expositional outline of 2 Timothy 3:14-17, the four steps he delivers derive directly from Scriptural authority and integrity.

By contrast, methods that are not derived from Scripture lack credibility because they are based on lesser, fallible, and constantly displaced authorities and leave God out of the picture. It follows, then, these other methods are, at best, redundant, cheap imitations of what is already revealed in Scripture. or, at worst, can only produce Pharisees potentially even more damned than before (viii, 4-5, 7). When presented this way, Adams elevates the methods of biblical counseling and calls into question the credibility of all other methods. Without a commitment to God's revelation of reality, what is at stake is merely cultural awareness and societal conformity.

Also, distinct from other methods is the view that the counseling relationship is not two-fold but three: the counselor, the counselee, and God himself (43). Adams helpfully points out that the counselor is merely one of the instruments by which God enables change in their counselee. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, the counselor cannot adequately teach, truly convict, draw out confession, restore, and aid in developing proper habits of righteousness.

Likewise, without the Holy Spirit enabling him, the counselee will not progress in sanctification. For example, in step two of Adams' process (conviction), he asserts that counselors must address identifiable sinful response patterns. However, unless the Holy Spirit informs and inflicts the conscience of the counselee, simply pointing out sinful thought patterns and behaviors will provide no springboard for change.

In step three (correction), the counselee must confess; that is, they must agree with God (not just the counselor) about their thinking, behaviors, and actions. Without the Holy Spirit, the best-case scenario is two individuals

merely agreeing on an interpretation of Scripture, the circumstances, and what to do about it.

Another strength of this book is Adams' clarity on the expectations of the biblical counselors and counselees. In the first step of Adams' process (teaching), he rightly exhorts counselors to live lives of integrity, according to knowledge of the whole counsel of God. Adams reminds the reader of James 3:1, warning to take stock of the responsibility counseling entails (55). While Adams explains that God has a high standard for this work, this should not dissuade aspiring counselors but instead challenge them to self-examination and to continue to grow in knowledge and dependence on Scripture. An academic degree in some expertise is irrelevant since it is both insufficient and not required.

In Adams' step four (training in righteousness), he exhorts counselors to persevere in counseling until counselees have begun producing godly habits of righteousness (195). Counselees must be discipled to the same objective and revealed standard that counselors are called to uphold: Christlikeness. This implies that biblical counseling is not a haphazard experimental process with moving goalposts due to new observations or uncertainty, requiring skilled subject experts on the bleeding edge of discovery and man-made standards. Rather, it is a work that relies on truth revealed by the Creator. Progress in Adams' method is measured objectively regardless of emotional outcome. Certainly, progress in a counseling case may be hindered by human finiteness and sin, but these expectations and standards come from the dependable, inerrant, unchanging, and sufficient Word of God.

The weaknesses of Adams' book are very minor and even debatable. An apparent weakness of Adams' method is that it requires both the counselor and the counselee to be Bible believing Christians. A criticism of Adams' method is that biblical counselors cannot help most people because they are not believers. However, what this critique misses is that any person who needs counseling is in dire need of Christ. In this case, counseling is not merely a path to evangelism; it begins with it as well.

Because Adams is so clear on the subject, he may come across combative to readers who hold a different perspective. *How to Help People Change* may not be immediately appreciated by everyone. In the book, though Adams takes aim at influential names in Psychology and Psychiatry like Laing, Freud, Rogers, Skinner, and Schuller, he does not take time to critically evaluate and refute competing positions in detail. However, the purpose of this book is not to provide a thorough critique of modern psychological methods. Rather, Adams clarifies his own position by contradicting the fundamental presuppositions of modern pyschology's naturalistic approach to human problems, and exposes how secular systems and worldviews are contrary to Scripture. It is in this way that he challenges his readers to critically and biblically evaluate the claims of secular psychiatry and psychology and to

reconsider any perceived necessity of them.

The only other critique this reviewer has is more preferential in style. Though his arguments can stand alone as is in this book, often, after a short discourse on a key topic, Adams often references his other publications for further reading. The result is a hyper-focused thesis, concise and to-the-point, but it seems to leave out what could be helpful information to have on hand for the reader.

Conclusion

In the end, I am happy to recommend this book to any believer who is seeking clarity on how to counsel others. *How to Help People Change* inspires confidence in the Word of God as a sufficient source for life and godliness, and will be useful for any Christian—pastors and laypersons alike—who seek to help others with their personal problems.

Alan Fadling. *A Non-Anxious Life: Experiencing The Peace of God's Presence*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2024. 210 pp. $24.99

Review by Patrick Lacson*

In his book, *A Non-Anxious Life: Experiencing the Peace of God's Presence*, Alan Fadling writes not as a detached instructor offering abstract advice, but as a weary soul who has walked through the furnace of anxiety. His opening sentence sets the tone: "For most of my adult life, I've been a master of anxiety. I'm working to become a master of peace" (1). Fadling disarms his readers with honesty and humility. He positions himself not as an expert who has conquered anxiety but as a student learning to rest in God's peace. His approach transforms the book from a mere self-help manual into something resembling a spiritual diary—an extended meditation on the formation of peace in a restless heart.

Throughout the book, Fadling exposes, in personal terms, anxiety's subtle tyranny. He writes, "Anxiety is never satisfied. If I listen to its frantic warnings, it does not stop there—it finds something else to warn me about. Anxieties followed tend to multiply into more anxiety" (10). His writing style offers warmth, allowing readers to see both his vulnerability and his faith. Rather than proposing a formula for quick relief, he invites his audience into a pattern of life that reflects what he calls the "pace of the kingdom." He defines it as the non-anxious life: "a certain pace of soul, pace of interaction, pace of engagement. Living a non-anxious life is about learning the pace of the kingdom, and God's kingdom has a particular pace" (14).

To cultivate this kingdom pace, Fadling structures his reflections across fourteen chapters that blend stories, meditation, and biblical guidance. From these chapters, four major themes arise that shape the backbone of his vision: Anxiety is a Choice, Gratitude toward God, Non-Anxious Practices, and Cooperation with Jesus.

Anxiety is a Choice

In his opening chapters, Fadling portrays anxiety as more than a fleeting emotion—it is a learned habit, a reflex of the soul that becomes entrenched over time. He argues that anxiety ultimately involves a kind of participation, even consent. Quoting Jesus' words in Matthew 6:27, "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Fadling suggests that believers must

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confront anxiety as a choice between two divergent paths: one that drains energy through fruitless worry, and one that yields peace through trust. "Anxiety has a way of keeping me busy with things that don't matter," he admits, "whereas peace keeps me in a place where I see with perspective what really matters" (23).

Here, Fadling's wise counsel shines through. His depiction of anxiety as a choice challenges readers to determine if they are complicit in nurturing patterns of anxiety. Yet he does not scold or shame the anxious; instead, he invites them to imagine an alternative way of being—living at the pace of peace rather than at the speed of fear.

Gratitude Toward God

The second major theme, explored most fully in chapter 4 ("Gracious Fullness"), revolves around gratitude. For Fadling, gratitude is not merely an attitude one adopts but a posture learned from the generous heart of the Father. Drawing from John 16:26-27, he observes that Jesus' prayer reveals a Father who already delights to give, not one who must be persuaded to love. Fadling insists, "The Father does not need to be convinced to be gracious with us" (49). The Christian's gratitude, therefore, is not fearfully manufactured but given—a response to divine generosity.

This insight leads him to warn against what he calls *anxious scrupulosity*, a form of spiritual perfectionism he likens to "Christian OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder)" Citing Jeremiah 31:34, Fadling reminds readers that under the New Covenant, believers are not enslaved to obsessive self-examination but are transformed by grace: "We can be rooted in God's transformation of our minds and hearts so that we know him and his ways" (50). In other words, one's gratitude to God displaces anxiety by grounding believers in God's love rather than in their own performance.

This emphasis resurfaces in chapter 8, "A Buoyant Life," where gratitude becomes a reflection of God's joyful delight in His people. "In this present moment of my life," Fadling writes, "God finds joy in me. God does not find it difficult to smile at me. God enjoys my fellowship" (94). While his portrayal of divine pleasure is deeply touching, the lack of supporting Scripture—passages such as Zephaniah 3:17 or 1 John 1:3 come immediately to mind—leaves the proposition floating when it could have been firmly anchored. Nonetheless, Fadling's picture of a God who delights in His children offers a refreshing antidote to the performance-driven spirituality that fuels much anxiety.

Non-Anxious Practices

Fadling's most practical section emerges in chapter 5, "Practicing Presence." Here, he explores what I observe as the spatial tension between God's presence and anxiety's constriction. "When I practice the *presence* of my

anxious feelings, it ends up as an exercise in practicing the *absence* of God" (57–58, emphasis mine). This statement distills one of Fadling's most powerful insights: anxiety and divine presence cannot occupy the same mental space.

He invites readers to reverse this dynamic by intentionally acknowledging God's nearness. To illustrate, he describes a meditative practice:

> I imagine breathing the very presence of the Spirit into those places in me that feel out of alignment, stressed, tight, or uncomfortable. I imagine the Spirit realigning me, unburdening me, relaxing me, quieting me, comforting me… I often feel the effect of this in my body becoming more relaxed overall (59).

He comes to this conclusion from a meditation on 1Corinthians 6:19: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own." His contemplative approach reflects a blend of mystic spirituality and contemporary prayer rather than biblical theology. For some readers, this imaginative method of "breathing the Spirit into those places in me that feel out of alignment" displays God as a spiritual chiropractor while misinterpreting 1Corinthians 6:19, which is a New Covenant promise that the Spirit of God is no longer *with* His people (cf. Exodus 40:34) but now *in* His people (cf. John 14:15-17).

The theme of embodied practice continues in chapters 11 ("Embodied Peace") and 12 ("Rhythms of Peace"), where Fadling applies Romans 12:1 to physical worship. He argues that offering our bodies as living sacrifices includes tangible expressions—clapping, lifting hands, bowing, singing, dancing (145). In a faith often reduced to intellectual assent, Fadling's insistence on embodied devotion is refreshing. He recounts shouting prayers at the top of his lungs and reading aloud from The Book of Common Prayer as how to apply Romans 12:1.

However, the theological grounding evaporates when Fadling introduces psychiatrist Gerald May's concept of "holy energy" as a means of discerning God's will. He writes, "It's not about a yes or a no or even a not yet… it's more like a kind of energy in a certain direction when the time is right for something and a fatigue in that direction when it's not" (147). Fadling acknowledges this notion is "not theologically sophisticated," yet he affirms it by connecting "energy" to the biblical term *power* (Ephesians 3:16; 2:10). He concludes, "The presence of holy energy, its direction and flow, seems to me a perfectly good way to describe our experience of cooperating with the work of God" (147–148).

Fadling aims to teach experiential discernment, yet his constant talk of "harnessing holy energy" veers perilously close to Eastern meditation rather

than distinctly biblical spirituality. The irony is sharp: the very next verse in Romans 12:2 commands, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is—that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Renewal comes through God's Word, not through fluctuating sensations of "energy." God calls us to have our minds transformed by Scripture, not conformed to the world's notions of flowing energy.

Cooperation with Jesus

The final major theme centers on cooperation—working with Christ rather than merely for Him. In chapters 13 ("Non-Anxious Work") and 14 ("Becoming a Master of Peace"), Fadling reflects on John 14:11-14, emphasizing that believers share in Jesus' ongoing work. Anxiety arises, he argues, when Christians assume they must produce results for God rather than cooperate with his purposes. As a traveling public speaker, he admits, "Anxiety focuses my attention on me," he admits. "'Will I make myself clear? Will I say things they appreciate? Or worse, will I impress those who are listening?' This is the way of anxiety" (173).

His confession resonates deeply, particularly for those in ministry, by shifting focus from performance to partnership. Furthermore, Fadling demonstrates how rest and work can coexist under Christ's lordship. He extends this logic to Sabbath rest, noting that Jesus not only works with the Father but also rests with him (169). Fadling tries to show that work is cooperative with God, not like an employee reporting to their employer. He establishes this cooperative approach by teasing out the idea of "yoke language that was also used to describe a disciple following a rabbi" (171), which he concludes involves working with Jesus and resting with Jesus. Fadling explains, "I am not pulling the heavy end of the yoke that I am in with Jesus; he is. This is the part of why his yoke is easy and his burden is light" (172).

The book concludes where it began—with peace. Drawing from the benediction of Romans 15:33, Fadling observes that peace was not merely a polite closing to letters but a real impartation of divine blessing. As a recently ordained Anglican priest, he confesses, "I believe this is God's primary strategy for bringing about peace in our world," he writes. "He wants peace to be embodied in his people so that they might live peace in their worlds" (188). For Fadling, peace is not an abstract state but an incarnate witness; the Christian becomes an agent of God's calming presence for our troubled world.

Strengths

Fadling's prose is lyrical and deliberate, marked by rhythmic cadence and beautiful imagery. His years of global ministry and leadership training give him the ability to translate spiritual truths into accessible language. Statements such as "I was strangely viewing my anxiety as an asset when Jesus was telling me it was a liability" (17) and "Anxiety is a symptom of a mistaken level of personal sovereignty" (72) reveal a writer who can summarize profound insights into memorable lines.

The book's most helpful sections come when he offers readers a helpful view of working *with* God rather than working *for* God in an attempt to please an overbearing taskmaster. Such an approach to serving God can enslave you to anxiety and fear. He also shows that anxiety is not something that you have to live with but is a choice that can lead you to a place of peace or anxiety (that begets more anxiety). His many examples of slowing down to have an unhurried life through breathing exercises (50-62), finding more time for rest (160), and disconnecting from devices the that lead to anxiety (158) are all very practical and helpful.

Critical Concerns

Despite its charm, literary warmth, and practical wisdom, *A Non-Anxious Life* raises several concerns that prevent my recommendation.

No Clear Gospel

While Fadling references Jesus frequently, his presentation of the gospel is noticeably absent. The Bible identifies anxiety not merely as a psychological problem but as a symptom of humanity's separation from God. Only through the objective peace that comes through justification by faith—"since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1)—can true inner peace begin. Yet Fadling assumes his audience consists entirely of believers. He never addresses the unbeliever who, as Romans 3:17 says, "has not known the way of peace."

The closest he comes to a gospel summary appears on the opening page: "The way of peace that Jesus leads us into is a way that begins from within us in a relationship with him"(1). While true, this line lacks reference to sin, repentance, the cross, the resurrection, and the exercise of genuine saving faith. Without a clear denial of self and following after Christ, the peace Fadling describes risks becoming therapeutic rather than salvific—a momentary tranquility of the soul rather than an eternal reconciliation with God.

No Clear Definitions

Given the title, one might expect a precise definition of anxiety. Instead, Fadling describes it loosely as "anxious feelings" (11) or sensations of being "trapped, hopeless, or helpless" (4). He likens it to worry, confessing,

> I've worried a lot. I sometimes worry about how much I worry. Then I worry that I'm worrying about my worries. There are layers of present worry that reinforce layers of ancient worry laid down in my body. Anxiety is obviously a problem for me (9).

The most concise definition he offers is, "Anxiety equals care minus God" (20). While memorable, it fails to clearly define anxiety. Unfortunately, that definition can also apply to worry, selfishness, jealousy, anger, losing, winning, and many other emotions that prioritize misdirected care without the presence of God.

Fadling also never clarifies whether anxiety itself is sinful or simply symptomatic. Scripture distinguishes between natural concern (2 Cor. 11:28) and sinful worry (Matt. 6:25–34). Without such distinctions, readers are left to wonder whether every anxious impulse constitutes moral failure, natural predisposition, or merely a human response to danger.

No Sustained Exegesis

Fadling's eloquence occasionally overshadows biblical substance. His scattered references to Scripture serve more as decorative proof-texts than exegetical anchors. This lack of careful exposition leaves readers remembering his turns of phrase more than God's Word.

More troubling is his casual approach toward Scripture's authority. Commenting on Philippians 4:6–7 and 1 Peter 5:7, he writes, "I'm learning that Paul just *might be right*… I'm learning that Peter just *might be right*" (13). Whether meant humorously or not, such phrasing risks trivializing apostolic imperative commands as tentative suggestions. It gives the impression of a low view of Scripture's certainty—a problematic posture for a book claiming to teach the "peace of God's presence."

Christian Integrationist Counseling

Fadling openly embraces psychological principles with Christian theology to promote holistic well-being. "I've benefited from years of psychological therapy," he admits. "I have recently taken advantage of medication for depression and anxiety. All of this has helped" (11). He sees his book as an attempt to complement these therapies with spiritual formation: "What I'm exploring in this book is how we might embrace the resources available to us in the peaceful kingdom of God in the presence of the Prince of Peace" (11). While his candor is commendable, his approach reveals an implicit rejection

of the sufficiency of Scripture. Rather than rooting his counsel in the transforming power of God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:3), Fadling blends psychology, medication, and spirituality into a therapeutic synthesis. His model may comfort readers already immersed in contemporary psychological paradigms but fails to show the power of God's grace in our weakness (2Cor 12:9ff), the abundant life in Christ (John 10:10) by the soul-satisfying power of His precious Word (Psalm 19:7ff). At times, Fadling hands the reader a sugary energy drink when what the soul needs is the Surgeon's scalpel—God's more sure and sharp Word (2Peter 1:19; Heb 4:12).

Conclusion

Alan Fadling's, *A Non-Anxious Life* is an eloquent, deeply personal, and pastoral reflection on living at the pace of peace. It offers readers moments of genuine insight—especially in its portrayal of embodied worship and its critique of performance-driven spirituality. His prose is gentle yet penetrating, and his vulnerability gives the book a rare authenticity.

However, the book's theological foundation is uneven. By emphasizing personal experience and psychological integration over biblical exposition and gospel clarity, Fadling's vision of peace risks becoming detached from the very source of peace—Christ crucified and risen. The reader may close the book feeling calmer but not necessarily closer to the Prince of Peace. The lack of clear Scriptural support causes the Christian to listen more to Fadling's voice than the voice of their Shepherd.

For believers already grounded in Scripture who seek to reflect more intentionally on spiritual formation, *A Non-Anxious Life* may provide helpful meditations and poetic insights. But for those wrestling with the roots of anxiety—guilt before God, unbelief, fear of man, borrowing troubles from tomorrow—Fadling's reflections will not satisfy the soul's deepest unrest. True peace, as the apostle Paul joyfully declares, "surpasses all understanding" and "guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). That peace does not come through learning the rhythms and pace of the kingdom but by personally knowing, obeying, trusting, and worshiping its King.