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Editorial: Taking Every Thought Captive to Christ

Stephen J. Wellum

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The apostle Paul summarizes the heart of the theological task—indeed the heart of the Christian ministry—in the memorable words: “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5 ESV). Crucial to developing a Christian worldview is to conform all of our thinking, attitudes, and behavior to the authority and teaching of God’s Word. Thus, in order to learn how to think and live biblically, godly, and faithfully in today’s world, it is imperative that we learn how to evaluate all ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints in light of Scripture.

Sadly though, we have to admit that too many times the Christian community has not carried out Paul’s example and exhortation consistently. Instead, more times than not, we have followed what liberal theologian Paul Tillich dubbed “the method of correlation.” This method attempts to correlate “equally” the teaching of Scripture with contemporary thought (whether that is the latest from science, philosophy, or history) with the admirable goal of taking every thought captive to Christ. However, as employed by most of its practitioners, it normally leaves the authority of Scripture far behind and instead places center-stage whatever is current in contemporary secular thought. In the end, rather than teaching Christians to bring all thought under the Lordship of Christ, it encourages us to re-interpret Scripture in the categories, structures, and values of whatever is deemed acceptable

in our present-day world. This observation, unhappily, can be verified in a number of areas in which Christians have sought to correlate their Christian faith with perceived “non-theological” disciplines. Thus, for example, methodological naturalism is viewed as a given in much of contemporary philosophy, science, and historical research, including even biblical and theological studies, thus guaranteeing and biasing the discussion from the outset.

But it is not only in the above areas that Christians have let secular thought drive the agenda; it has also been in the area of psychology. In fact, over the last century we have seen massive shifts in the outlook of our culture that have been largely driven by the revolution that has occurred in the burgeoning study of psychology. The language of “self-esteem,” “self-actualization,” “projection,” “neurosis,” “defense mechanisms,” and so on, has changed how our society thinks about humans and thus how people now view the world. And we must quickly add: the church has not been exempt from the impact of this revolution, both positively and negatively. That is why it is imperative that Christians, whether at the lay level or those who serve the church as professional counselors, carefully and self-consciously learn how to bring every thought captive to Christ, including the ideas that have been shaped by the psychological revolution. If we do not, then we will inevitably face the danger of accommodating the authority of Scripture to alien ideas that in the end will undermine the truthfulness and integrity of the gospel.

With this in mind, we devote this edition of the journal to the theme of Counseling and Christian Ministry. What unites our diverse contributors and contributions is the conviction that Christian theologians, pastors, and professional counselors must do what Paul commands us to do: Take every thought captive to Christ, including the thoughts, ideas, and perspectives of contemporary psychology and counseling. And we must do so in such a way that the full authority and integrity of the gospel is preserved, while at the same time seeking to apply and utilize valid insights from the discipline of psychology, as viewed through the worldview grid of Scripture.

Paul Tripp begins our discussion by showing the important relationship between preaching and counseling. He argues well that true biblical preaching and counseling is committed to the same goal of calling people to view their lives in relation to our great Creator and Redeemer God and to help them live in joyful submission to the counsel of God's Word. Furthermore, the goal of both preaching and counseling is to see the church not merely become a place where ministry takes place, but a ministering community for God's glory and for the good of the church. David Powlison helps us evaluate current psychological thought regarding the important discussion of "defense mechanisms" by first describing how these mechanisms are viewed in secular thought, and then evaluating this contemporary conversation in light of Scripture. He concludes that Scripture, in describing our human problem as that of sin in relation to God, gives us a better and more accurate psychology of both our problem and the solution to it found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eric Johnson, in his contribution, seeks to turn much of contemporary psychology

on its head by taking the insight of John Calvin that the true knowledge of the self and God are intimately related so that we know ourselves truly and we receive psychological healing in our lives, only when we first view ourselves in light of who God is—in all of his grace, beauty, and glory. Robert Roberts, in his article, adds an important observation that the Christian ministry has always been in the psychology business in the sense of promoting people's wholeness, but he warns us that we must be careful not to wed ourselves to current therapies without first applying a thorough critique from Christian theology, which includes for him both Scripture and the whole theological tradition. Mark Yarhouse picks up this latter point by applying some crucial insights from the Puritan, Richard Sibbes, in relation to helping people think through the issue of assurance in their Christian lives. Finally, Sam Williams reflects on the neglected but important area of a biblical psychology of emotions and feelings as it relates to our lives as Christians and the whole discipline of Christian counseling. In addition to our articles, the sermon from John Piper and our excellent Forum contributions serve as superb models for us, in a variety of ways, of how to apply the Scriptures to all of life, including the important areas of psychology, counseling, and pastoral ministry.

As you read the various contributions, it is my prayer that we, as God's people, might learn better how to fulfill the calling of our ministry of taking every thought captive to Christ so that we will be firmly rooted and grounded in Christ.

A Community of Counselors: The Fruit of Good Preaching¹

Paul David Tripp

Paul David Tripp is a counselor and faculty member of the School of Biblical Counseling at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation and also serves as lecturer in Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Age of Opportunity: A Guide to Parenting Teens* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Our Communication Struggles* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000), *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), and numerous articles.

I love Sundays. Even when I am out of town, I often fly home on Saturday nights just to be with my family, to worship, and to be taught the Word.

I love the moment when our preacher stands to deliver God's Word to God's people. I love the stunning wisdom of God's Word and the remarkable depth and practicality of what God says. No matter how deep you dig, the Word always runs deeper. No matter how familiar the road, the Word always surprises you from around the next corner. I love how the Word understands both the infinitely detailed textures of human experience and the labyrinthine motives of the human heart. The Word is a light, a rainstorm, a mine, a mirror, a garden, a hammer, a fire. I love God's Word.

Most of all I love the fact that the Truth revealed in the Word is more than a theology or a set of principles, but a Person: Jesus Christ. Truth is Emmanuel, God with Us. Truth is the Shepherd, the Lamb, the Wonderful Counselor, the Way and the Life, our Redeemer King. He is the one I need to see and hear and love. He gives me reasons to get up in the morning that far transcend any purpose that I might cobble together in some moment of great insight or inspiration.

I go to worship with God's people with hunger and expectancy. I am a man in desperate need of help, and the preacher is one of God's primary helpers. Sunday after Sunday, I am made to see what I had not seen before. My convictions are strengthened—and reversed. My heart is exposed,

and my behavior is challenged. I am led to gaze on the glory-laden beauty of the Redeemer. Sunday after Sunday, the invisible Kingdom is made visible for me, and my selfish agendas shrink against God's wise and wonderful plan.

Yet, with all the glory and power of the public preaching of the Word, I am convinced that, too often, something is missing. A significant part of God's plan for the proclamation of the Word lacks the prominence that it should have in the public moment of exposition. This remarkable weekly moment of truth declaration must be shaped by a recognition of the church's call to both a public and private ministry of the Word. Good preaching should create a community of counselors. Consider for a moment the kinds of people who have gathered to listen.

Sue sits in the fourth row next to her thirteen-year-old daughter. Sue is powerfully aware of how the world has magnetized the attention of her daughter in the last six months. She and Suzy have talked a hundred times about true identity, true character, and true beauty. But the battle is far from over.

Jon is an elder with shepherding responsibilities over twenty families. He is increasingly aware that he simply is not attracted to his wife anymore. He wonders why he ever married her and what would happen if his peers in ministry knew. He has not told a soul.

Josh had planned to serve the Lord in some way since he was a little boy, but now that he is a teenager, his parents drive him

crazy. He spends much of his time at home, isolated and angry. Who will help him?

Sally has just sung “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” but she wonders where God was when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The pulpit prayers for “the sick in our midst,” even when they mention her by name, seem far away and general. What if God does not heal her and MS slowly kills her? What about her eroding trust that God is good?

These are the sermon-listeners. They are also the counsel-needers and counsel-givers. They are God’s advancing army, bringing the Kingdom to real people in real situations. They desperately need to know the “Kingdom come,” yet they sometimes unwittingly follow and offer the counsel of another kingdom—the counsel of darkness, confusion, and falsehood. They are counselee/counselors, people in the process of sanctification who need both to grow and to equip others to grow.

Generally speaking, the church brings God’s Truth to God’s people in two primary ways: through public preaching and private counsel. This article will examine the relationship between these two truth ministries. Much of what has been said and written about this relationship tends to be based on weak definitions of both preaching and counseling. Preaching is reduced to doctrinal instruction, exegetical exposition, and moral exhortation. Counseling is shrunk to the size of people’s perceived problems and to dispensing problem-solving techniques, relational cures, and situational fixes.

It is important, therefore, that we take a fresh look at preaching as *one aspect* of the whole counsel of the church. By doing this we can begin to understand how preaching and counseling are identical in content and purpose, but significantly different in

context, method, and process. Let’s first consider four propositions about the purpose and practice of preaching that show us how good preaching *should* create a community of counselors.

Four Propositions about Preaching ***The Purpose of Preaching Is to Proclaim the Counsel of the Creator***

The need for preaching is rooted in the *nature of God*. The God who creates the world in Genesis 1 and 2 is not only a God who *does*, but also a God who *says*. In fact, God’s speech is actually the instrument of his creating work! What he has to say is vital to everything that humans are to think, desire, and do. He *is* truth! His words alone are able to define what is beautiful, right, and true. His words literally “exegete” what he has made. He is the Great Preacher *and* the Great Counselor.

Preaching also has its roots in the *nature of people*. Who are these creatures, anyway? They are thinkers. They have been given the ability to analyze and interpret their *experiences*. They do not live life based on the facts, but on their interpretation of those facts. God designed people to be *revelation receivers*, giving them conceptual and communicative abilities so they could know, hear, and understand him. Without God’s words they would not be able to make proper sense out of themselves or his world. So God in his creative wisdom blesses Adam and Eve with his words. God’s counsel in Genesis 1 and 2 speaks to the deepest issues of the human existence: identity, meaning and purpose, relationships, and worship.

People are also worshipers. Worship is not just an intention or an action; it is a state of being. We were uniquely designed for worship, and every thought, desire, choice, decision, word, and action expresses wor-

ship. According to Romans 1, there are only two possible objects of our worship: either the Creator or the creation. If God is not the object of my worship—and thus functionally ruling my heart—then something in the creation is calling the shots.

Formal worship in the church must be shaped by an acknowledgement of the war that is taking place every day on the field of functional worship. No war could be more important, because this war is fought for control of the human heart. One of the primary purposes of formal worship is to recapture and redirect functional worship. Good preaching will not only reinterpret life in light of the glory of God, but it will expose idolatry and encourage a joyful, practical, robust worship of God.

Every congregation is full of these interpreter/worshippers. Pete is polite and friendly in public, but he seethes with anger when he reflects on his life: single, forty-five years old, recently jobless. Martha simply does not know how to help her mother to see God amid experiences of the ravages of old age. These people sit in the pews, not just as worshipers in the formal sense, but also as interpreter/worshippers in the most functional, life-shaping sense that Genesis describes.

Every week the preacher incarnates the Great Speaker. As God's representative wielding God's Word, he stands at the portal of people's lives. Every one of them, just like Adam and Eve, needs to hear the words of God. If they are ever to understand their lives, they must first hear and understand God. Any attempt to live without the words of God will curse them to a sub-human existence.

The preacher also stands powerfully aware of the great worship war that rages on the battlefield of every heart (including his own). He shines a bright and penetrat-

ing light on the glory of the Creator, who alone is worthy of commanding and controlling our worship. He accepts the high and holy calling of bringing the Creator near enough to produce a life-shaping, heart-gripping awe in all who listen. People who awaken to the worship war in every heart start to become wise counselors, even as they see more clearly their own need for the help of brothers and sisters.

The Purpose of Preaching Is to Give Voice to the Wonderful Counselor

Preaching is also rooted in Isaiah 9:6 and the promise of the coming Messiah, the Wonderful Counselor. As we consider this promise, we must resist the mental monotone that often afflicts us when we encounter an all-too-familiar portion of Scripture. Allow yourself to be amazed by what is being promised. This is not a promise of a wonderful counselor who is wise. Rather, *the Wonderful Counselor is Wisdom!* Wisdom came to earth in the person of the Messiah, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Why is this so important? Because sin reduces people to fools. Sinners regularly get lost in the woods of their own foolishness. We all need to be rescued from ourselves, and this is the promise of our rescue. Wisdom is coming! Wisdom is coming! And his name is Jesus.

Preaching is weekly rescue. We are all fools by nature. We all tend to be magnetized by what is foolish and repelled by what is wise. We need to be led to recognize and confess how comprehensive and profound our foolishness actually is.

Remember the interpreter/worshippers in the pews. George thinks that angrily getting in his teenage son's face really is a way to motivate him to do right. Paula believes that the self-image-enhancing strategies of her self-help books really will

cure her depression. Sally has an MA in Child Psychology but does not know how to discern whether the “wisdom” she has learned is really wise. Each of these people needs to be fed the finest morsels of the Wonderful Counselor’s wisdom as they sit expectantly at his table. They need to know that true wisdom is not the product of research, intellect, or experience; it comes through a relationship to the One who is Wisdom.

A wise and faithful preacher speaks as an ambassador of the Wonderful Counselor, incarnating Wisdom. He skillfully exposes and exegetes the foolishness that masquerades as true wisdom. He lovingly teaches people to live in close communion and humble dependence on him who is Wise. He is a shepherd–counselor, rescuing the stray sheep who are trapped in the thorn bushes of their own foolishness and feeding the skinny sheep who are wisdom-starved.

Preaching makes the One who is Wisdom visible and audible. In that moment, truth silences the background clamor of our fallen foolishness. And at the center of this weekly wisdom banquet is the cross of Jesus Christ. Only there will I understand my true identity and see the profundity of my need. The cross alone bridges the chasm of foolishness and transports me into the Kingdom where Wisdom himself sits on the throne. If preaching is *weekly* rescue, mutual counseling is *daily* rescue. “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

The Purpose of Preaching Is to Incarnate the Word Made Flesh

The roots of preaching pass through John chapter 1: the Word has come in person. Jesus is the Word, God’s ultimate state-

ment of self–revelation. God’s eternal revelation of himself does not culminate in a logical syllogism, a philosophical treatise, or a theological outline. In the grandeur of his redemptive love, God does not argue; he comes! It is a mind-bending historical moment. God actually lives, breathes, walks, and speaks on earth. The eternal, invisible One is made visible.

Why was such an awesome miracle necessary? Because sin not only reduces us to fools, but also inflicts us with a profound blindness. This spiritual blindness affects us in many ways, but ultimately it obscures our God as he has revealed himself. Yes, God as a Spirit is physically hidden, but sin blinds us from him in a much more profoundly spiritual sense. Like the people in the days of Christ, we do not see God even when he is right in front of our eyes. The troubling thing about Sara’s story of her divorce is not just that it is a sad story of rejection and abandonment. It is that her recounting of the story is utterly godless. In her heart-wrenching narrative there is no recognition of God’s presence, plan, or active love. Sara suffers not only from the consequences of a nasty divorce, but from a fundamental inability to see God. This aggravates and distorts the impact of the divorce on her heart and behavior. The hope and help that Sara really needs begins with seeing God.

Listen when people tell you their stories. Usually their stories will be devoid of any functional recognition of God’s presence, power, goodness, and grace. When they do not see God, they become dazzled and captured by other glories—the fading glories of relationships, position, possessions, appearance, and achievement. They get worried or depressed or terrified by the wrong things. When they do not see the glory of God, they treat their problems with

more problems! Failures in human wisdom, character, and strength will be treated with another dose of human wisdom, character, and strength, rather than a cry to the God of real rescue.

Fran has been to a long list of counselors. Some have been friends, some have been professionals, but they have all told her the same thing: “Get more insight and try harder!” Yet Fran has a basic lack of personal motivation. In her honest moments she will tell you that she would much rather avoid life than live it. Much of what she does is an attempt to avoid trouble any way she can. Her life lacks the courage that seeing God before her eyes would give her.

People often see the difficulty of their situation, the magnitude of their suffering, and the sin of others. They may even see their own sin, but they usually fail to see God. In the incarnation we see the glory of God’s truth that exposes, reveals, illumines, convicts, encourages, and makes wise.

Preaching is a weekly unveiling of God’s glory before those who have a hard time seeing. The purpose of the sermon runs deeper than handling the text properly, or even applying it cogently. It runs deeper than expounding doctrines, commands, and principles. The central purpose of every sermon is to reveal God in all the glory of his grace and truth. At the center of this purpose is Christ, who *is* truth and who *is* grace. The fire in the belly of every good sermon is a deep desire to make Christ seen, known, and loved.

Geena simply wants a way to turn her daughter into a “responsible human being.” Frank is just tired of being discouraged. Jane is willing to do just about anything to get her husband to be tender and affectionate. But the cross reminds them that they need more than personal, rela-

tional, and situation adjustments. They need to be rescued, reconciled, empowered, accepted, adopted, and loved.

What we need can only be found one place: the Redeemer Christ. That Redeemer intends to make *us* his living representatives to each other. Preaching brings Jesus Christ to our human struggles. It ought to teach *us* to come to *each other* as small Christs, incarnating in a real way God’s mercy, compassion, patience, and steadfast love. Preaching brings Jesus in word to all of us, so each of us can bring Jesus in deed and word to each other.

The Fundamental Content of Preaching Is a Story

In the most basic sense, the Bible gives us a narrative. Our problem is that much of our preaching does not sound like we are expounding a story. It often seems like we are exegeting abstract concepts, and then applying principles to everyday life. But the gospel is not a concept. It is the most important story ever lived, written, or told. The goal of preaching, therefore, is to embed the stories of the listeners in the larger story of redemption. Good preaching calls people to a “God’s Story” mentality. Theological concepts and outlines simply provide a shorthand way of describing the plot.

Think about it for a minute: What is the hope of the person in the pew? It cannot rest in terms, principles, formulations, and abstractions. The hope of the believer is entirely relational. It rests on a living Christ, who has acted and will continue to act on behalf of his own. In the Story we see Christ in action, faithfully fulfilling his redeeming rescue mission. I will only understand my identity as a believer when I daily see my story embedded in his Story.

Preaching needs to be *narrative* preach-

ing, for at least three good reasons. First, narrative preaching addresses the real struggles of the person in the pew. Suppose you are in the middle of Manhattan. You get off the subway at 34th Street and 7th Avenue with the intention of going to Rockefeller Center, but you quickly get lost. Now, you are not totally lost. You know you are a human being in the universe. You know that you are in the United States, in New York State, and in Manhattan. You have loads of “theological” (geographical) knowledge, but you are seriously lost, because you do not know how to get where you need to go.

I propose that vast numbers of people to whom we preach are “lost in Manhattan.” They may not seem like they are lost, because they talk with such knowledge about where they are. But with all that knowledge, living in the middle of their own story, they do not know how to get from where they are to where God wants them to be. In fact, unlike being literally lost in Manhattan, they do not even know that they are lost. They have not understood that the Story gives them a whole different destination.

Sally is lost in the middle of her own story. Her marriage is cold and distant, but under the surface there is anger. She does not understand it, and so she does not know what to do about it. Sam sits at night and thinks about his teenage son, Josh. Once again he did not come home from school. Josh has lost his way, but Sam has no idea how to help him find it again. Joanie is waking up again to overwhelming waves of discouragement. Nothing significant happened today, yet she feels a darkness that she cannot lift.

In their lostness these people experience many significant things. They experience *hermeneutic disorientation*: “I don’t know

what it all *means*! My story doesn’t make sense.” Every living person is a hermeneutician; that is, one who works to make sense out of his life. In my lostness I generate all kinds of interpretations, but nothing really seems to fit. In the middle of my own life I have felt at times like the impatient child who is trying to force the puzzle piece into a place where it does not really fit. Yet, my interpretations are significant, for they set the direction of my life. What I do is not based on what I have experienced, but on how I have made sense out of what I have experienced. Many people in our churches on Sunday are in a personal state of hermeneutic disorientation.

Lost people also experience *spiritual claustrophobia*: “It’s all about me! My story is about ME.” When I am lost, the world tends to shrink to the size of my lostness. On that corner in Manhattan I become concerned with only one thing: that I am lost. I do not see the sights or hear the sounds. I do not notice the people who pass by me. In that moment I hope for only one thing: to find my way. This is one way that my experience of lostness distorts my world. It makes me more central, more significant, than I was ever meant to be. In my lostness, the only relationships I want are those that might help me become “unlost.” I care about others, but in a deeper sense, I really only care about myself.

We were never created to live in the deoxygenated confines of a self-defined world. We are meant to live in the “big sky” country of a God-inhabited, God-defined world. Often preaching that talks about the Kingdom of God feels like a “bait-and-switch” to lost people. They come to church, thinking the pastor would talk about “them,” but instead he talks about “it.” They have lived so long in the claustrophobic confines of their own needs that

they find it hard to relate to the grandeur of the now-and-then Kingdom.

They also experience *spiritual blindness*: “Where is God? My story unfolds with no God in view.” “There is no God!” People who are lost simply quit seeing. If I am lost in Manhattan, I do not notice the skyscraper across the street with silver-blue windows reflecting the whole New York skyline. I do not see the vendor hawking roasted nuts. My vision is clouded by my plight. The most important vision system of a human being is not the physical eyes, but the eyes of the heart. You can be physically blind and live quite well. You cannot be spiritually blind and live well.

What does the person lost in Manhattan really need? It is tempting to respond, “Directions!” But think for a moment. If you give him excellent directions and he gets from point A to point B, he will get lost again as soon as he tries to get to point C. What he needs is a helicopter view of New York City in his head. If you have the big picture, you are able to orient yourself and move in the right direction.

This is what we all need every Sunday—the helicopter view of life that only the grand story of redemption can give. Preaching must pull us out of our confusing little corners and enable us to see the grand vista of life. Only this kind of “whole story” preaching can enable us to orient ourselves in every new situation. Only God’s Story can confront the blindness and claustrophobia that continually weaken our functional spirituality. Do you see how preaching that finds us when we are lost in our own story equips us to enter other people’s stories to help find them?

There is a second reason to be committed to narrative preaching. It confronts the core issue of redemption: the battle between self-rule and God’s rule. Second

Corinthians 5:15 says that Jesus died so that “those who live should no longer live for themselves, but unto him who died for them and was raised again.” The primary thing God saves me from is myself! The most fundamental form of human idolatry is the idolatry of self. Sin renders me hopelessly enslaved to myself. Because of sin, what means most to me is *me*.

When preaching disengages the doctrines and principles of Scripture from the grand story, we offer people life without calling them to lay down their lives. When I look for answers in Scripture with only a sense of my own need, self remains unchallenged at the center. But God is not primarily in the business of meeting needs. He is in the business of displaying his own glory and calling a people who are functionally committed to live for him. As Paul says in Titus 2, God is calling to Himself “a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Topical, principle-filled, need-driven preaching may appear to be practical and helpful, but it distorts the message of the Bible and therefore harms people in the long run. What good does it do a person to be less depressed or to have a better marriage when they remain, in subtle and not so subtle ways, a rebel against the very thing for which they were created?

It would be easier for Sally if her struggle were just with her husband, Bill. But there is a deeper struggle: she wonders why she ever worked so hard to be a good, biblical wife. Maybe God isn’t so good after all? Sam had always dreamed of effective Christian parenting, but he ended up with a son who, frankly, is an embarrassment. He battles the desire just to kick him out of the house. He walks by his stack of parenting books and says to himself, “It’s just not that easy.”

An even deeper problem with the Sun-

day listener is that as a self-absorbed sinner he will tend to try to write his own story. He will quietly, perhaps unconsciously, hope that God will enter *his* story and make it work. But the reality is that long before he was born—literally before the foundations of the earth—he was already part of God’s Story. His life has never belonged to him. It was always the Lord’s.

The person in the pew needs a grander reason for living than the establishment of his own happiness. He needs to be confronted with the fact that the essence of true humanity is not found in retaining one’s life, but in being willing to die for the glory of Another. Every biblical principle must be attached to this death-life-glory drama. The commands and principles of the Bible are not mechanical maxims for personal success, but invitations to die to self and live for God. Good biblical preaching does not solve every listener’s immediate problems. Rather, it teaches people how to live within the plot of God’s Story. As they deal with the realities of life in the fallen world, they respond in ways that are consistent with what the Bible says the drama is about.

The plot of God’s Story is a “glory” plot. It is about God rescuing us from terminal enslavement to our own glory, to a life producing commitment to his glory. Yes, he is committed to our ultimate happiness, in that he knows that true human happiness is only to be found in the defeat of our glory and the victory of his. When preaching opens your eyes to *the* question—self-rule or God’s rule?—counseling will go after the same key question.

Third, narrative preaching will always lead to Christ. Since the biblical story is a redemptive story, it will always point to and highlight the Redeemer. The Bible does

give us a methodology for life, but it is not a Steven Covey manual (“The Seven Daily Habits of the Highly Effective Image Bearer”). If all we needed were insights and principles, Jesus would never have come.

The biblical drama puts Christ alone on center stage. Every mini-drama within the grand drama points to him and our need of him. Every good principle looks to him for its wisdom, and to him for grace to carry it out. Every promise is rooted not in mechanical natural law, but in his redemptive acts for his people. Narrative preaching says with Paul, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). The grand story is—*his Story*.

As preachers bring the grand Story to people Sunday after Sunday, they begin to see Christ in every moment of their own story as well. When this happens, not only does their formal theology become more Christocentric, but their everyday living in this fallen world does as well. Preaching that makes us say, “I love Christ!” will create counselors who bring that same Jesus to others.

So how do I take all these great *truths* and have them affect the way I listen to preaching and, if I am a pastor, the way I preach?

Preaching and Counseling Share the Same Purpose: Equip the Counselors

Now consider this: These four roots of biblical *preaching* are the roots of all sound *counseling* as well.

In a fundamental way, biblical preaching and biblical counseling are committed to doing the very same thing. Both incarnate the Creator, the Wonderful Counselor, and the Living Word in God’s Story. In preaching, this counsel occurs in a public

forum and is broadcast widely to reach all who listen. In personal ministry, this counsel is given with specificity so that it speaks with concrete detail into the life of the one who is listening.

The preacher must do more than dispense the theological truths of the text. He must help people to see God, to hunger for his Word, to be amazed at the hugeness of the Redeemer's grace, and to live every day within his counsel. Similarly, the counselor must be more than a mechanic, a caring friend, an explorer of experiences, or a life strategist. He or she must confront spiritual blindness and help people own their desperate need for God's words. The counselor teaches people how to live in a way that is joyfully submissive to the counsel of the Redeemer.

Preaching and counseling exist in fundamental unity as two aspects of the church's call to zealously and unceasingly incarnate the Wonderful Counselor on earth. Their basic content and purpose are the same; both find their reason for being in the God who speaks, the Counselor who has come, and the Word who has spoken. At the same time they differ radically in context, method, and process. The more familiar you become with the story of redemption, the more you realize that it is a community story. God is not just calling isolated individuals. He is calling a "people" to himself—not only to be recipients of his grace, but instruments of it as well. Solid biblical preaching must always be shaped by these two agendas.

Most preaching attempts to show people their need for the grace of Christ and calls them to receive it. But how many sermons also are crafted with a *second* commitment, to help people know more fully what it means to function as an instrument of that grace in the lives of others? Every

sermon ought to produce faith that works through love.

The biblical model of change distributes the responsibility for ministry to every member of the body of Christ. We are called to a "total involvement paradigm" where each person in the church understands his responsibility to be part of God's ongoing work of redemption in the lives of those around him. Therefore we come to the sermon needing to hear not only how the work of grace impacts our own lives, but to understand how to minister that same grace to those around us. *Every* word we say is meant to be "constructive, according to the need of the moment, giving grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:29). Sermons that preach that way will create people who talk that way.

God has ordained the church to become an unending redemptive conversation. It is a workroom in which Christ continues to rescue, restore, and conform his people. The public sermon should equip the body of Christ for the innumerable private moments of life transforming ministry to others that occur every day. In particular, the preacher must always do two things. First, he must inform and remind people of their place in the ongoing work of redemption. Second, he must teach people how to do what God has called them to do.

The sermon is a wonderful place to examine how to be part of what God is doing in the lives of others. For the Word to be practically applied, it must always be applied to people's life *and* ministry. By "ministry," I do not mean only the formal, scheduled ministries of the local church. I mean the whole web of dynamic relationships in the body of Christ. Every relationship is meant to express God's ongoing redemption by encouraging personal, progressive sanctification. From God's per-

spective, the husband, wife, parent, friend, and neighbor are all “ministry” positions.

Good biblical preaching grows out of the realization that there is no way you could ever hire enough paid ministers and counselors to meet the ministry needs in a church. God has ordained the church not simply to be a place where ministry takes place, but also to become a ministering community. The preacher is called to counsel the counselors, to comfort the comforters, to teach the teachers, to encourage the encouragers.

Good preaching extends the arms of the pastor through the ministries of those who hear it. Every week the preacher sharpens these instruments in the hands of the Redeemer. Biblical public ministry is interdependent with private ministry. The pulpit prepares people to receive private counsel as it brings to people the grand themes of the biblical story. The friend or counselor will apply these same themes to the person’s individual life by embedding their drama in the larger drama of redemption.

Public ministry needs private ministry. Private ministry carefully builds bridges of understanding from the broad themes of preaching to the particular circumstances of an individual’s life. Preaching is the *formative* discipline of the church. It is paradigm building, foundation-laying work. Private ministry, counseling, is the *repairing, sustaining, correcting, protecting* discipline of the church. It is the work of hands-on restoration. Personal ministry has been ordained by God to be built on the firm foundation laid by the public ministry of the church.

The preacher must recognize that he is the counselor of the counselors. Everyone to whom he speaks is a person of influence. They are all giving and receiving counsel

daily. But will their conversations emerge from a “God’s Story” mentality? Are they learning how to help one another live inside of the plot of God’s Story? Does this company of counselors know how to build concrete bridges of understanding from the themes of God’s grand drama to the raw details of their neighbor’s life? Every preacher is called not only to give wise, biblical counsel from the pulpit, but also to train the company of counselors that sits before him. God, help us in our preaching not only to comfort people with the counsel of the Word, but also to train them to give that counsel to others.

ENDNOTE

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Human Defensiveness: The Third Way¹

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Introduction

Change is brought about, not by new observations or additional evidence in the first instance, but by transpositions that were taking place inside the minds of the scientists themselves. In this connection it is not irrelevant to note that of all forms of mental activity the most difficult to induce, even in the minds of the young who may be presumed not to have lost their flexibility, is the art of handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework.²

This article will introduce no new observations and evidence. Indeed, it will work with some of the oldest and most familiar pieces of both “psychological” and “theological” data. But it is a transposition of that data, for it presents a new framework—a new system of relations. It asks for a flexible mind to relate what often functions as two discrete “departments” in the minds of Christians. It aims to portray such a tight relationship between biblical data and psychological data—between these two “departments”—that neither one can ever remain the same.

In some ways we are simply reassessing the nomenclature with which familiar things are discussed. The French chemist Antoine Lavoisier revolutionized chemistry in the 1780’s, and the core of his achievement was the introduction of a new set of terms. Subsequent to Lavoisier, even those who wished to dispute him were forced to fight on turf defined in Lavoisier’s terms. Something very similar happened with the

revolutionary psychological systems of the twentieth century: they changed the terms in which we think about people and their problems. A reawakened biblical worldview will engage our culture in its terminology; we must offer something more clear-headed, comprehensive, fruitful, economical, and true.

Lavoisier’s goal was to improve science by improving its nomenclature:

However certain the facts of any science may be, and however just the ideas we may have formed of these facts, we can only communicate false impressions to others while we want words by which these may be properly expressed.³

Our goal is to improve both the “science” of understanding people and the “technology” of trying to help them. Christians often have been virtually forced to discuss human problems in the distorted terminology of secularized psychology. For example, how common—and insidious—is the use of the nomenclature for “improved self-esteem.” Yet the very terminology casts our insight into people in a framework that is severely constricted and warped; false impressions are inevitably communicated, and false counseling implications are drawn from false impressions. Language about “more accurate self knowledge, both causing and caused by a higher esteem for Christ” is a far more accurate and comprehensive way to handle the observations made of people who experience futility and a deep sense of failure. It also handles observations of people

who are cocky and confident about their abilities and successes.

This article, however, is not about self-knowledge but its obverse: self-deception. We will examine nomenclature related to the ways people hide from themselves and from others. We will seek to redefine the turf of “defense mechanisms” in such a way that will markedly “improve the science,” as well as improve the counseling which flows by implication from one’s framework of interpretation. This article is in two parts. First, we will generally discuss human “defensiveness” as it has been seen and analyzed by ego psychology and by behavioral psychology. The classic studies of “ego defense mechanisms” are rooted in the Freudian tradition; the more contemporary behaviorist discussion of “self-exonerating mechanisms” has been initiated by Albert Bandura. Second, we will comment and interact from the biblical world-view. The topic is vast, and the paper is short; hence, the discussion will be in broad strokes.

Human “Defensiveness” in Ego and Behavioral Psychology

Much of the persuasive power of Freud’s and Bandura’s analyses of human motivation rests on their explorations of human hiding and self-justifying: they see many ways that we all put on a “good front” both to ourselves and to others. Ego psychologists interpret these things as arising from an inner dynamic process; they are intrapsychic mechanisms. Put in simplest terms, these psychological activities (“ego defense mechanisms”) are designed to protect ourselves (“ego”) from invasive anxiety, which arises when our desires (“id”) contravene the image we have of ourselves (“ego ideal”) and in turn our internalized conscience (“super ego”)

accuses us. Bandura interprets these same things as behavior that is both internally represented (i.e., cognitive behavior) and outwardly expressed. These psychological and verbal activities (“self-exonerating mechanisms”) are designed to protect ourselves from the unpleasant experience (“self-contempt”) that arises when our behavior transgresses internalized standards of performance that we have learned from people we respect (“models”). The parallels between these two interpretations are obvious: both are psychic “mechanisms;” both deal with failure to attain standards we have for ourselves; both describe some process of internalizing standards from others; both describe aversion to unpleasant emotions that threaten to destroy our sense of integrity and “OK-ness.” The differences in interpretive framework are also obvious: the one is a psychodynamic paradigm; the other is a behavioral paradigm. Different as they are, each is persuasive in its own way for each “covers the facts.”

But each is also a serious distortion of how people work. We want to reinterpret their data. People do the things that are described, but the correctness of the terminology and the theoretical system in which those terms function are highly debatable matters. Freud and Bandura differ seriously with one another, but they are united in this: they attempt to account for human “defensiveness” without seeing human life in its totality—behavior, psychological dynamics, interpersonal relations, physiology—as related to God. Accuracy about human defensiveness is anchored in one’s understanding of the relationship between man and God. Defensiveness cannot be reduced to psychosocial mechanisms. The biblical view drastically differs with both Freud and Bandura.

Before we get to the biblical view, we want to look briefly at the bundle of data. What follows is a representative sample of a number of “defense mechanisms” (1-10) and “self-exonerating mechanisms” (11-15). I have attempted to recast each in more descriptive and less technical language because, as we have noted, nomenclature incarnates a theoretical framework. Secular psychologists often have observed people doing these things. Psychologists bring an interpretation to the observed behaviors, seeking to distinguish among the many varieties of defensive behavior. But the interpretive categories are distortions—we might even say they are counterfeits—of the truth.

1. We fear that others harbor the same sinful motives we harbor and have not dealt with. We often *accuse* others of these things. Lust, anger, greed, and competitive pride are things often attributed to others. For example, a man has persistent fears that his wife is unfaithful to him, and he grills her about the slightest seeming inconsistency in her behavior, often making up wild interpretations. In fact, the man has an active sexual fantasy life, an ongoing problem with masturbation, and guilt over premarital sexual intercourse that he has never acknowledged. This has been termed “projection,” and extreme cases of such fear, accusation, hostility, and pride are termed “paranoia.”

2. People *cover up* their failures, sin, and guilt by trying to be good or to make up without genuine repentance to God and others. They *deny* the truth about themselves to God, to others, to themselves. People try to *manipulate* and *control* others with niceness and great demonstrations of “love,” at the same time hiding from themselves all awareness of what they are doing. Judgmentalism, anger, disappointment,

sexual lust, and desire to control others are frequently covered. For example, a woman exudes a kind of sticky-sweet love and piety, with great verbal protestations of the same, when she is extremely frustrated and angry with her husband. This has been termed “reaction-formation” because the truth is concealed from consciousness by an “opposite reaction.”

3. People *misdirect their attention* from important issues to secondary matters. Any area of failure or guilt can be avoided in this way. For example, a Christian is preoccupied with minutiae of eschatology and continually boosts the necessity of Christians carrying tracts, while all the time he has very poor relations with family and co-workers (because of his perceived judgmentalism and hypocrisy) and visits prostitutes about once a month. This has been termed “substitution” because all sorts of secondary preoccupations are substituted for attention to personal and interpersonal problems (i.e., issues of sin).

4. People *fantasize* rather than face their problems biblically. Fantasy can cover failed hopes, laziness, unrealistic ideals of success, unforgiven hurts, loneliness, etc. It can also express directly sexual, financial, or status lusts, as well as a fundamental thanklessness. For example, a lonely single woman with a job she considers boring reads romance novels, watches soap operas, and daydreams about being glamorous, successful, and beloved. This has been termed “fantasy” for obvious reasons.

5. People *whitewash* or candy-coat reality about others rather than facing things honestly and responding constructively (i.e., biblically). For example, a widow whitewashes the memory of her deceased husband in her own mind and in conversation with others. He was a drunk, adulterer, and deadbeat, but she reiterates that,

“He was really a good man.” This has been termed “inversions” because the truth is turned inside out.

6. People *generate physical symptoms* of problems rather than face them. Pride, unreal images of oneself, anxiety, anger, and a host of other things can be expressed in “psychosomatic” ways. For example, a man who has an image of crying as a sign of womanish weakness will get intense headaches whenever he thinks of his wife’s death. A pastor who will not face that he is afraid of what people think of him tends to get sick on Saturdays and is developing an ulcer. This has been termed “conversion” because a genuine addressable problem is converted into physical symptoms.

7. People *scapegoat*, blame, and attack innocent, helpless, or even guilty parties (or inanimate objects) rather than face and solve problems biblically. For example, a man yells at his wife, kids, and dog after a tough day at work. He throws an ash tray through the television screen when his football team loses; he perpetually grumbles and rages at minor injustices done against him—drivers who tailgate him, a mechanic who ripped him off—and never recognizes the fundamental pride that rules his life. This has been termed “displacement” because the emotion is directed away from its genuine object. The problem that needs to be solved is avoided.

8. People *deny or avoid reality* to save face, preserve their pride, or hide from consciousness of guilt. For example, a mother excuses her son’s drunkenness and troubles with the law by saying, “He’s really a good boy; he just got in with a bad crowd.” This has been termed “denial” and can serve as a kind of catch-all for the whole gamut of defensive behavior.

9. People *cover failures* with other successes instead of facing problems and limi-

tations constructively and realistically. For example, a woman with a bad marriage pours herself into her children and volunteer work. This has been termed “compensation” for obvious reasons.

10. People *rationalize*, make excuses, and shift blame to put themselves in the best light. For example, a man and woman rationalize their fornication by saying, “We really love each other. Society’s standards are wrong, and people need to be free.” A woman says she is justified in her bitterness at her husband because he is an alcoholic. A homosexual says God made him that way, and Romans 1 only applies to natural heterosexuals who engage in homosexuality. This has been termed “rationalization” and, like denial, can serve as a catch-all for many of the masks people put on.

11. People *use euphemisms* about themselves and others to avoid guilt or any attribution of responsibility for something. For example, “I’m just irritated, not angry.” “I just had a few drinks.” “He acts that way because he has a low self-esteem.” “When you said to me, ‘You have a problem with anger,’ you became fused with a primitive and punitive part of my super-ego and that made me very angry with you.” This has been termed “euphemistic labeling.”

12. People *compare themselves to others* to try to look good and justify themselves. For example, “I know I have my faults, but I’m not as bad as a lot of other people.” “Well, I might have slacked off some on my job, but at least I didn’t smoke dope in the bathroom like most of the employees.” This has been termed “advantageous comparisons.”

13. People *shift blame* from themselves to others, God, circumstances, sickness, etc. For example, “It’s only human to get angry. It’s just the way God made me. If my wife

would only treat me with respect I wouldn't get angry." "My life is messed up because my parents got a divorce." This has been termed "attribution of blame."

14. People *spread around responsibility* to avoid culpability. If everybody does it, the law allows it, or society accepts it, then it is OK. For example, "Everyone cheats on his income taxes." "The Supreme Court decision makes abortion all right, and 68% of the American people agree we ought to be free to choose." This has been termed "diffusion of responsibility."

15. People *ignore and minimize consequences of their actions*. For example, "I suppose my wife is hurt when I curse her out and threaten to leave, but she should know I don't mean it." This has been termed "disregard of consequences."

These are but a sampling of the "ego defense mechanisms" and "self-exonerating mechanisms" that various psychologists have detailed. There are all sorts of examples of similar behavior evident in all sectors of daily life. The theoretical freight these fifteen samples carry in psychology (they are given technical labels and supposedly describe real entities) can mask the fact that these sorts of things are only a few examples plucked from among many. These same things can be described in very untechnical terms: we "wear masks"; we duck, weave, and dodge "the light" of self-knowledge and honesty before God and man; we wear fig leaves.

The following provides only a smattering of further examples of the fig leaves that we wear:

1. We change the subject or crack jokes if an awkward or threatening (i.e., anything we are not dealing with biblically) subject comes up.
2. We ramble and monopolize conversation, filling silences to keep ourselves from seeming to be fail-

ures and to keep others at bay.

3. We live or die vicariously with a sports team.

4. We "run from problems" by watching TV, drinking, smoking, promiscuity, work-alcoholism, compulsive eating.

5. We mock or "put in a box" others whose opinions or problems would threaten our own commitments and behavior.

6. We "get defensive" and testy, talk loud or get accusatory, try to bully others to defend ourselves and make a show of competency.

7. We overdo penance by, "Poor me; I'm so horrible and such a failure," express maudlin repentances, and wallow in failures.

8. We minimize the seriousness of problems—"It's nothing"—or the difficulty of change—"I promise I'll never do it again."

9. We lie outright, either to look good or to avoid looking bad.

10. We lie subtly, putting the best light on ourselves by innuendo, embellishment, or careful selection of data. This is often allied with subtle expressions of contempt or criticism for other people.

11. We think highly of our own opinions on every issue.

12. We tie up our identity in certain grandiose roles, like "counselor" or "parent" or "pastor." Any of our functions and successes, real or imagined, can become fodder for self-deception.

13. We pray for help before performing a certain responsibility, and then rehearse our own success afterwards without thought of God.

It should be evident that it does not take a psychologized theory of ego defense mechanisms or self-exonerating devices to track down countless instances of self-deception, self-aggrandizement, manipulation, and deception of and by others. In fact the powerhouses of modern thought are precisely the dissectors of false consciousness, who pierce the illusions of individual and collective life, exposing the shame and game: Marx, Kierkegaard,

Nietzsche and a host of others join Freud. Nietzsche once observed, "I did that,' says my memory. 'I could not have done that,' says my pride, and remains inexorable. Eventually—the memory yields."⁴ Or as T. S. Eliot put it, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality."⁵

A Biblical Evaluation of Human "Defensiveness"

The greatest critic of human hypocrisy and dissembling, however, is the Bible, which speaks the mind of the Searcher of hearts and exposes illusions and false consciousness, using an entirely different grid than those of Marxists, existentialists, or psychoanalysts. There is much that can be said biblically on the subject of human defensiveness, but in this article we will make seven general points.

First, the data of human defensiveness looks like the biblical description of the workings of sin. "Defensiveness" incarnates all the blindness to the truth about oneself which might be denominated "pride." It has that combination of self-deception and deception of others that fits under the heading "the deceitfulness of sin." It embodies a primal resistance to honesty about oneself, an evasiveness, excuse making, and blame shifting, all of which are captured in a host of colorful metaphors: stiff-necked, hardened or darkened in heart, foolish, and so forth.

Also, the bundle of data describing defensiveness is clearly not well explained by calling it a set of intrapsychic mechanisms. It has an evident interpersonal component. Defensive people are almost invariably offensive as well. There is a curious blindness in the psychological analyses of the phenomena, for self-deception and defensiveness are only one side of the story. The other side is the trouble

such behavior causes for others: spouse, children, parents, boss, fellow employees, and counselors all suffer hardship and frustration in attempting to build meaningful, honest, and constructive relationships with "defensive" people. They are variously aggressive, evasive, deceptive, manipulative, and yet all the while somehow blind and driven, unable to help themselves. Of course, they are we! We all recognize ourselves in these descriptions of defensive behavior. Also it is no accident that others suffer hardship and frustration in cultivating good relationships with us.

We also intuitively recognize that psychological diagnosis does not ring true to the whole picture of what a human being is. It fails to capture that perverse combination of desire for good relationships, yet suspicion and fear of others; of tolerance for others' failings, yet self-aggrandizement and despising of others; of moments of brilliant self-awareness, yet habitual blindness to what about us is obvious to others; of patience with counselees, yet petty anger with family members; of love for self-knowledge, yet stubborn resistance to correction. In picking a good metaphor to capture the vast data of "defensiveness," the metaphor "mechanisms" would never do. The metaphor "warmaking" is far more cogent; it gets at the interpersonal component; it includes both the defensive and offensive activities, both fear and aggression; it includes the self-justifying rationalizations for what we do; it describes people with vast competencies and aspirations who somehow have gone awry; it implies we are both victims and victimizers; it implies the peacemaking that the gospel accomplishes in order to transform habitual warmakers into peacemakers. The idea of "defense mechanisms" represents a severe constriction of the data; it only has

appeal because of a presuppositional tunnel-vision that looks at people as “psychological” entities rather than as covenantal beings existing in relationship to God and neighbor.

“Warmaking activities” explains the data far more lucidly and comprehensively than does “defense mechanisms.” It should not surprise us that this is so. Secular psychology is always hamstrung by its precommitment to view human problems as “ontological” problems—as “things” that are not working right. Hence something as basic as self-deception is inevitably analyzed as a psychological “mechanism.” But the Bible never views human problems as ontological but as relational or “ethical” at their cores. Problems exist *between* man and God and *between* man and man. That our psyches are unhinged—or futile, darkened, alienated, ignorant, hardened, deceived, and desire-ridden, as Ephesians 4 puts it—does not mean our problems are psychological. The disorientation that manifests itself in our psychic life is only symptomatic of an interpersonal disorientation: our alienation from God. The very efforts of Freud, Bandura, *et al*, to describe these problems as essentially ontological things or mechanisms is a manifestation of that same disorientation.

Second, if we are going to understand so-called “defense mechanisms” as part and parcel of human sin, how do we make sense out of the seemingly “unconscious” character of so many of the problems that “defensive” people manifest—those things that usually are spoken of as “psychological or emotional problems”? It is evident that in part of the discussion above (for example, the “fig leaves” culled from daily life) I have indiscriminately mingled relatively “conscious” acts, like lying, with relatively “unconscious” acts, like projec-

tion by an angry paranoid. Psychodynamic psychology has stressed the relatively unconscious character of defense mechanisms in neurosis and psychosis. For example, compare the concealed anger of a “reaction formation” with the concealed intentions of a Casanova on the make: the former genuinely does not seem to know or to be able to admit the truth; the latter could admit in a moment the sexual motives under the debonair and caring exterior. The whitewashing and image-manipulation of a political ad campaign is a calculated affair. The “inversion” of a widow whitewashing her husband’s memory is automatic and unconscious. Conscious dissembling is not “ego-defense mechanisms” according to the theory. But the failure to connect these two things derives from a constriction of vision in the psychological theory.

In practice, conscious and unconscious are not that easy to distinguish. They are on a continuum. It is remarkable how the most “unconscious” person knows he is responsible for his sinful reaction as soon as it is brought out into the light. The sticky sweetness of a “reaction formation” vanishes as soon as the person becomes honest. And the most “conscious” person is deeply deceived. How full of rationalizations the Casanova is. However much the guilt has been denied and twisted, the “defensive” person is guilty. The well-psychoanalyzed person may be able to identify each of his defensive machinations as it happens, but in a sense he remains wholly deceived as to what those “mechanisms” really are. The fear of the LORD is always the beginning of true wisdom, however things may appear when another interpretive framework is forced onto human life. The “phenomenological status” of a particular problem is no safe guide

to what that problem is. However unconscious or conscious a particular pattern of warmaking activity seems, it is still fundamentally warmaking. The biblical doctrine of sin easily accommodates the reality of “unconscious” actions: sin is a darkening of the mind, a blind compulsion, a slavery, an automatic and indelible proclivity. Especially as sin is understood in terms of its inner hold on human life—variously analyzed as pride or unbelief or idolatrous desires or self or a drive for autonomy from God—then the fact of the automatic character of so-called “defense mechanisms” is simple and poignant testimony to the deceitfulness of sin, to human culpability, not to the excuse of “psychological problems.”

Third, people (psychiatrists, the man on the street, many Christians) have trouble seeing “emotional and psychological problems” as intimately related to sin. Casanova had a sin problem. But a troubled person has “emotional problems.” And a paranoid schizophrenic or a case of reaction formation is a matter of “psychosis” or “neurosis.” It is common to view defensive behavior such as we have been describing in some other category than sin. There are two simple reasons for difficulty in seeing such problems as matters of human sin. First, the typical view of sin is that it consists in outward acts consciously chosen, where one could have chosen the righteous alternative. Second, the typical attitude or stance taken towards sin is a moralistic one, condemning the person and/or telling them to shape up by an exercise of will power. The paranoid—to pick the extreme case—seems clearly not to have chosen to become that way. And telling such a person to shape up has never worked in the whole history of mankind!

But the view of sin that focuses on willed

actions is a denial of the biblical view of sin. It is the heresy known as Pelagianism in the history of theology. That it is the “natural” theology of the man on the street (psychiatrists included!) and that for Christians it is the most common functional view of sin do not make it even an approximation of biblical truth. Where sin is viewed primarily as willed outward acts, overt evil with “malice aforethought,” then the deep and complex inner troubles people have will tend to be absorbed under other categories. But this typical view of sin which creeps almost spontaneously into all of our thinking misses the deep inner hold of sin, the dislocation and confusion of our hearts that is the core of the biblical view of sin. Both the “high-handed” sins and the subtle sins, like anxiety, are embraced within the biblical view. Other categories communicate false impressions.

The attitude or stance taken towards sin naturally follows from the view of sin. An external view of sin will imply a moralistic stance towards sin. But an attitude of criticism or an exhortation to will power is a frank denial of the gospel. For most people “sin” connotes criticism or moralistic exhortation. But for the Bible—and for a counselor or counselee who desires true self-knowledge rather than some species of rationalization—it both denotes and connotes the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It implies compassion and love offered to those who would know both themselves and God. Christ did not come to judge or to say, “Shape up!” He came to save, to invite to an inner transformation of mind, heart, motives, will, identity, and emotions. He came to draw to himself people who, standing on their own, are already judged and are powerless to change themselves. “Christianity transformed the lives of men

not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story. The lives of men are transformed by a piece of news.”⁶

Historically, attitudes towards troubled people have often been moralistic in Western society and in the church. Secular psychology might even be viewed as a “tolerant” reaction against moralism, for it sought to accept people rather than judge them, to show acceptance rather than to promote guilt, to make problems be psychological or behavioral maladjustment rather than sin. Such themes are prominent in the life histories of men like Carl Rogers, B. F. Skinner, Ernest Jones, and many of the other founders of psychiatry. It is no accident that the history of secular psychology and psychiatry is intertwined with theological liberalism and has continued to appeal where there is a “liberalizing” trend going on in the church. The pendulum swings from error to error, from moralism that condemns men before God to liberalism that sets men free of God. The paradox is that, in the name of tolerance (i.e., non-judgmentalism and supposedly objective psychological science), the truth that troubled people have a deep sin problem is withdrawn—and so is the gospel that deals with that sin problem. A person whose heart is tangled up—is “deceitful beyond all finding out; who can understand it?” as Jeremiah 17:9 so eloquently puts it—is taught psychological euphemisms to diagnose his problems. He is then given the unconditional regard and acceptance of the therapist as a substitute for the self-giving love of the Lamb of God. “The wound of my people is healed lightly for they say ‘Peace, peace’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 8:11). Both legalism (“this is willful”) and psychologism (“this is a defense mechanism”) are profound distortions. Jesus Christ is a distinct third way.

Fourth, both Bandura and the ego psychologists assume that the only two alternatives are either stifling moralism (“character flaws,” lack of will power, judgmentalism, the way most religionists and the man on the street interpret behavior) or liberating psychological science (deeply penetrating into unconscious and dissociated behavior; non-judgmental; the way most psychologists interpret behavior). The gospel, however, is a third way. It is exactly the truth—of the radical and denominating nature of sin and of the radical and reorienting power of the Light, of the forgiving love of Christ—that defensive people need and respect. In counseling it is striking how “schizophrenics,” the paradigm case for powerful unconscious defensiveness, “track” to the themes of pride and hiding. They are large children, full of “folly” in the Proverbial sense, and they know it. It is striking as well how “madmen” become sane as they begin to grasp the implications of justification by faith, the substitutionary atonement, the alien righteousness of Christ, adoption as children of the Father, the Lordship of the crucified Savior (of course not in such polysyllabic language at first!). Biblical Christianity is a third way. It is hard truth that heals deeply. It is not a set of euphemisms, like “ego defense mechanisms.” It is not a set of criticisms, like, “If he wanted to, he could shape up.”

Fifth, when we look closely at the thought structure in which ideas like “ego defense mechanisms” or “self-exonerating mechanisms” are generated, we realize that they involve a deadly irony. These very categories are a case in point of the things being described. Their own categories condemn them. The nature of rationalization is to hide oneself from hard facts, from blows to one’s pride. The notion of uncon-

scious defense mechanisms that define one as “sick” (rather than profoundly deceived and/or deceptive) is a choice illustration of a “defensive” self-exonerating rationalization. Human responsibility is muted; there are “other reasons” for our problems. The psychodynamic explanation of human hiding and self-deception is itself a systematized and well institutionalized “defense mechanism.” It is a self-exonerating rationalization. Similarly Bandura’s theory of self-exonerating mechanisms is itself an example of euphemistic labeling taking place. He takes the data of human sin and euphemizes it. He writes, for example, “It is self-exonerative processes rather than character flaws that account for most inhumanities.”⁷ It would be much more accurate to write that sin—in all its self-deceptive power—evidences itself in inhumanities, character flaws, and self-excusing. Euphemism makes deep (serious) things shallow, and Bandura is shallow in his analysis of human knots. Some of Paul Vitz’s recent work, in which he shows how Freud’s analysis of the Oedipal complex is a damning explanation of Freud’s atheism, makes an analysis similar to the one we are making here.

Sixth, one of the most persuasive arguments in favor of a view of problems as “emotional and psychological” has always been that people with such problems almost invariably have had real scars from their upbringing. Especially when one has a moralistic view of sin, it seems somehow cruel to say, for example, that a woman with multiple personalities (an extreme form of the defense mechanism “fantasy”) has a basic sin problem. Such a person typically underwent constant criticism, was sexually abused, had horrendous role models, and lived a life of constant failure and danger. But a biblical view of sin and coun-

seling is tailor-made to help people with such deep problems. She was sinned against grievously and repeatedly—both in being given negative models of how to live, and in the direct attacks against her. Jesus Christ has great compassion on those sinned-against: He can give this woman courage and a reason to face now what happened and to forgive. She is also enslaved in sin—she lives multiple lies, is ruled by fear and bitterness, gives nothing to others, manipulates, does no work, has blasphemous ideas about God, and does not trust in Jesus. That she was both extremely provoked and consistently taught to sin does not lessen the fact that her life is controlled by sin. In fact, her sin against God is the “10,000 talents,” for her life is owed to him and is completely alienated from him; the sin against her is the “100 denarii,” a huge amount (a denarius is a day’s pay). Such large pain of being wronged will be converted into forgiveness when she sees her bigger wrong against God. Jesus Christ has great compassion on sinners: as she faces Him, responsible for who she is and has become, and finds forgiveness, she will gain reason and courage to live and to forgive.

Seventh, all this is to say that the “ego ideal” which “ego defense mechanisms” are defending and the violations of one’s internalized moral code which “self-exonerating mechanisms” are busy justifying are far from being mere “psychological” categories. These are “theological” issues to the core: the pervasive outworkings of human pride in seeking—automatically and blindly as well as willingly—to live autonomously from the Creator and Redeemer. Let us carefully use the descriptions and observations of secular psychologists. People indeed do and say the things reported, and secular men and women

have often been more careful to observe these than Christians have. But an interpretive framework is incarnated in the reports of these observations. Technical terminology is the bearer of unbiblical, speculative theory. Let us be wary of the terminology, for it sets the terms of the discussion of human problems in a world view that is false. "Projection," for example, is a mechanical term for a decidedly human, interpersonal, and covenantal activity! It is a term freighted with distorted theory. It communicates false impressions. Machines project; people act. Human beings do not have mechanisms, however automatically they react. Seemingly automatism in human behavior are better seen as illustrations of "slave-like behavior," not machine-like activity. Just as the notion of "warfare activities" thrusts us into a personalistic world, so the notion that behavior is "ruled," not mechanical, forces us to see people more accurately and personally. Sin, the desires of the flesh, the world around us, and the devil are all portrayed as rulers that enslave and command behavior.⁸ They are personalized powers that deceive people and induce them to "warfare activities," whether people know that they are ruled or not. Slaves and machines have many similarities. To show a slave how he is a machine may give him a sense of control and a world-view in which to interpret his experience. But though his anxiety level is reduced and he functions more self-confidently, he has been deceived more profoundly.

If they could be isolated from their system, none of the terms would be

bad. Euphemistic labeling, fantasy, rationalization, and others are reasonably concrete words with which to describe behavior. But functioning as technical terms, they are theory-laden. The triumph of Lavoisier's nomenclature was the triumph of Lavoisier's system! Simple descriptive language that incarnates a personalist world-view may be more useful than technical terminology, so long as the secular theoretical framework continues to be implicit in the vocabulary. Freudians and Bandurans have some notion of truth which serves as a framework within which to determine what is euphemistic, fantastical, or rationalistic. But their notion of truth is a shallow and distorting gloss when seen next to Scripture. They observe the evidences of human sin in massive detail, but they do not see sin nor hear Jesus. There is a vast difference between saying, "That is a case of euphemistic labeling," and saying, "You are using euphemisms." The former places us in a world of secular mechanisms needing repair; the latter locates us in the world of human sin needing redemption.

Conclusion

Let us be ruthless to root out theoretical structures that view people as psychological or socio-psychological abstractions: the phenomena observed are not "ego defense mechanisms" but are pride's offensive, defensive, and deceptive strategies. And let us also forswear the therapeutic assumptions that are consequent to the theory: they are poor and deceptive substitutes for the gospel of Jesus Christ. If—and it is a large *if*—biblical categories con-

trol, we can revel in the descriptive acuity and case-study riches of psychologists. With biblical categories, we ourselves will mature as psychologists in the best sense of the word: acute observers of human life, experienced in cases and case studies, consistently wise in our counseling methods. We will know people deeply enough to know exactly how they need Jesus Christ. We will remember that Christianity is a third way. The alternative to moralism is not psychologism; the alternative is Christianity. "Warmaking activities" are omnipresent. Jesus Christ came and made true peace. Blessed are the peacemakers who help others into the peace of God that is in Jesus Christ. With biblical categories we will become men and women who know people—including ourselves first of all—and who know how to help with the help that is help indeed, with the *paraklēsis* ("comfort") with which we ourselves have been comforted by God (2 Cor 1:4).

ENDNOTES

¹"Human Defensiveness: The Third Way" was first published in the *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 8 no. 1 (1985) 40-55. Used by permission.

²Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 1.

³Antoine Lavoisier, *The Elements of Chemistry*, trans. in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 45 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952) 1.

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (London: T. N. Foulis, 1914) 86.

⁵T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt,

Brace & World, 1971) 14.

⁶J. G. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923) 47-48.

⁷Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973) 158.

⁸Eph 2:1-3 is an exceedingly rich summary passage that includes all of these. Rom 6:11-22; Gal 5:16-24; Rom 12:2; and 2 Tim 2:26 describe each in turn, as well as the alternative: “slavery”—to righteousness, to the desires of the Spirit, to God’s will—a “slavery” which is freedom.

How God Is Good for the Soul

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Many of the greatest Christian thinkers have believed that knowing God and knowing one's self were intimately interwoven, including Augustine, Bonaventure, John Calvin, and Søren Kierkegaard.¹ Calvin called the knowledge of God and the knowledge of one's self the sum and substance of all "true and sound wisdom" and believed they were thoroughly interdependent.² As Kierkegaard briefly put it, "The more conception of God, the more self; the more self, the more conception of God."³ The more one knows God, he believed, the more one becomes a self (a responsible person as Christianly conceived); and the more one becomes such a self, the more deeply one can appreciate God. The best of historic Christian thought has consistently maintained that it is not possible to know one's soul accurately apart from a corollary knowledge of God. Such a stance offers a radical reconceptualization of the field of counseling, currently conceived of in thoroughly secular terms. But the secular stance of modernism/postmodernism is nothing more than a communally-based assumption that was largely unquestioned in the twentieth century. For the Christian community, grounded as it is in the Christian Scriptures and, secondarily, in the Christian tradition, an accurate understanding of human nature and oneself can only proceed in concert with one's knowledge of God (and vice versa).⁴

To develop a distinct psychology and form of counseling and psychotherapy that is foundationally Christian, then, requires a deeper exploration of the implications of this "bi-polar" stance. The purpose of this

article is a consideration of the mental health benefits of prayerfully meditating upon some of the main features of God's nature.

Some Psychospiritual Benefits of the Experience of Some of God's Attributes

Because of the thorough interdependence of self-understanding and God-understanding according to Christian thought, we would expect that the Christian self would be profoundly benefited by its perception and experience of God. The Bible contains many examples of people being deeply affected by an immediate exposure to God: Abraham, Jacob, Moses (repeatedly), Isaiah, and, of course, most of Jesus' own disciples! The predicament of post-resurrection disciples like ourselves is that our experience of God is mediated through God's word and requires the agency of the Holy Spirit acting upon our capacities. In the present, through our reading, hearing, and reflecting on the word of God, God the Holy Spirit reveals the knowledge of God to the soul (as well as true self-knowledge and a truer knowledge of others).

And this knowledge of God is good for the soul. Jesus equated it with eternal life (John 17:3). Augustine took this insight very seriously. "For Augustine the goal of life is knowing and enjoying God. Knowing God occurs on two fronts. One is the sphere of God's works in history: creation, Incarnation, and so forth. The other is the spiritual sphere—a proper understanding of the qualities of God. In order to enjoy God it is necessary to know who God is

based on what he has done and to understand ourselves in a certain way, a way that takes pleasure in the qualities of God and of ourselves as participants therein.”⁵ As the Puritan, Henry Scougal, wrote (influenced, at least indirectly, by Augustine), “The true way to improve and ennoble our souls is by fixing our love on the divine perfections that we may have them always before us and derive an impression of them on ourselves.”⁶

Before we look at some of God’s traits, we must consider the way in which we are to know God, for the wrong kind of knowing does nothing to benefit the soul. On the contrary, it leads to spiritual death. Edwards sharply distinguished what he called “notional understanding” (an abstract and speculative knowledge that only involves the intellect) and “spiritual understanding” (an apprehension that engages the whole person: the affections as well as the intellect, issuing in love and awe in the heart). For Edwards, spiritual understanding was necessary for true religion. He equated true knowledge of God with the love and worship of God, for true knowledge of an object, according to Edwards, entails the aesthetic perception of its worth, a perception that necessarily produces an emotional, evaluative response. In the case of a spiritually healthy soul, such a perception of God produces immense love and awe. So, for Edwards, knowing facts about God were essential, but not enough. The only *saving* understanding of God involves both an intellectual and affective appreciation or experience of the beauty of God that draws our hearts out to him in love and adoration.⁷

This point cannot be overstated. Some Christians have concluded that the understanding of God produces little, if any, ben-

efit to the soul, because they assume a strictly intellectualistic approach to such efforts, and so they look elsewhere for psychologically transformative experiences. But if, following Edwards, we insist that the true knowledge of God entails a “tasting” of God’s goodness (Ps 34:6), it produces, by definition, emotional change (as a result of a deeper physiological change than factual learning alone can produce), and it is only such changes that can lead to the “re-formative” kinds of encouragement, conviction, humility, and peace that can contribute to a genuine and deep healing of the soul, changes that are especially necessary to aid in the recovery of people who have been emotionally traumatized. However, there is a balance here. God has revealed cognitive content about himself in the Bible that provides the essential grist for Christian experience. Christian orthodoxy does not disparage an intellectual understanding of God, since it provides the necessary foundation for Christian experience of God, without which Christians have no understanding of what they experience and therefore no ability to distinguish the true God from false ones. This feature decisively separates Christian and Eastern approaches to religious experience. The Christian life is based on truth and love.

God’s Greatness

God possesses many traits, and we do not have space to deal with them all here. Erickson distinguishes between two types of traits (or attributes) of God: those having to do with his greatness and his goodness.⁸ Though we humans are inclined to focus on those traits that relate directly to us (mostly those of his goodness), we will begin with God’s greatness, because the greatness of his being is what most distin-

guishes him from us, and it also heightens the significance of his relationship with us and provides its proper context.

God's Self-Existence and Self-Sufficiency

Humans have needs for food, water, and air in order to live, and for social relationships in order to develop (when children) and to live well (as adults). God, by contrast, requires nothing outside himself to exist. God has life in himself (John 5:26). This, of course, makes God utterly unique. He needs nothing outside of himself to be fulfilled or happy, so he certainly does not need humans to fill a void he has. Since God exists as a triune set of persons, God has always existed in perfect, fulfilling social relationship and unthreatened contentment.

Some might feel that this understanding takes significance away from humans (compared to a view that sees God as needing humans). And this is true. Christianity does not place humans at the center of the universe (as humanism does), but God. Upon reflection, the superficial boon a human-centered universe would provide for our self-esteem is quickly negated. If God was made content by the likes of us, the universe would be managed by a needy and unstable deity (in fact, we would be his helper, turning us into his deity), making it difficult, to say the least, to find peace through entrusting our lives into his hands. On the contrary, knowing that God is absolutely self-sufficient is deeply reassuring. It is good for our souls to know, in the midst of our contingent, unpredictable life, that our God is never drained, burned out, or out of control, and is therefore always able to care for us and our needs (though we may have to reconceive our needs).⁹ His sufficiency meets the ultimate needs of my

insufficiency. Secular existential psychology raises the issue of our contingency, frailty, and finitude, but offers no consolation; it just claims that we must face such realities alone. Christianity also encourages us to face them, but armed with the knowledge that we have an all-sufficient God who is with us.

Many people are troubled about their deficiencies, weaknesses, and shame. Such knowledge is made desperate without God. Moreover, out of a need to protect ourselves from our fundamental frailty, humans create and maintain defenses, and become self-sufficient, independent, and even proud and self-absorbed. Over time knowledge of God's self-sufficiency can give us the courage to allow those defenses to be softened and gradually taken down.

If it is true that narcissism is the disorder of our age,¹⁰ what better way is there to treat it than fostering a relationship with the God of the universe? Loving this God gets us outside ourselves and focuses our attention on One who is truly worth magnifying. And the experience of God's affection for us in Christ may go a long ways towards meeting deep, unmet relational needs that foster narcissism. Relating to the absolutely self-sufficient God (as we grow in our ability to acknowledge our own limitations and sins) may be one of the most helpful relational activities in which one struggling with narcissism can engage. One might argue that only a genuinely God-centered religion is able adequately to treat the self-absorption of narcissism; certainly its resources are more beneficial than contemporary Selfism, which simply aids in the sophistication and success of one's autocentric orientation.

None of the foregoing should be read as implying that other humans are not extremely important to such therapeutic

processes. The point here, in this article, is that the awareness of God is, also, extremely important to such processes, and part of Christian counseling is to help Christians avail themselves of the therapeutic resources of their faith.

God's Self-Awareness

Since God knows all things, he knows himself perfectly. He is absolutely self-aware.¹¹ In this capacity, God provides a model for human psychological well-being. Humans are prone to self-deception, defensive activity, self-alienation, dissociation, and, in extreme cases, can experience psychosis. And the more self-aware humans are, the more mature they are, and the more they are able to control themselves and the less they are controlled by unacknowledged dynamics. Knowing God, who knows himself exhaustively, provides a profound encouragement to grow in self-awareness, and God himself, through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 4:4), makes such self-awareness possible. "Only by being before God can one totally come to oneself in the transparency of soberness."¹²

God's Omni-Competence

To say that God is the greatest being in the universe means that he is superlative in every way. He has no limitations or imperfections, and so he is unimprovable. There is no power greater than his own and so nothing (meaningful) he cannot do (he is omnipotent), nothing he does not know (he is omniscient), and nowhere he is not (he is omnipresent). God then is perfectly competent.

For those who have a personal relationship with him and believe he is perfectly good, such truths can contribute to a deeper sense of comfort and security.

Though most things are outside human control and everyone has experienced some suffering in life, it is encouraging to know that God knows everything that is going to happen to us, he is in absolute control, he is always present with the believer, and he works all things together for the believer's good (Rom 8:28). Such awareness can go far to reduce stress,¹³ and it seems likely that many psychological difficulties could be impacted by a deep acceptance of God's omniscience (combined with the belief that he is "on my side"), including such things as perfectionism, a sense of meaninglessness or insignificance, inferiority, anxiety, phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and feelings of personal incompetence.

Each of the attributes that contributes to God's omniscience provides its own psychospiritual consolation. His omnipotence communicates that no ultimate harm will come to believers. God is their always-victorious protector. "When we say that God is omnipotent, it is not only that we may honor Him, but in order that we may be at rest and invincible in the face of all temptations, for, since the power of God is infinite, he is well able to preserve and guard us."¹⁴ Being omniscient means that God knows the future and will not be surprised by anything that happens to us. It also means that he knows everything that is in the believer's heart. There is no point, therefore, in hiding from him (or from oneself), so believers are encouraged to "come clean" and open up their souls self-consciously to his gaze (and so to their own). Tozer says God's omniscience is sweet because "no talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make an accusation stick; no forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to abash us and

expose our past; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us.”¹⁵ God’s omnipresence means that no matter where the believer is, God is there present with him and will be there to support the believer through whatever happens. For the believer, there is no place in the universe of absolute loneliness and abandonment.

God is supremely, wondrously great. Since he is the most glorious being in the universe, his beliefs and values are of supreme importance. He is the absolute expert or authority; therefore, he knows what he’s talking about. This is all-important therapeutically because a deep awareness of his greatness makes his affection for us and his understanding of us very important (for example, his view of us as justified in Christ). An awareness of his supreme greatness causes us to value what he thinks about us, more than what other humans think (or have thought) and more than what we fundamentally think about ourselves (in our core beliefs; “we shall assure our heart before him, in whatever our heart condemns us, for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things,” 1 John 3:19-20). Julian of Norwich recognized some of the value to the soul of such knowledge. “Of all things, the beholding of and longing for the Maker most makes the soul become less in its own sight, for it most fills one with reverent dread, true meekness, and fullness of charity toward one’s fellow Christians.”¹⁶

God’s Goodness

We began this section by looking at God’s greatness because it provides the

necessary background for properly understanding God’s goodness. Only after recognizing the vast supremacy of God can one properly appreciate his love for humans and benefit from it. “It is the greatest joy possible, as I see it, that he who is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, becomes lowest and meekest, friendliest and most courteous.”¹⁷ So we consider next God’s overall goodness.

God’s Moral Goodness, Righteousness, and Justice

“God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Such knowledge can also be deeply helpful to our souls. We were created to correspond to such moral perfection, so we are predisposed to be optimistic about ourselves and our future, to be positive about things in general, and to form a just-world theory of how things work out.¹⁸ Autocentric non-Christians must engage in self-enhancing “positive illusions”¹⁹ to maintain such a positive stance, leading sometimes to tragic self-deception, since humans in this age are inclined to justify themselves and blame others for their difficulties.²⁰ Knowing God through the gospel allows the Christian, ideally, to find cognitive satisfaction for this “positive orientation” in God, in spite of one’s personal shortcomings.

This leads to another reason why the knowledge of God’s moral goodness is good for our souls. Calvin believed that knowing God in his righteousness was one of the best promoters of accurate self-awareness.

As long as we do not look beyond the earth, being quite content with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue, we flatter ourselves most sweetly, and fancy ourselves all but demigods. Suppose we but once begin to raise our thoughts to God,

and to ponder his nature, and how completely perfect are his righteousness, wisdom, and power—the straightedge to which we must be shaped. Then, what wonderfully impressed us under the name of wisdom will stink in its very foolishness.²¹

Knowing God’s righteousness can help Christians to be more humble, authentic, and accurate in their self-representations. On the other hand, problems arise when Christians *over-identify* with God’s righteousness and come to assume unconsciously that they are intrinsically as good as God. This, unfortunately, can lead paradoxically to greater self-deception and arrogance than that to which non-Christians are typically given.

Recognizing God’s moral goodness also can benefit the soul by reducing the anxiety, bitterness, and self-pity that can arise from the feelings that one’s maltreatment at the hand of others will never be redressed. God’s righteousness guarantees that everything wrong in this life will somehow be made right in the end. This knowledge can be deeply satisfying, because much of the secret anguish in life that derives from mistreatment in childhood is due to the immense sense of injustice that the victims of such sin feel so deeply.

Can There Be Anything Therapeutic about God’s Wrath?

Surely the most disturbing trait of God is his capacity to be angry (1 Kgs 14:9; John 3:36; Eph 2:3). The Bible makes clear that, in response to the rebellion of his image-bearers, God can be extremely displeased and looks like the opponent of sinners, eventually consigning those who disobey him to hell.²² The prophetic literature in particular shows God to be enraged at sin.

We might think that nothing of therapeutic benefit can be derived from thinking about such a threatening attribute as God’s wrath, but because of the psychological perplexities this attribute poses to the soul (and because of modern discomfort with it), we will examine it a bit more in depth.

Theological liberals, who do not take biblical revelation seriously, find it easy to reject God’s wrath, positing instead a God that is more “accepting” of human faults.²³ Such a stance might seem superficially beneficial to the soul, but trusting God’s word, we should expect that in the long run too much is lost for it to be truly psychologically helpful. For if God were simply to “overlook” wrong-doing, he would of necessity be a moral relativist himself, one without ethical standards, a view that throws the universe into moral chaos, ultimately a devastating move psychologically, since it subtly encourages human moral carelessness, which inevitably brings harm to its practitioners (Prov 1:32, 8:36). In addition, God’s wrath most clearly reveals his absolute opposition to all evil, abuse, and oppression, and this truth, as suggested above, is ultimately consoling to its victims.

When convinced that God is thoroughly holy and righteous, even in his wrath, intellectual problems with his anger dissolve. The real problem in this doctrine comes from its tragic distortions in human sinful anger, since human anger rarely attains the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Most human wrath is narcissistic and self-serving, in the light of God’s holy emotions, and so it hurts others. Excessive parental anger, in particular, is deadly to the child who, being an emotional “sponge,” soaks in aggressive rejection and in different ways takes it into her soul, being profoundly damaged in the process.

Adults who have been exposed to such sinful distortions will be inclined to either reject God, or the idea of wrath in God, or will come to over-identify with God (and his wrath), falsely legitimizing their own sinful wrath (as is the tendency of authoritarian parents, who tend to be religious).

We are driven to take seriously the wrath of God for no other reason than that it is a pervasive theme in the Bible.

Rightly handled, God's holy indignation against sin causes a healthy, theocentric sense of the awfulness of evil. It can lead to soul-maturing experiences of conviction and a deepening humility. God's wrath in Scripture points to his values, that which robs him of glory, but that also happen to be what is ultimately most self-destructive for humans! His anger reveals what is against God *and ourselves*. It is, for the believer, the corollary of his love.²⁴ Theological liberals seem not to grasp this. God has revealed his wrath to spare humans from the harmful consequences of sin, ultimately from that wrath itself (2 Pet 3:3-13). The revelation of God's holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath, *when combined with the gospel*, can profoundly benefit the soul by causing humans to reject, or repent of, harmful thoughts, behaviors, desires, and motives, to separate themselves by faith from the old self and its evil, and so ultimately to contribute to a fuller and healthier self-awareness and ability to relate to others.

But this attribute must obviously be handled with great care. When perceived through the lenses of past emotional or physical abuse, God's wrath can be interpreted as personal rejection. Consequently, the Christian counselor will have to encourage some clients not to focus on God's anger, until, after receiving healing through the gospel of the grace of God,

they are better able to interpret it, separated from their own abuse and pain. Perhaps this trait is of greatest value to those on the ends of the spiritual-ethical continuum: on one end, those whose very souls are in immediate eternal danger through the ongoing practice of sin (chronic substance abuse or adultery, see 1 Cor 6:18) and, on the other end, those who are the most psychospiritually mature, who are capable of handling it with little distortion and so can use it to promote humility, seriousness, and earnestness in the Christian life.

Ultimately, any consideration of God's anger must take us to the cross of Christ, for there was the greatest display of God's wrath *and his love*, simultaneously, since there God's anger against sin and sinners is swallowed up in his own saving goodness.²⁵ In light of the revelation of the cross of Christ (and his resurrection), humans find whatever angry abuse they have suffered, and their own shame, sorrow, anger, and guilt reckoned to Christ (Isaiah 53), ultimately setting the believer free from all that stands in the way of God's saving purposes. The cross is the tree of life to the believer.²⁶ However, in this age, it takes time to take in more and more of the healing found in that tree.

God's Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness

At this point, it must be made clear that none of God's attributes can be *properly* perceived (i.e., in a way that benefits the soul) apart from the gospel of God's grace in Christ. "The way to diminish and even overcome those terrors which arise from partial and false apprehensions of God is to attain spiritual, clear, and enlarged views of Him as a God whose glory it is to be merciful and gracious even to the chief of sinners."²⁷ Many humans struggle with a conscious awareness of shame and guilt,

and most humans possess an unconscious sense of the same. Shame, in particular, fosters an avoidance of self-examination and the assumption of responsibility, fear of others and of “being exposed,” defensiveness and aggressive anger; it keeps people from reaching out to others; and it is associated with most forms of psychopathology.²⁸ The revelation of God’s grace and mercy, his love for sinners and the broken and hurting, can therefore be profoundly encouraging and hope-giving. Direct experiences of God’s grace in the gospel can lead to a reconfiguration of one’s self-representations, and one’s view of others and the world, and can facilitate a growing honesty and openness with God, oneself, and others, and so can help Christians become more willing to take risks with others. This is because knowing that the greatest Being in the universe is committed to one’s ultimate well-being in Christ, regardless of one’s sin and dysfunction, provides a deep sense of security, integrity, wholeness, and fulfillment, a sense that corresponds to the extent the individual is able to embrace it and so undermine previous destructive patterns of shame and self-abhorrence.

People who are especially burdened by their guilt and shame can become especially transformed by God’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness. In fact, the greater the sense of shame, the greater can be the eventual sense of gratitude and affection to God (Luke 7:47; though such an awareness tends to grow throughout one’s life with God). The deepening reception of one’s forgiveness gives the soul a serious kind of joy quite unlike any other, one that brings psychospiritual healing in its wings.

God’s Love

Understanding God’s Trinitarian nature

leads to the recognition that God in himself is perfect love and communion (John 17:23, 24; 1 John 4:10, 16).²⁹ So gazing upon the triune God of all love, by faith, is fundamentally beneficial. Naturalism, humanism, and postmodernism have nothing more to give their clients than the admonition that they should care about and love themselves, because it makes persons more happy, adaptive, and successful. But what if someone sincerely believes that he is not lovable (as many depressed people do)? Humanistic psychotherapy has always been hampered by the contradiction of encouraging “unlovable selves” to love themselves. Humans need a transcendent basis for a change in self-evaluation that originates from outside the tainted self.

God, furthermore, is absolutely committed to his children; he is *for* them; he is on their side (Rom 8:26-39). “We may, with his grace and his help, stand in spirit, gazing with endless wonder at this lofty, unmeasurable love beyond human scope that Almighty God has for us of his goodness.”³⁰ For Christians, this absolute support, grounded in his covenantal promises to them in Christ, can become the primary catalyst driving their psychospiritual improvement. As God’s supreme dedication to one’s welfare is increasingly accepted, a deep-seated psychological paradigm shift begins to occur, and believers come to feel that the “cloud” that has hovered over their lives is being gradually lifted, that God *really is* on their side, and that their life *really is* worthwhile.

God’s word encourages believers to see his love as directed personally toward them. “The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will be quiet in his love; he will exult over you with loud

singing.” (Zeph 3:17). Because of Christ, God takes absolute delight in the believer. Experiencing attachment with God can repair attachment damage.³¹ Experiences of his favor help to supplement damaged and weak self-structures and relational dispositions and foster the development of new, healthier internal structures. People who struggle with “co-dependence” or dependent personality disorder can derive special benefit from fostering a deeper relationship with their Father and Friend. The unmet needs that cause people to be overly dependent on other humans in unsatisfying ways can, to some extent, be met in a real sense through a deepening relationship with the Lover of their souls.

The revelation throughout the Bible of God’s love of the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the sinful, the broken, and the suffering, particularly as demonstrated through Christ’s life, ministers to those who have felt disenfranchised, alienated from others, and marginalized. Persons with serious psychospiritual problems are given hope as they accept this revelation. Counselors must take seriously the pain of God’s “absence” in someone’s childhood, the result of the evil or carelessness of human caregivers. While God was not actually absent, distorted image-bearers in childhood seem to provide “evidence” that God does not exist, or perhaps that he is one’s enemy, and, combined with one’s own original sin, these experiences can persuade the soul that it is unlovable and abandoned. Thus, the revelation of God’s love through Scripture can become profoundly curative and therapeutic as the adult comes to know and love this God who felt so distant in earlier periods of life. (This is enhanced when Christian image-bearers [like the counselor] express this love concretely through supportive rela-

tionships with the individual.³²) Together, the love of God, experienced through private and public worship and that which is mediated through God’s people, provides the kinds of relational experiences that permit the relinquishing of pathological self- and other-representations and the incorporation of healthy self and relational structures.

God’s Joy and Contentment

Throughout Church history, Christians have also understood God to exist in unalterable happiness and bliss.³³ God is intrinsically content and joy-filled. He is perfectly satisfied in himself and beyond any threats to his infinite enjoyment. This has powerful implications for human well-being and our relation with God. For this means that,

God is never irritable or edgy. He is never fatigued or depressed or blue or moody or stressed out. His anger never has a short fuse. He is not easily annoyed. He is above any possibility of being touchy or cranky or temperamental. Instead he is infinitely energetic with absolutely unbounded and unending enthusiasm for the fulfillment of his delights.³⁴

God’s perfect peace and joy provide the ultimate foundation for the psychological well-being of the human soul. Human joy has an objective basis in God.³⁵ It is therefore good for the soul to gaze upon and fellowship with this perfectly mentally-healthy and joyful God. Since God is so characterized by such joy, those who worship God and dwell in him (through prayerful meditation) are exposed to and gradually drawn into his contentment. Given his joyful nature, God himself “gives pleasure, creates desires and rewards with enjoyment, because He is pleasant, desirable, and full of enjoyment.”³⁶ Secular

counselors have no such transcendent resources; how advantaged is the Christian counselor who can help others to access such joy in God!

On the other hand, to be cut off from the God of all joy, through distrust and unbelief, makes humans more susceptible to the kinds of psychological dissatisfaction and suffering that are devoid of transcendent joy (e.g., depression) or that result from trying to find transcendent joy in less-than-transcendent places (e.g., in the creation, through drugs). So, Christian counselors assist their counselees as they point them to the God who is perfectly blissful and teach them how to dwell in him and obtain more of the gift of his bliss.

Summary

Since humans are made in God's image, humans can only become whole selves in love with God. Because of the breadth of God's character, just about every distressing or dysfunctional state can be addressed by some trait of God. Knowing and being loved by God strangely transforms one's sense of worthlessness and inferiority. The self-importance of narcissism is relativized in God's presence. His sovereignty soothes anxiety and fear. His righteousness and justice help to put into perspective experiences of injustice and so reduce bitterness. It would seem that whatever one's psycho-spiritual difficulties, they can be fundamentally improved by looking to God. By focusing increased attention and affection on the beauty of God (and so more and more "bringing" the beauty of God into one's internal world), it would seem likely to lead gradually to a fundamental reconfiguration of one's self-other relational context; one's narrative; one's feelings of security, hope, and belongingness; and one's sense of meaning and purpose.

At the same time, it must be restated that God made humans to be in human relationships as well as divine, and the experienced Christian counselor knows that prior harmful relational experiences and later self-understandings and choices can push the experience and comfort of God's goodness outside one's immediate reach. This reality provides no excuses, but it must be taken with utmost seriousness. To minimize such conditions leads to a distorted view of the hindrances that inhibit one's ability to receive the grace of God's nature. Here is where the Christian counselor's resourcefulness comes into play, recognizing that he or she is a sign of God that immediately reveals something of God to the counselee, a function that can eventually become a relational bridge for more direct work with God.

Healing Time with God

Before we finish, we must consider how to help people access God in more of his beauty for therapeutic purposes. For this we need to consider those spiritual disciplines that have been used for centuries for such purposes: prayer; spiritual reading (*lectio divina*), especially the Bible, but also good devotional literature; meditation (or contemplation); and worship.

Christians need more supernatural visits from their Father and Savior to be beneficially impacted by God's nature. It is not enough simply to read the Bible. That is necessary, but such reading must be enlivened experientially by the Holy Spirit, so that our religious affections are engaged and focused on God and we experience his presence.³⁷ For this, Christians have to learn how to cultivate the frame of heart to gaze upon God's beauty. Christians (and too many Christian counselors) are often unconvinced that communing with God

will produce the kind of psychological help people need.³⁸ Many Christians have little understanding of the psychospiritual benefits that result from learning how to abide in Christ and worship God in private and public, so devotions and church attendance often degenerate into mere formal duty. But Christians have to re-wire their brains for accessing glory. It takes time to learn how to meditate and how to develop a simple, daily focus on God that more consistently connects with God's greatness and goodness. So Christians, including emotionally troubled Christians, need to be taught the relevant spiritual disciplines, and they need to make space in their lives for God, getting free of distractions, and getting alone more with God. This is often a huge hurdle because of the busyness of modern life and because of the disarray of many Christians' inner lives. But helping in these areas is also what Christian counseling is about.

Christianity is nothing if it is not relationship with God. So prayer is primary (and therapeutic).³⁹ But it cannot consist merely in restless supplications for it to be deeply helpful. The practice of "listening prayer" leads to a richer, more dialogical form of prayer that rests in the presence of God.⁴⁰ Second, as the Christian learns how effectively to meditate on the nature of God, through Scripture especially, but also good Christian books (something that can take from weeks to months to learn), such meditation tends to produce daily benefits (through ongoing stress-reduction), as well as long-term benefits (by enabling the creation, over time, of new internal structural change in one's deep understanding of reality, one's story, one's relationships, and one's self). Prayerful meditation is essential, especially when it is affectively-charged, because it accesses deeper parts

of the brain (the amygdala and hippocampus)⁴¹ that can bring about fuller, healthier internal reorganization of one's memories and emotional orientation, than can mere intellectual apprehension of spiritual truth, that by itself does little to change the heart.

It should be added that it is also highly therapeutic for Christians to go on nature walks, hikes, or camping trips, to get alone with God and allow his peaceful dignity, contentment, power, and wisdom to be directly communicated to the soul through his creation. Nature does not belong to New Agers; it really belongs to God and to his children. Nature contains countless metaphors of spiritual truth and healing, and some of God's traits seem sometimes almost palpable in nature (Rom 1:20). The assignment of spending time in nature will make good clinical sense for some clients.

So, knowing God is not to be reserved for those who are already psychologically whole. On the contrary, for the Christian, God is always central to human life and to its development, regardless of its degree of psychopathology. May God lead all of us into more of his beautiful, healing presence.

Recommended Resources

There are not enough good, accessible books on God's traits, particularly written in the twentieth century. Most of the following are classics.

Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Translated by H. Chadwick. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Augustine was one of the most God-centered Christian thinkers of all time. This autobiographical prayer (!) is filled with praises of God and reflections on his greatness and beauty.

Bernard of Clairvaux. *The Love of God*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1983. A rich

exploration on Christ's love for his people, his bride, and our growing love of God, by an important monk from the 12th century.

Calvin, J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960. This is rigorous theology but was written before theology became overly intellectual and arid. This is worship-theology. One cannot read far before being drawn to worship, confess, or celebrate.

Charnock, S. *The Existence and Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. Written by a Puritan preacher and published first in 1682, it is a demanding and exhaustive, but rewarding, discussion of some of God's most important attributes.

Edwards, J. *A Passion for His Glory*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998. Accompanied by a lengthy introduction by John Piper on the value of Edwards, the last half of the book is a reprint of Edwards's essay *The End for Which God Created the World*, the best exposition of God's glory ever written (penned around 1750).

Julian of Norwich. *Manifestations of Divine Love*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977. Wondrous insights into the love of God, but it must be read with discernment. Written in the fourteenth century.

Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973. Great, practical discussion of some of God's attributes and the blessings of knowing him.

Piper, J. *The Pleasures of God*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1991. Unusual, worshipful exploration of some of the things that make God happy.

Tozer, A.W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1961. Very accessible discussion of nearly 20 attributes in 20 short chapters.

Watson, T. *A Body of Divinity*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966. A great Puritan treatment of theology. The first section is on the

attributes of God. Watson was one of the most accessible of the Puritans, writing with pithy statements, nice metaphors, and solid theology.

ENDNOTES

¹Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Henry Chadwick (401; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis* (1259; Mahway, NJ: Paulist, 1978); J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (1559; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960); and S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death* (1848; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941).

²Calvin, 35.

³Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 129.

⁴It must be added that one's relationship to other humans is just as fundamental to one's self-development and self-understanding as is one's relation to God, a position in keeping with Christian thought. In addition to the duality of self and God that has been the primary focus of Christian reflection on self-development, the individual human person is actually necessarily situated within three poles of relationality: (1) a self in fundamental relationship with (2) God and (3) other humans. God created humans to develop within families, in relationship with other images of God, in order to realize their individuality as image-bearers themselves. Christ's twofold command of love of God and neighbor underscores the interdependence of one's relationships with God and other humans in Christian understanding (O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985]), an interdependence found

throughout the Bible (e.g., James 3; 1 John), all of which points towards a recognition of a “tripolar” nature of human beings. However, it was not really until the twentieth century that Western thought (and research) more fully explored the dependence of human self-development on human others, as seen in the theories of Cooley, Mead, and Vygotsky, and more recently, Rom Harre, Charles Taylor, and John Shotter, the clinical theories of the object relations and family-systems approaches, and social development research. In light of such conceptual enrichment, the Christian community is better equipped to understand how it is that self- and God-understanding are both also interrelated with other-understanding than Christian thinkers of previous centuries were able to appreciate. It remains for contemporary orthodox Christian psychologists to more fully explore how these three poles are interrelated. The present article, however, focuses exclusively on the relationship between the knowledge of God and the self.

⁵E. Charry, *Renewing the Mind: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 128.

⁶H. Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1677; Minneapolis: Bethany, 1976) 49.

⁷Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 2: Religious Affections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959).

⁸M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998).

⁹L. J. Crabb, Jr., *Shattered Dreams* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2002).

¹⁰D. Capps, *The Depleted Self* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); and C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

¹¹John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002).

¹²S. Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination/ Judge for Yourself!*, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (1875; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) 106.

¹³K. I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping* (New York: Guilford, 1997) 223.

¹⁴Calvin quoted by A. Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics* (London: Lutterworth, 1949) 379.

¹⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1961) 57.

¹⁶Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977) 92.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸M. E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); M. E. P. Seligman and M. Csikszentmihalyi, “Positive Psychology: An Introduction,” *American Psychologist* 55 (2000) 5-14; and C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez, eds., *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁹S. E. Taylor and J. D. Brown, “Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health,” *Psychological Bulletin* 116 (1988) 21-27.

²⁰D. G. Myers, *The Inflated Self: Human Illusions and the Biblical Call to Hope*

(New York: Seabury, 1980).

²¹Calvin, 38.

²²L. Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960).

²³See e.g., S. McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987); for a recent critique, see E. L. Johnson and D. S. Huffman, “Should the God of Historic Christianity Be Replaced?,” in *God under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. D. S. Huffman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 11-41.

²⁴H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

²⁵D. Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

²⁶Bonaventure.

²⁷J. Colquhoun, *Spiritual Comfort* (1814; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998) 164.

²⁸J. P. Tangney and R. L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: Guilford, 2002).

²⁹C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); A. P. Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); and J. Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁰Julian of Norwich, 91.

³¹R. C. Roberts, “Attachment: Bowlby and the Bible,” in *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology*, ed. R. C. Roberts and M. R. Talbot (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997) 206-228.

³²See L. J. Crabb, Jr., *Connecting* (Waco, TX: Word, 1997).

³³See John 14:27, 17:13; T. Aquinas, *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945); H. Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951) 247.

³⁴J. Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1991) 192.

³⁵K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 1: *The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957).

³⁶Barth, 651.

³⁷Edwards.

³⁸Though for some Christian counseling correctives, see Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*; G. W. Moon, *Homesick for Eden: Confessions about the Journey of a Soul* (Lifespring Resources Moon, 1996); J. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997); and S. -Y. Tan and D. H. Gregg, *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit: How to Connect to the Spirit's Power and Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

³⁹Pargament.

⁴⁰W. Wangerin, *Whole Prayer: Speaking and Listening to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

⁴¹See E. D. Aquili and A. B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); J. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Touchstone, 1996); and D. J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience* (New York: Guilford, 1999).

Psychotherapy and Christian Ministry¹

Robert C. Roberts

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Pastors as Therapists

As facilitators of God's saving work, Christian ministers are in the business of promoting people's "wholeness." Such wholeness is largely psychological: It is a formation or transformation of people's emotions (their anxieties, hopes, angers, loves), their behavior, and their relationships. All of this can be summed up by saying that ministry is largely character-formation or character-transformation. The word "character" sounds like ethics, rather than psychology; but good character is also wholeness, personal well-being. And the borderline between personality (the domain of psychologists) and character is by no means clear-cut. Ethicists these days are much more attentive to psychology than they used to be (see the recent move away from an ethics of action-principles to an ethics of virtues), and psychology is coming to be recognized as a discipline with a strongly ethical dimension (psychologists as instructors in how to live).²

It is not surprising, then, that pastors and pastoral theologians have been intensely interested in the psychotherapies of the twentieth century. In his history of the Clinical Pastoral Training movement in the United States, Brooks Holifield chronicled the virtual relinquishment of distinctively Christian ministry in favor of therapeutically informed ministry.³ Moreover, Thomas Oden noted that the classical tradition of pastoral care "has been steadily accommodated to a series of psychotherapies. It has fallen deeply into a pervasive amnesia toward its own classi-

cal pastoral past, into a vague absent-mindedness about the great figures of this distinguished tradition."⁴ But why, we might ask, should we worry that the Christian approach (or approaches) to promoting people's wholeness has been so largely replaced by the approaches of Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, and Carl Jung (to mention just a few)? After all, they are all promoting personal wholeness, and we are promoting the very same thing. Is Oden's anxiety on behalf of the Christian tradition anything more than conservatism and blind Christian partisanship?

Pastors who have turned to the psychotherapy traditions for help have supposed that, as movements within scientific psychology, these approaches are effective, clinically tried and proven methods of promoting personal wholeness. The psychotherapists have discovered truths about the human psyche, much as the chemists have discovered the chemical structures of things, and have devised techniques of intervention that trade on the truths they have discovered. Therapy is a sort of technology of the human soul, or if not quite a technology, at least an expert art of the soul. As such the therapies are a clear improvement on the pre-scientific strategies of the older pastors. To ignore them would be irresponsible to our calling and bad stewardship of available resources.

Moral Criticisms of Therapy

One premise of the foregoing argument is that the psychotherapies are more effective than traditional pastoral counseling at

bringing about personal wholeness. We will examine this claim a little later. Another premise is that the psychotherapies and Christian ministry aim at the *same* wholeness. This second premise has been under attack by a series of authors, both Christian and non-Christian, for at least the past thirty-five years. Starting with Philip Rieff's *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, and proceeding through Paul Vitz's *Psychology as Religion*, Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*, and Philip Cushman's *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*, we have a series of moral critiques of psychotherapies.⁵ By "moral" I mean that the criticisms leveled against psychotherapies all accuse therapies of *perverting personality and corrupting character*. They do not lay all the blame for such corruption at the feet of therapy; indeed, these books often see therapy as a product, as well as a purveyor of cultural trends toward deformations of personality. But therapy is a conduit for the cultural influence and a significant promoter of the spiritually undesirable traits.

Among the pernicious traits that various therapies are accused of fostering are narcissism (an inordinate preoccupation with one's own feelings, experiences, satisfactions, and, in particular, one's self-esteem; and a corresponding neglect of duties and of what is outside the self), individualism (an undervaluing of community, of social interdependence and bearing one another's burdens), consumerism (a traditionless, empty self that needs to be "filled up" with things and experiences), emotivism (thinking oneself to be the source of one's values), egoism (making self-interest one's chief motive), instrumentalism (seeing one's behavior towards others as chiefly a means of shaping or con-

trolling them), victimism (the inclination to blame others, or social forces, for one's problems), irresponsibilism (the belief that nobody is responsible for anything), and atheism. Many of these criticisms of therapy come from persons who have no interest in promoting Christian character, but Christians can agree with the criticisms, for the traits in question are clearly contrary to the kind of wholeness of personality that pastors try to facilitate (except for pastors under the sway of therapeutic ideology).

Assuming that some of the therapies that promote the pernicious traits do so intentionally, out of a conscious commitment to the values in question, it becomes clear that personal wholeness can be conceived in a wide variety of ways, some of which are mutually exclusive. The concept of personal wholeness is highly contestable; there are many different and conflicting concepts of personal wholeness. In the ancient world, Stoics, Epicureans, Aristotelians, and Sceptics all had different and incompatible conceptions of human wholeness, all of which differed in one way or another from Christianity.⁶ And the same is true in the modern world. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that each of the major psychotherapy models has its own personality ideal (its own conception of the chief virtues). The Rogerian ideal of Congruence is not the same as the Jungian ideal of Individuation, and both are quite different from the Rationality and Equanimity that Albert Ellis attempts to inculcate, and all of these differ radically from the Justice, Gratitude, and Family Loyalty that contextual family therapy aims to produce in clients.⁷ Furthermore, each of these conceptions differs from the Christian personality ideal in one or another crucial particular.

Recovering Christian Psychology

Some Christian critics of psychotherapy, noting the divergence between the Christian character ideal and the ones promoted by the psychotherapies, have recommended that Christians eschew therapy altogether as an influence on pastoral work.⁸ But the claim of the first premise—that therapy works, and that it works because of the insights and techniques that are distinctive of the various models of modern therapy—persists, and we are reluctant to throw out the precious baby with the stinky bathwater. Is there not some way we can harness what is valuable and effective in therapy, without buying into the aspects of it that pervert Christian personality? This is the project to which I tried to contribute in *Taking the Word to Heart*, but subsequent to its publication I have come to think—somewhat like Oden, in the book I cited earlier—that another project ought to be given priority.

I noted at the beginning of this article that Christian ministry has always been in the psychology business. This is why the twentieth century psychologies are so fascinating and tempting to the pastoral mind. But we have also seen that psychotherapies can undermine the project of Christian ministry at its core by introducing spiritual influences that are subtly pernicious by Christian standards. Using psychotherapies in Christian ministry therefore calls for a careful process of discrimination and adaptation of what is good in therapies for the distinctive uses of Christian ministry. The process of distinguishing the powerful mechanism in a therapy and keeping it free from the polluting tendencies that it has when used in its native setting is a process of *integration*.

Such integration cannot succeed unless

the integrator knows both what he is integrating and what he is integrating it *into*. For example, the Christian who integrates the neo-Freudian self-psychology of Heinz Kohut into Christian thought and practice has to know Kohut's thought very well, but he must also have a solid grounding in Christian pastoral thought and practice. If he doesn't know the Christian tradition in a fairly profound way, he is liable to integrate elements from Kohut that undermine Christian ministry. The "amnesia" of which Oden speaks is a serious obstacle to the intelligent use of modern psychotherapies in a Christian setting, because the project cannot be intelligently pursued without a profound understanding of the psychology that is native to the Christian tradition—the biblical psychology with which Gregory the Great and other excellent Christian counselors were working. So I have been proposing lately that we shelve the project of integration until we understand better the psychology of our own tradition. Only by having a deep understanding of this psychology will we be protected against seduction by the plausibilities and other attractions of modern therapies.

I myself have made a few modest forays into the psychology of the Bible. In one piece I explore the broad parameters of a biblical psychology;⁹ in another I outline a psychotherapy that would trade almost exclusively on Pauline psychological concepts;¹⁰ in another I explore a chapter of the Sermon on the Mount for its psychological content and implications.¹¹ But the Bible is just the beginning. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Richard Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards are some later Christian thinkers whose thought could be mined for psychology. Oden's book on Gregory is an example of efforts in this line.

Therapy Works

Until recently I have proposed the study of Christian psychology, not as a substitute for the integration of powerful therapeutic concepts and techniques from the modern psychotherapies, but as a *basis* for such integration—as an education necessary for the successful integrator. But a growing body of scientific research concerning the effectiveness of psychotherapies seems to call into question once again the project of integration—or at least impinge on how we are to conceive of that project. In particular, it raises deep questions about *what* from the psychotherapies ought to be integrated.

I will draw my information about this research literature from a long review article by Michael Lambert and Allen Bergin.¹² Hundreds of studies, done over the past thirty years, show pretty consistently that psychotherapy is a very effective way of getting relief from the kinds of complaints with which people go to therapists. On average, people who go to therapy are about twice as likely to improve with respect to whatever complaint brought them to therapy, as are similar people with the same problem who do not get therapy. Let us call this problem-specific effectiveness “therapeutic effectiveness,” and distinguish it from the “spiritual effectiveness” about which the literature critical of psychotherapy is concerned.

Therapeutic effectiveness is the power of a therapy to alleviate such problems as depression, anxiety, rapid mood-swings, phobias, eating disorders, difficulty in making life-decisions, marital strife, hypochondria, difficulty getting over grief in the wake of a loved one’s death, post-abortion melancholy, post-divorce disorientation, bad temper, homosexual maladjustment, strife with colleagues at work, inability to

hold down a job, feelings of hopelessness or meaninglessness, poor performance in school, problems with dating, alcoholism and other addictions, child abuse, spouse abuse, and sexual abuse. *Spiritual effectiveness*, by contrast, is the power of a therapy to change one’s self-understanding and ways of experiencing the universe and one’s relations with others. Consider, for example, a Christian sense of oneself as a creature of God, rather than a sense of oneself as living in an impersonal universe; a Christian readiness to worship and obey God, rather than a sense of oneself as the autonomous center of one’s life; a Christian sense of other persons as one’s neighbors whose burdens one is to bear, rather than as persons from whom one is chiefly to detach oneself; a Christian sense of God as different from and beyond oneself, rather than as just the best part of oneself; a Christian sense of oneself as a responsible sinner, rather than as a victim whose problems are blamed on others.

Therapies seem to have both of these kinds of effectiveness. In one way they are like medical therapies, in another they are religion-like philosophies of life. We could say that the Christian task of integration is to exploit the therapeutic effectiveness of therapies while neutralizing or transforming their spiritual effectiveness into something compatible with the Christian spirituality.

Why Does Therapy Work?

So therapies are therapeutically effective; this result of the studies spurs us on to integrate their therapeutic power into the work of Christian ministry. But two other cumulative results of the scientific literature on psychotherapy outcomes raise serious questions about such a project of integration. The first is the “Dodo bird ver-

dict”: Like the Dodo bird in *Alice and Wonderland*, who declares that “Everyone has won and all must have prizes,” the studies generally show that practitioners of the various competing schools of therapy are all about equally therapeutically effective.¹³

This is a surprising result, given the diversity among the therapies and the way psychotherapies purport to work. Therapies purport to intervene in a client’s mind and behavior in a way prescribed by a pattern of explanation of dysfunction. For example, cognitive therapy explains emotional dysfunction by reference to irrational cognitions and thus treats clients by attempting to correct the erring cognitions. Psychodynamic therapies explain dysfunction by reference to repressed memories of traumatic childhood experiences with significant others, and so treat clients by trying to explore the past and create transferences to the therapist that will enable a working through of the memories. Rogerian therapy attributes dysfunction to introjected socially imposed conditions of worth (“I have worth only if I’m as big a financial success as my Dad”), and so treats the problem by having the therapist supply unconditional positive regard for the client which frees the client to follow his authentic internal valuing process. Some family therapies explain dysfunction by reference to improper constellations of family relationships, and so attack the problems by attempting to rearrange these relationships.

With such diversity of explanatory frameworks and their correlated interventions, one would expect some therapies to work much better than others. It is hard to see how all could have a precisely correct diagnosis of dysfunction, and yet they purport to work because they correctly explain the source of psychological problems. If we

took our malfunctioning car to several mechanics, and they all explained the malfunction in diverse ways—one says the problem is the spark plug wires, another says it’s the fuel injectors, another that it’s the kind of fuel we are using—we would expect that only one of them (at most), applying her prescribed remedy, would be very successful in solving the problem. We would be astounded to find that regardless of what remedy was applied, the car was equally well fixed! It is for this reason that Lambert and Bergin suggest that the factors by which the various schools of therapy explain their therapeutic success may not be what is causing the success.

This hypothesis is strengthened by a second unexpected finding of the research on psychotherapy outcomes, namely that people with a great deal of training and experience in therapy—say, a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and several years of practice—are no more successful in alleviating people’s problems than counselors with minimal training or even no training at all.¹⁴ This is what we would expect if the training and experience were training and experience *in the distinctive theory and practice of some psychotherapeutic model* (or an eclectic agglomeration of such distinctives from several models). That is, if what is distinctive about therapies is not what is doing the therapeutic work, then deeper training and greater experience in such distinctives is not going to improve outcomes.

But even if the theory and allied practices of therapeutic models are not what makes them therapeutically effective, the fact remains that they *are* effective. What can it be about them that makes them so? No one knows for sure, but the best guess, according to Lambert and Bergin, is that it is factors that all or many of the therapies

have in common.¹⁵ What factors are these? In most if not all therapies, the therapist comes across as an expert, and the client is inspired to trust him or her. This gives the client a sense that his or her problem is being addressed in an effective manner, and motivates the client to make an effort to get better. In most therapies, the client is encouraged to articulate his or her problem, and thus come to a more immediate experiential confrontation with it. In many therapies, the therapist gives the client some advice, or at least points the client toward some behaviors that are contrary to the dysfunctional patterns that led him or her to therapy. In many therapies, the therapist conveys to the client a sense of having been empathically understood. And finally, any time a client is engaged in therapy, he or she is actively engaged in solving the problem.¹⁶

What Shall We Think of the Therapies?

What implications do these findings and this speculation have for the use of psychotherapy in Christian ministry? In the twentieth century, the Christian ministry has been very deferential to the distinctive theoretical claims and allied practices of such therapies as the Jungian, the Freudian, the cognitive-behavioral, and family systems. It seems clear that the rationale for such deference has been severely undermined by the research literature that Lambert and Bergin discuss. We have good reason to think that the theories behind the therapy models are not scientific findings but philosophies of life far less solidly grounded than the long tradition of pastoral work native to the history of the church. And the outcome studies give us good reason to think that the indisputable power these therapies

have to help people is something rather generic that could be had without integrating anything distinctive from the models. Indeed, the common factors in which the therapeutic power seems to reside are factors that have existed in pastoral counseling during the entire history of the Christian church. The particularities of the psychotherapies may be new, but there is absolutely nothing new about the common factors. The great deference to psychotherapy that writers on pastoral care have shown in the twentieth century seems to have been misplaced.

Earlier I distinguished two kinds of effectiveness of therapies, therapeutic effectiveness and spiritual effectiveness. We have seen that therapeutic effectiveness does not seem to be a product of the particular theories and practices of the therapies. What about spiritual effectiveness? We do not have controlled studies of this, as we have of therapeutic effectiveness, but we have lots of informal evidence that the philosophies of life embodied in the psychotherapies powerfully shape people's understanding of themselves, their universe, and their relationships. Here it seems that the particularities of the outlooks *do* account for the effects (it stands to reason that ideologies affect people by putting ideas into their heads). Whether or not people are actually in therapy, they do learn from therapies to construe themselves as needing higher self-esteem before they can move on to more functional behavior, or as being the seat of certain defense mechanisms, or as having been put out of touch with their perfectly reliable internal valuing process by too much social pressure to conform, or as being victims of inadequate parenting in early life. If we prefer to spread the spiritual influence of Christian reflection rather than an alien framework like

the psychology of the inner child or the ideology of codependency, then we have a positive reason for sticking with the psychology of the Christian tradition. As Christian ministers, we want to couch our psychological help as much as possible in the edifying language of the Christian message.

Conclusion

I conclude, then, that the psychotherapy outcome literature of the past thirty years gives us reason to doubt whether we will better promote psychological wholeness by adapting ideas and techniques from the therapies of the twentieth century. Common factors in therapy that are already present in traditional pastoral counseling seem to be the source of most therapeutic effectiveness anyway. And the common observation that the twentieth century therapies are morally and spiritually distorting ideologies of personhood gives us a strong reason for developing our own distinctive approach by deepening our understanding of the rich psychological resources of the Christian tradition.

ENDNOTES

¹"Psychotherapy and Christian Ministry" was first published in *Word and World* 27 no. 1 (2001) 42-50. Used by permission.

²See Don S. Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

³Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983).

⁴Thomas Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 28.

⁵Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York:

Harper and Row, 1966); Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); and Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995). It would be an understatement to say that my bibliography is only a sampling.

⁶See Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁷See my *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Other in an Age of Therapies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) chapters 1-7.

⁸See David Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling View," in *Psychology and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric Johnson and Stanton Jones (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 196-225.

⁹"Parameters of a Christian Psychology" in *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology*, ed. Robert Roberts and Mark Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 74-101.

¹⁰"Outline of Pauline Psychotherapy" in *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology*, ed. Mark McMinn and Timothy Philips (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 134-163.

¹¹"A Christian Psychology View" in *Psychology and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric Johnson and Stanton Jones (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 159-168.

¹²Michael Lambert and Allen Bergin, "The Effectiveness of Psychotherapy" in *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change*, ed. Allen Bergin and Sol Garfield (New York: Wiley, 1994) 143-189. Lambert and Bergin have been occupied for decades with the outcome literature on therapies. The first version of the essay to which I refer was published in 1978 in the first edition of the Handbook. The present version is the third.

¹³Ibid., 156-161.

¹⁴Ibid., 169-172.

¹⁵Ibid., 161-167.

¹⁶Robyn Dawes especially stresses this last point. See his *House of Cards: Psychology and Psychotherapy Built on Myth* (New York: The Free Press, 1994) chapter 2.

Applied Integration of a Sibbesian View of Assurance

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Richard Sibbes (c. 1577-1635) was born in Tostock, England, in 1577 and grew up in the nearby town of Thurston. He was the oldest of six children and studied locally until he was elected to a fellowship at Cambridge. His education at Cambridge took place during the Late Elizabethan period, which was a time of great theological controversy for the university and for England. It was during his time at Cambridge that Sibbes was drawn into a saving relationship with Christ. He was ordained a deacon and priest at age 30 and had a lectureship at Holy Trinity (1610) and later obtained an appointment to a parish in London, where he was to earn a reputation as a theologian and preacher, one who had a meek personality. "Rarely polemical (with the exception of occasional attacks on Roman Pelagianism), his preaching was distinguished by its pacific tone, more concerned with comfort than controversy."¹

It has been said that Sibbes lost his lectureship and fellowship at Cambridge due to his theology, but Dever challenges this as popular legend among nonconformists rather than historical fact.² Indeed, with respect to controversy, while some in the church were nonconformists, Sibbes expressed formal conformity to the Three Articles of Canon 36 which upheld the King of England, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the existing structure of the Church of England.³ Yet he was known to question specific practices, such as kneeling for communion, and he clearly preached Reformed theology with a Calvinist understanding of election and predestination. So he was a

"conforming Reformer, dissatisfied with the existing situation, even wanting to change it, yet ultimately submitting to and even defending the discipline of the Church."⁴ Sibbes would be noted for his moderation, his ability to rise above the fray and focus on the pastoral implications of his theology.⁵ His concern for comfort over controversy, then, was expressed in his writings on assurance. Among the best of these is *The Bruised Reed*.

Foundational Considerations

Before considering *The Bruised Reed*, let me offer a preliminary discussion of Sibbes's view of predestination and election, as they are theologically foundational for the assurance offered in his well-known treatise. Covenant theology laid the foundation for assurance for Puritans in general and Sibbes in particular. Puritan writing emphasized the assurance of God's covenant of grace, in contrast to the covenant of works where rewards were given to those who fulfilled God's law.⁶ Puritan theology affords us two elements of assurance: understanding of God's covenant of grace and encouragement to those in anguish over their participation in the covenant.⁷ Because of who God is, Christians can have confidence that he will fulfill his promises. But what of one's standing in the covenant? Puritans tended to focus on evidences of such standing, most typically recognized via experience.⁸ Typically this was meant to be consistent with the "unshakable conviction that a loving God chose those who have felt it to salvation in

Christ, a conviction Calvin calls the ‘very sweet fruit’ of predestination.”⁹ According to von Rohr, “when one is convinced that he is within the Covenant he can be certain of the ultimate fulfillment of the Covenant promise which God has given.”¹⁰

Covenant and election go hand-in-hand. Von Rohr observes that

God’s unbound righteousness [is] given to unfaithfulness, or better, the sovereign righteousness of God . . . creates faithfulness and . . . is bestowed freely to those who are his elect. . . This, too, is God’s action by covenant. . . the covenant which promises the new heart to those who have no claim upon it except they be chosen for it by God himself.¹¹

So the covenant itself is made accessible by the gracious gift of God, that is, faith. Indeed, as von Rohr observes, Sibbes, in his work, *The Bride’s Longing for the Bridegroom’s Second Coming*, would tell people to “plead with God to fulfill his absolute promises, those declarations by which God offers to create the very conditions in our hearts by which we may be led to take him for our God and consent to covenant relation with him.”¹²

With these foundational considerations in mind, we move to *The Bruised Reed*, a work of great importance, to gain an understanding of a Sibbesian view of assurance.

The Bruised Reed

The Bruising

Sibbes develops the image of “the bruised reed” as found in Isaiah 42:3: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” As Sibbes points out, we are “not trees, but reeds; and not whole, but bruised reeds.”¹³ To be a bruised reed is to be in distress, particularly in response to one’s own sin,

to live in fear and in doubt with respect to one’s sin. Contemporary mental health professionals may presume that to be bruised—thinking about “sin” or anything else—is the real concern. But there is a purpose to the bruising that supercedes the priority health professionals may place on “negative” emotions, such as guilt or depression. For example, not only does bruising bring about humility, it is a necessary experience prior to conversion, according to Sibbes. After conversion we need bruising “so that reeds may know themselves to be reeds, and not oaks.”¹⁴

Sibbes reminds us that Christ loves the bruised reed. In *Glorious Freedom*, Sibbes notes that Christ “was so full of sweetness to weak Christians” and “where there was any beginning of goodness he encouraged it.”¹⁵ So, not only will Christ not break the reed, but “he will cherish those with whom he so deals.”¹⁶ He continues:

Physicians, though they put their patients to much pain, will not destroy nature, but raise it up by degrees. Surgeons will lance and cut, but not dismember. A mother who has a sick and self-willed child will not therefore cast it away. And shall there be more mercy in the stream than in the spring? Shall we think there is more mercy in ourselves than in God, who plants the affection of mercy in us?¹⁷

It is Sibbes’s understanding of the incarnation and of Christ’s merciful, compassionate presence in the life of the believer that reflects his pastoral concern: “Why was he tempted, but that he might ‘succour those that are tempted’ (Heb. 2:18)?”¹⁸ Indeed, Christ is the “physician good at all diseases, especially at the binding of a broken heart.”¹⁹ It is precisely because God became flesh that we can go to God “in our flesh; he is flesh of our flesh, and bone of

our bone for this reason, that we might go boldly to him."²⁰

But such compassion and mercy is not poured out automatically. It is not our right. Rather, we come into bruising by either God's doing or by our intention. When it is God's doing, the challenge Christians face is to stand in faith and trust a loving God that he is ultimately working to fulfill his will in our lives. Concerning our participation in the bruising, "we must join with God in bruising ourselves" and thus experience God's abundant mercy and by personal experience know the foundation upon which we stand.²¹

The Smoking Flax

The related image from Isaiah is that of a "smoking flax" or a "dimly burning wick," and Sibbes believes that not only will Christ not put out the wick, but that he will "blow it up till it flames."²² To facilitate a proper understanding of this truth during times when we are discouraged, Sibbes encourages us to think of ourselves as Christ does: "Christ values us by what we shall be, and by what we are elected unto. We call a little plant a tree, because it is growing up to be so."²³ Sibbes wants us to rest on justification rather than sanctification, and to avoid the extremes of "serenity" (an expression of spiritual laziness or apathy) and "pride" (the assumption that you have merited what is yours by grace).²⁴

In this context Sibbes sees genuine doubts as helpful to the degree that they lead us to greater assurance. As he says, "Nothing is so certain as that which is certain after doubts. Shaking settles the roots."²⁵ And so there is a place for doubt in the Christian life. Not a longstanding agnosticism, but a genuine questioning of our standing because of our struggles with

sin. But these struggles lead us somewhere: they bring us to a place of greater clarity, in part because they are suggestive of the work of God in our lives.

When we struggle with seeing blazing fires in others, Sibbes reminds us not to presume that we have no spark, but to remember—switching metaphors—that "life in the winter is hid in the root."²⁶ Moreover, what fire we do have is not of our own doing but is from God. We can trust that this fire in us will become a purer flame with more kindling, and this gentle reassuring can lead to a softening of our hearts toward ourselves and toward others.

Concerning temptations, Sibbes says that even the best actions on our part will still smell of smoke and thus display aspects of our old selves. Yet God shows us mercy in our weakness and calls us to continue in obedience as we are able: "There is never a holy sigh, never a tear we shed, which is lost. Pray as we are able, hear as we are able, strive as we are able, do as we are able, according to the measure of grace received. God in Christ will cast a gracious eye upon that which is his own."²⁷

"As we are able" is a key to understanding Sibbes. God accepts our obedience even with our mixed motives. We undoubtedly do a disservice to ourselves and our relationship with God when we act as though we have pure motives when we do not, and God shows us mercy even in this.

With a truly compassionate tone Sibbes notes that "weaknesses do not break covenant with God."²⁸ Recalling the metaphor of the church and Christ as the bride and groom, as well as the history of Israel's relationship to God throughout the Old Testament, Sibbes is able to assert in all sincerity that, "Mercy is part of the church's marriage inheritance."²⁹

To the extent that we give way to our will in sinning, to that extent we set ourselves at a distance from comfort. Sin against conscience is as a thief [a flaw in the wick of a candle] in the candle, which spoils our joy, and thereby weakens our strength. We must know, therefore, that willful breaches in sanctification will much hinder the sense of our justification.³⁰

To regain a sense of peace and comfort, we are instructed to condemn ourselves and throw ourselves on Christ's mercy: If Christ is not merciful, he will not have anyone to serve him.

Yet many continue to struggle with doubts, and Sibbes would have us believe God rather than Satan, as the latter frames Christ as a "severe judge" while God would have us see Christ as merciful. It is within the Christian's purview to ask God to show us more of who he is, to know more fully who Christ is with respect to his character and intentions in our lives.

Guilt is another matter, of course, and God wants us to recognize through our guilt the wrong we have done and that which Christ has taken on through crucifixion: "God sees fit that we should taste of that cup of which His son drank so deep, that we might feel a little what sin is, and what His Son's love was. But our comfort is that Christ drank the dregs of the cup for us, and will succour us."³¹

During these times Christians may work against Christ's mercy in many ways. We can throw water on the sparks, to use Sibbes's language, by presuming on Christ's mercy or taking liberty with our sin. We can also seek after other sources of mercy and in this sense reject the gospel presentation of mercy. We may want mercy from friends or from family or others in our lives; we may also abide by "rules" we have in our own minds, that if we do such and such we will merit God's mercy. But

this *quid pro quo* approach to assurance is not a Christian view of assurance as founded upon Christ's mercy.

Although Sibbes would have Christians find their assurance in justification, he does not neglect sanctification. He argues that Christ will continue his work in the life of the believer and make gradual progress until "judgment unto victory."³² Sanctification involves being made more and more in the likeness of Christ. For Sibbes this likeness includes Christ's judgment in us as established by God; the inward ruling of our hearts. In *Glorious Freedom*, Sibbes is quite clear that this "is not mere persuasion and entreaty, but a powerful work of the Spirit entering into the soul and changing it, and altering the inclination of the will heavenward."³³ Later Sibbes refers to Christ as "a powerful root that changes all his branches into his own nature."³⁴ This internalized judgment includes "government of mind, will, and affection."³⁵ "The gracious frame of holiness set up in our hearts by the Spirit of Christ shall go forward until all contrary power is subdued."³⁶ Likewise, "In spiritual life, it is most necessary that the Spirit should alter the taste of the soul so that it might savour the things of the Spirit so deeply that all other things should be out of relish."³⁷

One of the gradual dispositional changes in the life of the Christian is the desire for mercy, not as a pardon for our missing the mark, but as a gift for healing out of which we follow Christ in obedience and in gratitude for his sacrifice. In *Glorious Freedom*, Sibbes recognizes the need to remove both "inward and outward hindrances," which would include such changes in the Christian's disposition over time.³⁸

Sibbes reminds Christians that we can have full confidence that Christ's kingdom

in us will prevail. Christ first conquered sin, death, Satan, hell, and the world, and so too can he conquer and rule in our hearts: "Heaven is ours already, only we strive till we have full possession."³⁹ Although we continue to struggle, we can know that the struggles fail to win out over Christ's victory:

When chaff strives against the wind,
or stubble against the fire, when the
heel kicks against the pricks, when
the potsherd strives with the potter,
when man strives against God, it is
easy to know on which side the victory
will be. The winds may toss the
ship wherein Christ is, but not over-
turn it. The waves may dash against
the rock, but they only break them-
selves against it.⁴⁰

When Satan seems victorious and we struggle with doubts, we are told to recall that Christians have long overcome their difficulties through suffering and that sometimes—in God's economy—victory may come through strivings against specific sins: "When he is conquered by some sins, he gets victory over others more dangerous, such as spiritual pride and security."⁴¹ In this sense we might grow less concerned about our specific sins but more concerned about our posture in relation to them: "It matters not so much what ill is in us, as what good; not what corruptions, but how we regard them; not what our particular failings are so much as what the thread and tenor of our lives are, for Christ's dislike of that which is amiss in us turns not to the hatred of our persons but to the victorious subduing of all our infirmities."⁴²

In this sense the victory is complete (justification) yet we are being trained in the fight (sanctification): Christ has "undertaken the victory, yet he accomplishes it by training us up to fight his battles."⁴³ Of

course there will be conflict because the government or rule of Christ in us will be opposed. Opposition comes not only from an opposing structure but from a *spiritual* government in constant tension with the flesh. In this sense it is judgment, which no one cares to experience.

We turn now to the clinical application of a Sibbesian view of assurance. How does such a view work itself into the clinical work of contemporary Christian mental health professionals?

Clinical Application

My clinical work is grounded in contemporary systems theory. In one particular model, clinicians seek to identify and remove constraints that keep a person from living and relating to others as they are capable of living and relating.⁴⁴ This is a secular model that begs the question of how people are intended to live and relate, and Christians can bring to such a model a Christian view of the person and God's intention for human relationships.⁴⁵ One approach to this is to consider the Old Testament concept of shalom. As Nicholas Wolterstorff develops this in *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, God's intention is for people to take delight in various relationships.⁴⁶ These relationships include our relationship with ourselves, with our fellows, and with God. And when we attempt to bring a Christian understanding to contemporary systems theory, we see the importance of identifying and removing the constraints that keep people from taking delight in these important relationships. What keeps a person from delighting in a proper view of himself and herself? What gets in the way of a person taking delight in her relationship with others? What keeps a person from delighting further in his relationship with God? These

are the kinds of questions that might help guide a Christian clinician working from a contemporary systems perspective.

The following case example explores the clinical application of these concepts while taking into consideration a Sibbesian view of assurance. The client was seen in an outpatient group practice that is in a secular setting, while the clinician is identified as a Christian and a psychologist through written informed consent to treatment.

Case Example

“Lenny” (age 32) first entered therapy following an emotionally overwhelming experience with a local church that has since folded. Lenny rose to leadership in the church, where he was required to be ascetic in his spiritual life for several years, particularly with respect to self-control around behaviors deemed by the church to be of critical importance. Lenny reported mixed feelings about the experience. On the one hand, he appreciated much of what he learned from that church community; he believes that the leadership was well-intentioned, and he felt generally “very close to God” during that time. On the other hand, Lenny holds the leadership accountable for humiliating experiences, such as public confessions and rebuking, which were very difficult to tolerate, especially as they would be around what Lenny thought were reasonable behaviors, such as occasional experiences of lust or dating of women. The latter was strictly regulated, and Lenny ended up leaving the church in great disagreement with others in leadership and feeling emotionally and spiritually eviscerated, having invested several years of his life in working toward what he thought was a calling to the pastorate. He has since struggled to move on with his life.

Lenny reported that following his departure from the church he completely cut himself off from any Christian community. He married and began a family and has only recently revisited a local church community. He is not satisfied with his spiritual life, and he feels he harbors anger and resentment toward that particular church and especially the leadership, as well as God for allowing him to experience such great distress when he had been seeking God’s will all along.

Lenny entered therapy in part because of the promise of meeting with a Christian who is also a psychologist. He stated that he wants healing and that he wants to “move on” and “get past” his feelings toward the church’s leadership. Also, he wanted to meet with a Christian, but part of him was leery of being judged by yet another Christian in authority. His interpersonal style of relating was noted. He related in a way that suggested he wanted to be told what to do; in fact there were several times in therapy when he would bluntly ask, “What should I do next?” At the same time he struggled with visceral reactions to criticism in his marriage relationship and was wary of being criticized by his therapist. This could create a bind for a clinician, and I was feeling compelled to give him various directives, but was able to resist this urge upon reflection. Instead, I chose to comment on the experience and let him know that I would be more focused on processing his experiences for the time-being, rather than directing him with specific homework assignments relating to his spouse or children or the local community of Christians.

Aside from these exchanges, I recall my first impression when relating Lenny’s circumstances to the writing of Richard Sibbes: If, as Sibbes puts it, “shaking settles

the roots,"⁴⁷ then Lenny's roots should have settled in a pretty secure place. And yet the shaking and the settling can be separated by years as God works out the redemption of our lives and the healing of our wounds.

So in the course of time we discussed Lenny's view of assurance insofar as it was related to God's role in the midst of suffering. Lenny felt he had been doing "all the things Christians are supposed to do" and "much more than most Christians do" in their personal spiritual lives. He read scriptures daily, prayed several times a day, made confession to leaders in the church, changed his behaviors in response to church discipline, and so on, until the time when he left the church. His way of thinking about Christianity was very much *quid pro quo*. He does one thing and God owes him another. These tradeoffs could be traced to his own family-of-origin where his parents expected nothing but the best for Lenny and rewarded his behavior and in some ways communicated to him that there are rules for living: *If you follow those rules, you get what you are owed. If you do not, you get what you deserve (punishment)*. As we see in Sibbes's writing, *quid pro quo* approaches to assurance fall short of a Christian view founded upon Christ's mercy.

But Lenny simply applied his line of reasoning to his spiritual life. His attributions simply reflected what he knew to be true growing up in his home. He aggressively sought approval from the local Christian community and showed himself to be zealous among other Christians. But what was his reward? He did not receive what he expected God to give him in return. If God did not relate by the "rules" Lenny had lived by for so many years, what was he to make of God, and did he want anything more to do with him?

A related concern was Lenny's attempt to answer the question, "Where is God when it hurts?" Was God the author of Lenny's abuse? Was God unable to intervene? If not, what accounts for God not intervening? If God allows abuses how might Lenny come to trust God with his healing and the redemption of these wounds? These are age-old questions, the answers to which were rather complicated to sort out in the clinical setting. At an experiential (rather than strictly theological) level, Lenny seemed drawn back to God in a way that was not always easy for him to understand. He felt he had no other options. Quite frankly, he believed in God and knew with great certainty that "there is no other game in town." Yet he harbored such anger and resentment toward God for the abuses he experienced, and he wondered sometimes if he was as bad as those in church leadership had claimed.

Many of the struggles Lenny faced reached a point of crisis that coincided with a spiritual awakening for him and his wife. Lenny lost his job, which was an experience that in the past precipitated great stress and conflict in their marriage. The present job loss, however, led to a coming together in their marriage as each partner pursued a better understanding of their circumstances through their personal relationship with God.

As his therapist I predicted that this loss might lead to his revisiting old feelings of anger and resentment toward the abusive church, ministerial staff, God, and others. Lenny acknowledged several negative emotions, but he was also able to think through the abuse he experienced in an objective way; he felt more compelled to focus on what God wanted to guide him toward in a future vocation and in his present life circumstances.

It was at this time that we considered a recently published model on the relationship between meaning making and coping with a stressful condition.⁴⁸ In this model people respond to specific life stressors and make a connection between global meaning and situational meaning. *Global* meaning refers to a client's fundamental beliefs and basic assumptions about the world, including their sense of purpose and a sense for what is just and fair. *Situational* meaning refers to how a person's global beliefs interact around their own specific circumstances.

Lenny was then making meaning of his specific life circumstances, i.e., having a long-standing relationship with an abusive church. This is situational meaning. He was also looking for connections between this situational meaning and his global meaning, or his sense of life's purpose and of what is right or wrong.

It was in this context that we considered whether Lenny's experiences in the church were God's doing, or at least whether God allowed Lenny to remain in the church despite Lenny's report that he sought God's direction in the matter. He repeatedly went back to the "just world phenomenon," where people "tend to justify their perceptions by blaming victims on the basis of the assumption that good is rewarded and evil is punished."⁴⁹ Because Lenny believed in God's existence, he struggled with whether (a) he did things wrong that warranted his experiences of abuse as punishment from God, or (b) God did not in fact exist, since he had not done wrong and God did not protect him from harm.

Recall that Sibbes would have Lenny respond in faith, trusting that God loves him and is working out his purposes in Lenny's life. Again to return to the mean-

ing-making model, Lenny is looking for connections between his situational meanings and his global meanings. In this model it matters that Lenny is able to tie meanings surrounding his exposure to an abusive church to global meanings about God's purposes in his life. We also considered the consequences of sinful choices, and whether he was not a casualty of the sin by individuals in the church and in the structures of the church. This still left open the question of why God did not protect him from harm, but it also opened a door to God's desire to redeem the hurts experienced by those he loves.

In the course of therapy we naturally discussed issues related to the theological concept of assurance. We pursued selected bibliotherapy resources, reading sections from *The Bruised Reed*, and relating these to Lenny's present circumstances. We discussed the analogy of reeds being bent and bruised but not broken. This language fit our prior discussion of how Lenny was moving from a *victim* to a *survivor* in terms of the scripts from which he read in his interpersonal relationships.

Although Lenny continued to work in therapy on other issues in his marriage, as well as how his image of God was shaped by his experience of his parents, he reported an improved relationship with God and a greater understanding of God's desire and ability to redeem the circumstances Christians find themselves facing. These circumstances are redeemed for God's purposes, yet God's purposes are sometimes beyond our understanding. But he began to understand that there is a relationship between a Christian's assurance with respect to his salvation and a Christian's experience of peace with respect to difficult life circumstances (see Rom 5:1-5). In this Lenny's faith was

strengthened, as he was drawn into a more settled conviction about who God is and how God's love for him can be experienced in the aftermath of abuse.

Conclusion

The Bruised Reed continues to offer Christians important insights into what it means to experience assurance with respect to one's standing in Christ. Sibbes offers Christians the gift of this understanding while demonstrating practical pastoral care to those troubled by their experiences this side of heaven. In this Sibbes provides the contemporary Christian mental health professional a resource for applied clinical integration of a Reformed understanding of assurance.

ENDNOTES

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Toward a Theology of Emotion

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Introduction

Scripture is replete with emotion, both God's and man's. The Bible is a collection of books, addressed to persons by a Person. It is the revelation of a personal God to human persons made in his image. Since emotions are an important component of personhood, the Bible deals with the subject of emotions. The Bible frequently reveals God's emotions so that our lives, including our emotions, might fully honor and glorify him. For example, Scripture speaks frequently of the wrath of God. In no uncertain terms, God wants us to understand not just what he thinks about sin but also how he feels about it. Why is this? Clearly, it is so that we might know the Lord better and in particular improve our understanding of his holiness and his love. The Bible speaks of God's wrath so that we might apprehend, rationally and emotionally, our moral dilemma before his holy justice and so that we might experience the depth of his love for us when he poured his righteous wrath out upon his Son instead of us. "Scripture not only speaks about emotions, it also speaks to and through our emotions. The Bible itself is emotional literature, filled with emotional expression and designed not just to communicate with our rationality but also to stir us emotionally, thus affirming our emotionality."¹

Although some theologians, in order to preserve God's immutability, have understood the plethora of references to God's emotions as anthropomorphic, this paper will contend that it is more accurate to view man's emotions as theomorphic. Good the-

ology should lead us not only to think God's thoughts after him but also to feel God's feelings after him. If Christlikeness is our goal as his followers, that would include not only Christlike behavior and thoughts, but also Christlike emotions as well. Compassion, the emotion most frequently attributed to Christ in the Gospels,² facilitates the fulfillment of the "one another's" of the New Testament. Jesus invites us into his joy in the Gospels and promises us (in the Psalms) that at his right hand there are pleasures forevermore (16:11). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is characterized by attributes—love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness—which are riddled with emotion.

Unfortunately, contemporary evangelicals have paid little attention to the development of a theology or biblical anthropology of the emotions, affections, and feelings. As a result, when the emotions are addressed personal opinion, denominational or cultural prejudices, and pop psychology are the dominant voices. Even worse, these voices are rarely questioned or justified with biblical warrant. We seem to function as if Scripture is silent on these matters.

Scripture contains the norms not just for our behavior and thinking, but also for our emotions and affections. St. Paul told the Corinthians that he aimed to work for their joy and then admonished them for having restrained their affections for him. Both the Old and New Testaments frequently enjoin their listeners to "Rejoice" and "Be glad" (Ps 100:2; Rom 12:15; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16). Peter tells us to cast all our anxieties on

God, because he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). “Fear not,” is a recurrent command in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut 31:6, 8; Josh 1:9; Matt 10:26; Luke 12:4). Scripture tells us that a righteous man hates evil (Prov 8:13, 13:5; Rom 12:9). Moses tells the Israelites that they will be judged “because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart for the abundance of everything” (Deut 28:47).

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we have theories and operating principles about emotion. It should be no surprise that when Scripture does not form our thinking, especially about a matter such as emotion which is so much a part of the nature of persons, something else will. Christian ministry cannot occur without a set of beliefs and concepts about persons, a psychology if you will, which necessarily entails beliefs about emotion.

Fortunately, God’s written Word is anything but silent about emotion. Practical biblical wisdom about emotion is available in the Scriptures, if we will but take the time and make the effort required to mine these latent riches of the wisdom of God.

The purpose of this article is to posit biblical parameters and offer a few modest proposals toward the development of a theology, or maybe more properly, a biblical psychology of emotion, affections, and feelings. The ultimate purpose of this article is to consider the reality of our emotions as a manifestation of the image and glory of our great God.

Distinguishing Feelings, Emotions, and Affections

Confusion and imprecision abound in the use of these three correlated words: feeling, emotion, and affection. This is difficult to avoid entirely, since their meanings overlap and they share much of the same

semantic field. In addition, they are often used interchangeably in common parlance. However, some definitions are essential as a starting point. The following definitions are proposed.

Feeling—the sense perception of an internal or external event, which is typically classified into binary categories of experience: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, smooth/rough, hard/soft, hot/cold; or, the subjective experience and report of an emotion. Often, in common language usage, the word “feeling” is coterminous with the word “emotion.”

David Powlison describes four different uses of the word “feeling”: to describe sense perceptions; to express emotion; to communicate desires; and to communicate thoughts, beliefs and attitudes.³ The first two uses that Powlison describes are similar to my definition, have the potential for greater precision, and avoid confounding human faculties and capacities.

Powlison’s first use and my first definition provide us with a concept that describes broad categories of human experience: pleasure or pain, hot or cold, etc. “I feel good/bad” or “That feels good/bad.” God has designed us so that we desire our own good; we naturally seek that which we perceive will lead to life, happiness, and pleasure, and we avoid that which we perceive as bad, aversive, painful, or unpleasant. The pursuit of pleasure or happiness and aversion to pain and suffering is a basic principle of life, and in itself, begotten by God. It is because we are created in this way that God frequently motivates us in Scripture with promises of blessing and threats of punishment. For example, in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, we read

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you

today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to him.

In a similar manner, Pascal wrote,

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every man, even of those who hang themselves.⁴

The second part of my definition of feeling, like Powlison's second use, simply uses the word as a predicate to consciously experienced emotion. "I feel happy, sad, disgusted, afraid, etc."

Emotion—a fully personal (involving thoughts, beliefs, and judgments made about the environment and oneself) and somatic response to internal and/or external experience, subjectively experienced as some variety of feeling, which prepares the body and mind for action. Emotions are normally psychosomatic, body and soul, for human beings. Emotions, however, are not necessarily mediated by a body.

The words "emotion" and "motive" are

derived from the same Latin root,—*mov-ere*, which means, "to move." Emotions are both responsive and preparatory. They are part of our response to our experience and also motivate us toward particular ends. And, specific emotions have a specific purpose and function. Therefore, we naturally and correctly speak of an emotion as being warranted or unwarranted, rational or irrational, realistic or unrealistic, sensible or ridiculous. Emotional experiences are not neutral; they are either facilitating the individual's, and more importantly God's, purposes and functions or they are not (of course in varying degrees). *Coram Deo* (before the face of God), specific emotions in specific contexts are either sinful or righteous.

Particular emotions have particular functions or serve particular purposes. Any definition and specification of the role of particular emotions must attend to the intrapersonal, horizontal/interpersonal, and vertical/spiritual/moral dimensions.

Affection—deep and abiding emotional/motivational vectors of the soul, which move us toward or away from something, contingent upon moral evaluation. McDermott, following Jonathan Edwards, differentiates affection and emotion by noting that affections are strong and powerful and ultimately determine our choices, while emotions are comparatively weak and fleeting.⁵

Jonathan Edwards was careful to avoid separating the affections and the will. In *Religious Affections*, he stated,

The *will*, and the *affections* of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere *actings* of the will and inclination, but only in the liveliness and sensibility of exercise . . . what are commonly called affections are not

essentially different from them, but only in the *degree* and *manner* of exercise. In every act of the will whatsoever, the soul likes or dislikes, is either inclined or disinclined to what is in view.⁶

About one hundred years before Edwards, the English Puritan, William Fenner wrote with insight and graphic imagery about the role of the affections and their necessary connection to the moral sense.

The affections are the forcible and sensible motions of the heart or the will, to a thing or from a thing, according as it is apprehended to be good or evil. . . . The affections are the feet of the soul: for as the body goes with its feet to that which it loves, so the soul goes with its affections to that which it loves. The soul hath no other way to come at that which it loves, but only by its affections. . . . The affections are the soul's horses, that draw her, as it were, in a coach to the thing that she affects: a man is moved by the affections. By anger he moves out to revenge; by desire he moves out to obtain; by love he moves out to enjoy; by pity he moves out to relieve. The affections are the motions of the soul. . . . The affections are directly related to the apprehension of good and evil. When there is little apprehension of good and evil, the affections are weak and may hardly work on the body at all. But, when there is great apprehension of either, not only the soul is deeply affected, but the body also.⁷

Our definition of affection includes emotion, which involves the intellect, "thoughts, beliefs and judgments," and our definition of affection includes moral evaluation. We can summarily dismiss reductive definitions of emotion or affection as merely somatic, biological disturbances. In addition, the definitions and descriptions that I have proffered do not

allow us to separate emotions or affections from reason, conscience, or volition.

The Doctrine of God

A biblical psychology of emotion must begin and end with God. John Frame has aptly noted that we cannot know other things rightly without knowing God rightly, "essentially because the doctrine of the knowledge of God implies a doctrine of the knowledge of everything."⁸ Calvin begins his *Institutes* with a similar acknowledgement: the knowledge of ourselves is inextricably dependent upon our knowledge of God, and vice-versa.⁹ Not so coincidentally, wisdom and knowledge about anything begins with a fear of God, a particular emotional response to him (Prov 1:7, 9:10).

Most psychologists and philosophers start in the wrong place when thinking about emotion because they do not proceed from a knowledge and fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom and understanding.¹⁰ Although they may provide helpful observations, collect useful data, or ask important questions, their conclusions are often superficial and always fundamentally flawed when the Creator, whose image we bear, is excised from their formulations. Even from a secular perspective, it has been argued that psychology's disengagement from philosophy, particularly metaphysics and ethics, at the end of the nineteenth century left it morally and spiritually vacuous, virtually ignoring the human condition.¹¹ Academic psychology is dominated by behaviorism (including the cognitive-behavioral variety) and biological reductionism. It excludes moral and metaphysical reflection, since these domains are not accessible to empirical methods. Psychology has become "behavioral science," and biological psychiatry,

the reigning paradigm in the mental health fields, typically reduces human experience to mere neurobiology.

God Is a Person

Directly or indirectly, every page of Scripture answers the question, "Who is God?" What type of being is he? One central answer to that question is that God is a person. God is portrayed in personal terms in the Scriptures.

Yahweh (OT) and *Kurios* (NT) are the names that God gives to Himself and these are personal names, proper names, with various levels of meaning.¹²

He is the only self-existent, totally independent person. He is Absolute Personality, depending on nothing for existence or definition. "Only Scripture presents consistently the reality of a God who is both personal and absolute."¹³ He is not a mere life force, or a rational or moral ideal, or a transcendent ethical principle. Although he is the Creator and omnipresent sustainer of life and all things on this earth, he is not identical to, nor does he share a common identity with, anything he created. Although God is holy and God is love, the reverse is not true; neither holiness nor love is God. Although he has attributes, he is not an attribute; he is a Person with attributes.

From the beginning in the Scriptures, God acts like a person. He thinks and chooses and feels, speaks and expresses pleasure and displeasure, expresses delight and wrath, and both loves and hates. In other words, he acts like a person because he is a Person. God is Father. God is Son. God is Holy Spirit who grieves and knows and to whom one may lie (Isa 63:10; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 2:11; Eph 4:30). He is a Personal Lord, and because of this we can have a relationship with him (on his terms of

course; he is Lord) as fellow persons, but we must do so as servant persons. He is the Person who creates; we are the persons He has created. He is Father; we are his children in and through Jesus Christ.

Since he is a person, not only can we engage in a relationship with him, but we can also understand ourselves through an understanding of him as he reveals himself in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. By knowing the Father and the Son, we come to know who we are as persons and to know what kind of persons we should be. God is the prototype for personhood and personality. He is also the Holy One, perfect Personality. Therefore we should look at him to understand what it means to be a person, a being characterized by personality.

Alvin Plantinga asks,

How should we think about human persons? What sorts of things, fundamentally, *are* they? What is it to be a human, what is it to be a *human* person, and how should we think about personhood? . . . The first point to note is that on the Christian scheme of things, *God* is the premier person, the first and chief exemplar of personhood . . . and the properties most important for an understanding of our personhood are properties we share with him.¹⁴

Therefore, in order to understand ourselves as persons with emotion, we must understand God as a person with respect to emotion. We are made in his image and likeness. A theology of emotion must begin with God and his self-description in the Scriptures because he is the eternal and Absolute Person, the Creator, the original whose image we bear. Ultimately, all emotions are intended to end with God as well, to return to him for his exaltation because, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and *enjoy* Him forever."¹⁵

God as a Person with Emotions

The assertion that the God of the Bible experiences emotion would seem to go without saying, were it not for the early influence of Plato and the Stoics upon theologians. The contrivance of an impassible, unemotional God stems from a pejorative view of emotions as inherently unruly and capricious. The emotions were viewed as irrational and intemperate and as a sign of weakness, dependence, and contingency. As a result, the Stoic ideal of *apathēs* became the ideal and this idea was imposed upon God.

McGrath cites the challenging and modification of the concept that God is impassible as an example of the way in which theology is affected by prevailing cultural and philosophical assumptions, noting, "Patristic reflection on whether God could suffer were significantly influenced by the prevailing philosophical consensus that a perfect being could not change, or be affected by outside influences."¹⁶ In order to preserve the divine attributes of transcendence, immutability, and aseity many of the patristic theologians believed it logically necessary to posit that God is impassible—he is incapable of experiencing "passions," negative emotions or suffering.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England and the Westminster Confession of Faith described God as "without body, parts, or passions." The plethora of biblical verses that seemed to ascribe emotion to God was deemed anthropomorphic or, more properly, anthropopathic. In other words, in Scripture God merely represented himself with emotion in order to communicate meaningfully to emotional human persons. However, as Bruce Ware notes,

in all of Scripture's references to emotions as these relate to God, there does not appear to be any instance in which it is said that in reality God transcends these emotional qualities. There seems to be no clear direction, then, as there was with regard to the question of divine repentance, for taking the ascriptions of divine emotions in any way other than at face value.¹⁷

D. A. Carson also criticizes the hermeneutic for impassibility.

The methodological problem with the argument for divine impassibility is that it selects certain texts of Scripture, namely those that insist on God's sovereignty and changelessness, constructs a theological grid on the basis of those selected texts, and then uses this grid to filter out all other texts, in particular those that speak of God's emotions.¹⁸

Several modern theologians since the middle of the twentieth century acknowledge that God does indeed experience emotion.¹⁹ Bruce Ware reformulates the doctrine of immutability by denying that God is "absolutely immutable" but asserting that God retains ontological and ethical immutability or "onto-ethical immutability." In other words, God is unchangeable and self-determining in his holy and eternal being (or intrinsic nature) and also unchangeable in his moral perfections, including his utter reliability and faithfulness in keeping his Word. However, Ware contends that God is relationally and emotionally mutable, *so that his ethical and ontological immutability are preserved*. He states,

when rightly understood the relational changes that occur through God's interaction with his creatures, so far from conflicting with his immutable character, actually express it . . . because God's intrinsic moral nature is unchangeable it must always and without fail

express itself in ways appropriate to the moral state of any given situation. Thus when the human moral state changes (e.g. from rebellion to repentance) the immutable divine nature must now reflect itself in ways that are appropriate to this new situation. Hence, changes in God's attitudes and actions are naturally brought about as God consistently applies the standards and requirements of his constant moral nature in ways that correspond to the moral changes continually undergone by his creatures. Barth was right then to speak of a "holy mutability of God" whereby God is understood to change in his attitudes, conduct and relationships with humans in ways that both accord with his changeless intrinsic moral nature and properly confront the human moral situation.²⁰

Surely this type of change in God's relationships with and attitudes toward his creatures would include various emotional changes. These various emotions would be a necessary expression of God as an utterly holy, loving, wise, and morally perfect, personal being. God is made neither better nor worse by such emotional changes which are consistent with and even necessary to express his supreme perfections. Ware concludes, "The abundance of Scriptural evidence of God's expression of emotion and a more positive understanding of their nature lead to the conclusion that the true and living God is, among other things, a genuinely emotional being."²¹

That God is a Spirit being, without a body but with emotions informs us that emotions are not essentially material or somatic. In addition, we see evidence for the essentially spiritual nature of human emotion in the Scriptures where individuals who have physically died are described in the intermediate state. In Revelation 6:9-11 the souls of the martyrs cry out with righteous indignation for the Lord's justice

to be meted out. In the parable of Luke 16:19-31, Lazarus receives comfort while the rich man is in torment and agony. (Granted, we are not sure how far we can rely upon every point of the parable, but it is very consistent with other accounts of the suffering that will accompany eternal punishment in hell.) What is relevant here in this parable is that these disembodied persons are conscious and that one soul experiences the emotion of suffering while the other receives comfort.²² According to John Piper, "Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8 teach that after a Christian's death, and before the resurrection of the body, the Christian will be with the Lord and capable of joys 'far better' than what we have known here."²³

Finally, some support for the contention that emotion does not necessarily require a physical human body can be inferred from the biblical descriptions of angels, who are essentially non-physical, spiritual beings. For instance, in Luke 2:8-14, the angel who announces the incarnation of the Messiah to the shepherds brings "good news of great joy." The heavenly hosts who praise and give glory to God do not sound like apathetic robots. Luke 15:10 suggests, at least, some sort of emotional capacity in angels, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine heavenly angels in the very presence of God worshipping him unceasingly but unemotionally. Surely they delight and tremble in his presence.

The Doctrine of Man

When it comes to addressing the nature of human persons, science is largely incompetent either to frame the correct questions or to provide answers. The hard sciences are at their best when they describe how

physical systems work, but they are largely incompetent when settling questions about the nature of consciousness, intentionality, personal identity and agency, and related matters.²⁴

Since emotion is essentially a personal and spiritual phenomenon, a biblically grounded theology and philosophy are “at their best” when “settling questions about the nature of consciousness, intentionality, personal identity and agency, and related matters.” The historical-redemptive paradigm of Creation, Fall, and Redemption will serve to organize and focus the discussion of emotion as it relates to the doctrine of man.

Creation

“We should not be surprised that when a society denies the reality of the God of creation it is filled with individuals who do not know who they are and cannot explain why they do what they do.”²⁵ Realizing that emotion is an important aspect of our nature as human persons created by and like and for an absolutely Holy and Personal God delivers us from several of the prevailing misconceptions about emotion. The Stoic contention that emotion is mindless passion that disturbs rational thought and impedes good choices, along with the “Christianized” version of Stoicism that asserts that God does not care about our feelings but only about our holiness, can be contested on several grounds.

First, our emotional capacities are part of our nature as personal beings created in the image and likeness of God. Contrary to the Stoic tendency to view emotion as a nuisance are many biblical commands to experience particular emotions. We are instructed to hate evil, rejoice always, delight and be glad in the Lord, weep with

those who weep, not grieve like those who have no hope, and fear God (Ps 97:10; Phil 4:4; Ps 37:4; Rom 12:15; 1 Thess 4:13; Luke 12:5).

Second, the capacity for emotional response is part of God’s original pre-fall design, which was declared “very good” by the Lord. The second chapter of Genesis provides three direct references to man’s emotional capacity. First, God made trees with fruit that was pleasant to the sight (v. 9). He could have placed soylent green bio-tablets in a hermetically sealed dispenser but in his wisdom, he made food with an attractive and pleasant appearance. Second, Adam’s poetic exclamation, after God made and then presented a female companion to him, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” drips with relief and exhilaration (v. 23). Finally, the creation story ends by informing us “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (v. 25). We can reasonably infer that Adam and Eve were not only naked and unashamed but that positive feelings were correlated with their naked state before God and each other.

Third, particular emotions such as fear and joy and delight are essential components in fulfilling the primary purpose of our existence: serving and glorifying God. Only fools have no fear of God. Fearing God is a natural and necessary response to his holiness and power. Even Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, experienced and delighted in godly fear (Isa 11:1-3; Heb 5:7). “Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling” (Ps 2:11). Serving God rightly requires right emotions. “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you” (Deut 28:47).

John Piper's concept of "Christian Hedonism," echoing themes found in other Christian thinkers like Augustine, Pascal, Edwards, and Lewis, contends that the pursuit of joy is not merely popular or only one option among many in life, but is rather the essence of our duty to glorify God by enjoying him. "The pursuit of pleasure is a necessary part of all worship and virtue."²⁶ "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him," is an axiomatic theme for Piper.²⁷

Therefore, God gives emotions for a specific purpose. They are necessary for us properly to know and relate to and glorify God; they are designed to facilitate the fulfillment of the Great Commandments: loving God with all we are and do, and loving our neighbor as readily as we love ourselves. The capacity for emotions is designed by God and is part of his divinely ordered plan for us as servant persons. Understanding God's designs and order for emotion is an essential prerequisite, without which we cannot understand emotional disorders.

One of the most common contemporary explanations for why people do what they do and for personal and social misery is that they suffer from a "Mood Disorder" which is a diagnostic category in the DSM-IV,²⁸ or simply that they have an "emotional problem," such as depression or anxiety. However, the secular mental health professions do not adequately define and understand affective disorders or emotional problems because they ignore the divine order and the Divine Orderer. It goes without saying that a prerequisite for defining a disorder is a prior apprehension of the proper order. To understand what is disordered, you must first understand the right or ideal order. For example, from a biblical perspective, people who experi-

ence no fear of God and no anxiety about their eternal destiny are more disordered than those who have panic attacks subsequent to conviction that they are guilty before a Holy and Just God and bound for hell outside of Christ. In both cases, their emotions cannot be correctly deciphered until their status before God, who never sleeps or slumbers and searches every heart, is apprehended. When emotions are isolated from the "one with whom we have to do," they cannot be understood and in fact may be tragically misinterpreted and often medicated or otherwise falsely assuaged.

In a similar vein, Christian counselors sometimes refer to "wounded" or "damaged" emotions as the source of a person's problems in living. This manner of speaking, while making some experiential sense, is misleading because the emotions are reified and separated from the inner person, or heart. As a result, counseling focuses on healing emotions rather than addressing the heart out of which these emotions spill. The biblical diagnosis is not that we have wounded emotions or emotional problems, it is that we have "me" problems or heart problems. "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live." (Eccl 9:3) Jay Adams asserts,

The fact is that there are no damaging or destructive emotions *per se*. Our emotional makeup is totally from God. All emotions of which He made us capable are constructive when used properly (i.e., in accordance with biblical principles). . . . All emotions, however, can *become* destructive when we fail to express them in harmony with biblical limitations and structures.²⁹

And this is where the rub lies.

Fall

Derek Kidner offers the following comment on Genesis 3 regarding Satan's tempting proposal to Adam and Eve, "The climax is a lie big enough to reinterpret life . . . and dynamic enough to *redirect the flow of affection and ambition*. To be *as God*, and to achieve it by outwitting him, is *an intoxicating programme*."³⁰ Adam's and Eve's emotions are incited and directed against God rather than for him. Emotion, like eating and drinking and whatever we do, should be to the glory of God. But, fallen emotions appear quickly in human history. Adam and Eve experienced a panoply of negative emotions only after they yielded to their own lusts in accord with Satan's "intoxicating programme." They became ashamed, worried, anxious, and fearful soon after disobeying God. In Genesis 4, the first murder is in a context of ungodly emotion: sinful envy and unrighteous anger.

One of the most popular and pernicious myths about emotions is that they are neither good nor bad; they are neutral. On this view, emotional experience occurs within a morally neutral, value-free zone where concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, godly and sinful are systematically avoided or at least minimized.

Carl Rogers was the most prominent twentieth century proponent of this view, which pervades clinical, counseling, and educational psychology and clinical pastoral education, and which has crept into Christian counseling. A primary focus of Rogerian (AKA non-directive or person-centered) therapy is on carefully listening for, accepting, and empathizing with the counselee's feelings. "Objective facts are quite unimportant. The only facts which

have significance for therapy are the feelings which the client is able to bring into the situation."³¹ The goal of therapy is to reduce estrangement from one's own experience and feelings and facilitate congruence by helping them get in touch with their true feelings. Negative feelings like anxiety and depression result from incongruence with and lack of acceptance of one's true self. In order to facilitate congruence and self-actualization, the counselor simply draws attention to and empathizes with the counselee's emotions. People will function as fully human beings if they are free to experience, express, and satisfy their inner nature, which is positive and rational and basically good. Moral evaluation and directive advice would only inhibit the actualizing process. Emotions are to be accepted without conditions or judgments.

Another way in which the moral valence and spiritual nature of emotion is either denied or minimized is through biological reductionism. In other words, emotion is reduced or completely attributed to the body, usually brain physiology or genetic inheritance or some combination thereof. This is a difficult point, since emotion as we currently experience it is undoubtedly psychosomatic, soul and body. The body is indeed the channel through which we experience emotion, and no one can question that our bodies and brains influence our emotions. A biblical psychology of emotion can acknowledge the somatic mediation of emotion and a close interaction between psyche and soma but must hold that emotion is essentially personal and spiritual, and normally but not necessarily or essentially somatic. Commenting on the relationship between body and soul, Jonathan Edwards wrote,

Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of the union of soul

and body, that there never is in any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the inclination, without some effect upon the body. . . . But yet, it is not the body, but the mind only that is the proper seat of the affections. The body of man is no more capable of being really the subject of love or hatred, joy or sorrow, fear or hope, than the body of a tree, or than the same body of man is capable of thinking and understanding. As it is the soul only that has ideas, so it is the soul only that is pleased or displeased with its ideas. As it is the soul only that thinks, so it is the soul only that loves or hates, rejoices or is grieved at, what it thinks of.³²

A biblical view of emotion, while maintaining that the capacity for emotion is good, must account for sin, which has corrupted every part of our being and experience. The fallen human heart is evil, deceptive, and rebellious; therefore, its products are inevitably tainted with the stain of sin. Sin infects our whole being and every capacity or faculty has been tilted away from God. Our emotions are no longer naturally oriented in such a way that they contribute to honoring, loving, and obeying God. Instead, our emotions have become self-serving, our affections idolatrous, and our passion is for our own glory rather than God's. We tend to seek happiness in what cannot last; delight in evil; delight in ourselves, fear that which God forbids; become angry when we should be patient; grieve hopelessly; and hate that which is good. Pervasive, holistic depravity means that not only do we choose and think the wrong things but also that our emotions are wrongly oriented.

At this point, we must reiterate that all our primary faculties or capacities (intellect, will, conscience, and emotion) are equally involved in imaging God and equally corrupted by sin. This is important

because,

It is sometimes argued that unless one asserts the primacy of the intellect, one may justly follow any or every sort of emotion. But this would be true only in the non-Christian concept of the nature of man. Only in the non-Christian concept of man are the emotions inherently unruly; they have become unruly only because of sin. But, when sin has entered into the mind of man, the intellect is as unruly as are the affections. The whole man refuses to subject itself to the rule of God. When a saved sinner learns to control his passions, the reason is not primarily that he has understood the meaning of the primacy of the intellect as a psychological truth, but the primary reason is that in the whole of his being he is born of God.³³

Likewise, John Frame notes, "the fall was not essentially a derangement of faculties within man. It was rebellion of the whole person—intellect as much as emotions, perception, and will—against God. My problem is not something within me; it is me!"³⁴ Fortunately, that is not the end of our story.

Redemption

Because of God's grace and his redemptive purposes realized in Christ and by his Spirit, the pervasive effects of sin upon the image of God in man are not irreversible. Every one of our capacities or faculties is corrupted but they can likewise be restored. In Christ, we find hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and truth (Col 2:3, 3:10; Eph 4:21), thus the good of reason is restored. In Christ, our conscience is renewed (Heb 5:11-14, 9:8-14, 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21). In Christ, we are empowered to choose that which is good (Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14, 3:8; Heb 9:14), thus our volition is renewed. In Christ, our emotions and affections are redeemed and become allies

in loving God and others (Phil 1:7-8, 2:1-5; Col 3:5-12; 1 Thess 2:7-8). In addition, Jesus Christ can restore the harmonious interaction of reason, conscience, volition, and emotion, which dis-integrated in the Fall. "It is best to think of intellect, will, and emotions as interdependent. Each affects the others, and none can function properly apart from the others. When we try to employ one without the others, the result is distorted understanding, choices, and feelings."³⁵

A failure to recognize both the fallenness and the potential for redemption of emotion has resulted in a couple of contemporary fallacies. For example, Jay Adams's concept of feeling-oriented vs. commandment oriented³⁶ living is frequently misunderstood (and probably could have been nuanced more fully by Adams to avoid the abuse of his concept) by falsely dichotomizing emotions and obedience. Likewise, the well known Campus Crusade train illustration from the Four Spiritual Laws, wherein feelings (particular emotions) are the caboose following faith in the facts of salvation, conveys both truth and error. Adams's dichotomy and Crusade's train illustration are true in the sense that following particular emotions (i.e., ungodly fear or guilt) while failing to attend to biblical promises and commands is foolish and sinful. However, God's Word and Spirit address the whole man so that the intellect is challenged to think truly, the emotions are kindled toward God, and the will is stimulated to act in ways that please God. These "Christian" versions of the popular admonition that "one should never follow feelings" fail to take into account the effect of both sin and redemption upon the whole man, upon each and every one of our capacities or faculties. As I review my own

sinful history, it is apparent that my thoughts, decisions, and actions have caused me a lot more trouble than my emotions ever have. In fact, nagging "negative" emotions such as despair, guilt, shame, and fear best reflected my true condition and kindled a return to God's Word as the source of truth and Christ as my only hope.

Particular emotions may in fact facilitate true thinking and righteous action. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul writes that godly grief leads to and produces repentance, while worldly grief produces death. In other words, the problem Paul is highlighting is not "following your emotions," but following worldly emotions. John Frame observes,

It is true, of course, that people sometimes "follow their feelings," rather than thinking responsibly. But it is also the case that people sometimes follow rationalistic schemes that run contrary to what they know in their "guts" (feelings) to be true. God gives us multiple faculties to serve as a sort of internal system of checks and balances. Sometimes reason saves us from emotional craziness, but emotions can also check the extravagant pretenses of reason . . . [Sometimes] feeling guides my reflection; my reflection refines my feelings. Those refined feelings provoke additional reflection, and so on. The goal is a satisfying analysis, an analysis I feel good about, one with which I have cognitive rest, a peaceful relation between intellect and emotion. That relation seems to me to be involved in all knowledge.³⁷

Neuroscientist and physician, Antonio Damasio, likewise maintained, "Emotions are not a luxury. They play a role in communicating meaning to others, and may also play a cognitive guidance role . . . feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense. . . . Feelings

are a powerful influence on reason."³⁸

Emotions are designed, just as much as any of our capacities, to respond to God's Word and Spirit and are crucial for a wholehearted response to him and others. The Laodicean church of Revelation 3 is rebuked and threatened both because of their works and their apathy, "because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (v. 16). They are exhorted not simply to repent, but to "be zealous and repent" (v. 19).

Regeneration and sanctification don't necessarily make us any more emotional, although they certainly are intended to renew our emotions and kindle and redirect the affections so that, in increasing measures, the new man is able to love God and neighbor more wholeheartedly and to hate evil and sin. And of course, the event and process of redemption does not make us less emotional, although the renewed heart with increasing faith in Christ can and should experience diminishing measures of sinful emotion and idolatrous affection.

Galatians 5 presents a picture of the freedom that comes for the believer who places his faith in Christ alone (vv. 6, 13-14). In this passage, the redemption of emotions is apparent. In Christ and by the Spirit, the redeemed are empowered to avoid immoral and impure emotions like jealousy, anger, and envy that are closely associated with enmity, disputes, dissensions, and factions (vv. 19-20). Redemption means that evil passions and desires have been and can be crucified with Christ. (Surely this is a process; the tension of the "already" and "not yet" of the reign of Christ in our hearts is as true here as it is everywhere else. We must acknowledge two senses of sanctification, both a definitive past event and a progressive process,³⁹ as the Scriptures do.) To be in Christ sets

us free to live and walk by the Spirit, thus empowered to progressively manifest a renewed affective life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (vv. 22-24).

Jonathan Edwards emphasized the crucial role of affections in authentic Christian experience.

For although to true religion there must indeed be something else besides affection; yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no *religious affection*. . . . If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart . . . God has given to mankind affections, for the same purpose as that for which he has given all the faculties and principles of the human soul, *viz.*, that they might be subservient to man's chief end, and the great business for which God has created him, that is, the business of religion.⁴⁰

The transformation of our affective life requires supernatural assistance. John Owen recognized the power of affections, "It is vain to contend with anything that hath the power of our affections in its disposal; it will prevail at the last."⁴¹ God's redemptive activity in this domain is necessary and typical. As Lord over all, he sovereignly initiates a covenantal relationship with us through his law and his grace, by which we are transformed as we respond with faithful obedience.

A transformed affective life requires that we acknowledge, accept, and trust in God's Lordship: his loving presence, his power and authority, and his wise and sovereign

control over our lives and circumstances.⁴² It is our response to his compassion, his commands, and his control that mediates personal transformation, including our emotions and affections.

Compassion—It is because of a Stoic bias, not Scripture, that some say God does not care about our emotions, but only our holiness. It is his loving presence with us, by his Word and Spirit, that allays our anxieties, comforts us in our afflictions, and gives us hope when we grieve. He is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions (2 Cor 1:3-4). He is a God of encouragement (Rom 15:5). We are told to cast all our anxieties onto him, because he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). We need not fear evil, because he is with us and his firm hand comforts us (Ps 23:4). When we are afraid, we can trust in him (Ps 56:3). He puts all our tears in his bottle (Ps 56:8). His “love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Rom 5:5)

God’s loving compassion is most apparent in his Son whom he sent to die for us, even though we were undeserving enemies of him. Christ is the Prince of peace, who brings perfect peace to those who trust in him (Isa 9:6, 26:3). Compassion is the emotion most frequently attributed to Christ.⁴³ The compassionate presence of God with us and for us is essential for the transformation of any component of our lives. We need help to change our emotions; one way God provides this help is by caring for us.

Command—As Lord, God is not only personally present with unfailing compassion, but also he has the right and authority to tell us how to live, including the emotions we should and should not feel. Even though we cannot command and direct our emotions in the same way that

we can our thoughts or actions, God does not seem to have any compunction about commanding and directing the emotions and affections of his people. He commands us to rejoice and be glad (Ps 100:2; Rom 12:15; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16); to fear him (Luke 12:5; Rom 11:20; 1 Pet 1:17); not to fear people (Josh 1:9; Deut 31:6, 8) or persecution (Luke 12:4-5); not to worry about circumstances (Matt 6: 25-34; Mark 4:40); to grieve and mourn with others and for our sin (Ps. 51:17, Rom 12:15; Jas 4:9); to let peace rule in our hearts (Col 3:15); to be kind and tenderhearted and compassionate toward others (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12); to hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15) and not to hate our brother (Lev 19:17; 1 John 2:9,11, 3:15). As Lord, he not only commands our emotions but he also questions (Gen 4:6; Jonah 4:4-9) and judges (Deut 28:47) them. His interest is not just in how we act with respect to our emotions but also in their motives and causes. His claims are not limited merely to what we do with our emotions but also extend to which emotions we feel and why.

As Lord over all, God’s designs and intentions for our emotions are normative. As the Supreme and Most High Being, he has a right to our allegiance in all things. Therefore, whether we are eating or drinking or getting angry or sad or feeling afraid or happy, all things should be for his glory alone. Thus, our Holy Lord lovingly provides norms for our emotions: what we feel (which would include even our motives for these emotions), what we do with these emotions, and their ultimate purpose and objective.

Control—Lords are, by definition, sovereign; our God does indeed reign over all things. All of the circumstances and events of our lives are under the control of his wise and loving hand. Our emotions and affec-

tions are intended to bring glory to him, and as we trust and rest in his sovereignty, we are enabled to orient them for him and to him. God's sovereign control over all things brings order, sense, meaning, and purpose to our lives, and our emotions. When we understand our emotions in the light of God's sovereignty, particularly when coupled with a wholehearted apprehension of his presence with and authority over us, our emotional lives are situated within ultimate and divine perspectives that temper, order, and direct them.

Conclusion

The God of the Bible aims to establish his Lordship not just over our actions and thoughts, but also over our emotions, affections, and feelings. "Religious affections are a subset of affections in general, and all affections are religious."⁴⁴ What is the source of my joy and happiness? What do I grieve and become sad about most? What is it that provokes my anger? Who or what do I fear most? Is he Lord over my emotions or do they rule me? Are my feelings for him or against him? Do my affections indicate that I love him above all other gods with all my soul, heart, mind, and strength? Who or what is the chief end of my affections? Our emotional states are windows into our souls, revealing the allegiance of our hearts. Let us endeavor to think God's thoughts after him, conform our actions to his Word, and experience emotions that reflect and honor him.

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Sermon: Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles; Tomorrow's Mercies for Tomorrow's Troubles

Matthew 6:34 and Lamentations 3:22-23

John Piper

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Introduction

Sometimes I have reinforced a sermon by following it up with a STAR article (The STAR is Bethlehem Baptist's weekly newsletter). Today I want to reinforce a STAR article with a following sermon. The STAR article last week was called, "Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles; Tomorrow's Mercies for Tomorrow's Troubles." There were several points. One was this: Every day God appoints a measure of pleasure and pain for that day—like the old Swedish hymn says:

He whose heart is kind beyond all
measure,
Gives unto each day what he
deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and
pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Kind beyond all measure, the Lord gives pain and pleasure to each day as he deems best. We don't always agree enthusiastically with what God deems best for us. It is hard for us to feel that he is kind beyond all measure when he gives us pain. Causing pain is not generally equated with showing kindness, especially if God's measure for one day is a lot more than another day. But it's true, as we will see more fully in a moment. God gives each day his wise and loving measure of pain and pleasure. That was the first point of the STAR article.

The second was that there is fresh mercy

from God for each day's appointed pain. Today's mercies are not designed to carry tomorrow's burdens. There will be mercies tomorrow for that. Today's mercies are for today's burdens. But tomorrow? What about tomorrow? What will become of our children? Will they believe? Or will they forsake the way of righteousness? What will become of our health? Will we go blind or deaf or lose our memories? Who will take care of us? Will we spend the last 10 years of our lives out-living all our friends and family, abandoned, slumped over in a wheel chair at a rural nursing home? What will become of our marriages? Will we ever trust again? Will we laugh and play and pray and talk in peace? Will we be there for the children? Will we be there for each other? Will it be sad and strained and dissatisfying for 30 or 40 more years? What will it be like tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow? What will become of our church? What will tomorrow bring? Or Wednesday? Or next Sunday? Or a year from now? Or ten years from now? Will we be together? Will we be winning the lost, and standing for righteousness, and delivering the oppressed, and sending more and more missionaries to the unreached peoples, and resting in the care of 17 district elders, and worshipping with white-hot zeal for the glory and grace of our great God? What about tomorrow? Will we have the strength to live tomor-

row when it comes? And to live it well and wisely and even joyfully, no matter what God's measure of pain and pleasure?

The point of the STAR article was that the strength to live tomorrow will be given tomorrow, not today. And it will be given. Our task today is not to have the strength needed for tomorrow's burdens. Our task today is to live by the mercies given for today, and to believe that there will be new mercies for tomorrow. Today's mercies do not include strength for tomorrow; they include faith that tomorrow's unseen mercies will be sufficient for tomorrow.

I can't express how important I believe this is for the living of the Christian life—for children, for teenagers, for college students and young adults in the work world, for middle-aged people facing major life changes, for older people with tremendous uncertainties before them, for single people and married people. It's important because of how natural and strong is the impulse in our hearts to want to feel sufficient today for tomorrow's challenges. We don't like it when the gauge reads "empty" at the end of the day, and we have to go to sleep—if we can—not feeling the power for tomorrow's troubles.

The Christian's Secret of Dealing with Trouble

There is a secret to the Christian life here that I want you to get a handle on. If you don't—if you go on desperately needing to feel today the strength for tomorrow, then it seems to me that either you will cave in under the pressure of excessive anxieties, or you will find a worldly strategy for developing immense ego strength and persuade yourself that you really are sufficient for tomorrow's troubles. Neither of those is God's way. God's way is summed up in two passages of scripture. One is Matthew

6:34, "Do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (The other text is Lamentations 3:22-23. See below.)

Let me tell you what I think that text does not mean. It does not mean: Make no preparations for tomorrow's needs. If you're a farmer, the thought about tomorrow's empty silos should cause you to sow your field with corn months before you need the corn. Almost everything that is worth doing requires some forethought, planning, and preparation. Jesus said, "Which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). The point of Matthew 6:34 is not—don't make wise preparations. The point is—don't bring the troubles and uncertainties of carrying out those preparations tomorrow into today. "Each day has enough trouble of its own."

What does Jesus mean by "enough"? Or as the old Authorized Version says, "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." What does he mean by "sufficient"? He means that your sovereign heavenly Father, who is kind and wise beyond all measure, lovingly gives unto each day what he deems best, including both its pain and pleasure. Each day's troubles are "enough"—they are "sufficient"—because God determines their limit. God decides what is enough and what is sufficient (cf. 1 Cor 10:13).

You can know some of the pressures that are coming tomorrow. And part of your job may be to make some preparations for them. Those preparations are part of today's "sufficient" trouble. But how those preparations will turn out tomorrow, and whether you feel strong enough today to do your part tomorrow—that is not something God wants you to carry today. Those are tomorrow's burdens. God does

not give mercies today for bearing tomorrow's burdens.

For example, we on the staff must now plan and design worship services ahead of time. It's like the farmer: we know that if there is going to be a harvest of corporate worship on Sunday, there needs to be some plowing, sowing, and watering earlier in the week. That's OK. Jesus wants us to do that.

But what about the questions that start to arise from the flesh: How will it go on Sunday? Will the people be there? Will God meet us? Will it be real and deep and earnest and life-changing and soul-winning and Christ-exalting? Will the people be disappointed? With these questions we can cross the line from faithful preparation to unfaithful anxiety. We cross over from dealing with today's sufficient burden (preparation) and begin to borrow tomorrow's troubles (how will it be received?). And that is spiritually very dangerous because today's mercies are given by God for today's burdens not tomorrow's.

Or the danger can happen another way. Not only can we start to fret about how our preparations will turn out, but we can start to fret over whether we will have the resources to handle all the preparations after this. What about Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday and Easter and then April and May and June and July and August? Will the spiritual resources be there? That too can be a crossing over the line between faithful planning and unfaithful anxiety. The strength to plan worship for July 10, will be given on July 5th and 6th. And probably not before.

Now where in scripture do I get this confidence that God not only gives the trouble to each day that is sufficient for that day, but also the mercies which are tailor-made to carry that day's trouble? I get it

from (among other places) Lamentations 3:22-23, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness."

It's the phrase "they are new every morning" that gives me this great confidence that each day's mercies—each day's kindnesses—are given specifically for that day. Ponder that with me. Let it sink in. "His mercies . . . are new every morning."

Why are they new every morning? Why does God do it that way? It's not because yesterday's mercies were bad or weak. It's because they were yesterday's. Yesterday's mercies were for yesterday's burdens. Today's mercies are for today's burdens. They are new every morning. They are like the manna in the wilderness: you can't keep it overnight. Enough comes for each day. You live on God day by day, or you don't live on God.

The Swedish hymn gets it right again. The second verse says, "Every day the Lord himself is near me, With a special mercy for each hour." A special mercy for each hour. The mercy to carry you through this hour is given in this hour. This truth will save your life again and again, if you grasp it and live it. Because how many times in life do we come to the end of our resources and say, "There isn't anything in here anymore. I am depleted. One more straw and this camel's back will break." And we despair that tomorrow will just be rolled on to today's depleted condition. And at that moment we desperately need this truth: God will not expect you to carry one more straw with these present mercies. When the next straw is added the mercies will be new.

So we must not compound today's load with fretting over tomorrow's. We must not doubt God and say, "I have no more

strength; so tomorrow will be impossible to live." That's not true. You will not be asked to live tomorrow on today's strength. What you need today is not tomorrow's strength, but today's faith that tomorrow's mercies will be new and will be enough.

And there's something different between the experience of faith for tomorrow's power, and the actual experience of that power itself. Faith stands on the promise of God and waits and hopes in weakness and peace. And, of course, that waiting and hoping is part of today's mercy. Part of today's mercy is the ability to trust that there will be sufficient mercy for tomorrow. And we trust in that because God promises it in Lamentations 3:23 (cf. Phil 4:19; 2 Cor 9:8-11).

But in spite of all the peace that faith can bring about today, it is not yet tomorrow's mercy or tomorrow's power. There's a difference. And that's why there is such a battle that goes on. We want the feeling of adequacy today for what we will have to go through tomorrow. But God says, "Trust me. I will give it to you when you need it."

Let me illustrate what I am saying by the following story. In 1931 a missionary named John Vinson was working in North China. An army of bandits swooped down on his village looting, burning, and killing. They took 150 Chinese and Vinson captive. When the government troops pursued, the bandits offered Vinson his freedom if he would write a letter to the commanding officer of the government troops asking him to withdraw.

Vinson said, "Will you let the Chinese prisoners go free?" "Certainly not" was the reply. "Then I refuse to go free," he said. That night the bandits tried to flee, taking Vinson with them. Many bandits were killed, and many of the captives escaped. Vinson could not run because of a recent

surgery. A little Chinese girl later reported that a bandit pointed a gun at Vinson's head and said, "I'm going to kill you. Aren't you afraid?"

Now at this point how do you feel? Are you projecting yourself into Vinson's place? If so, do you feel rising within you the power to respond with great serenity and to die with peace? The point of what I have been saying is this: you don't have to feel that right now. What God wants from you now as you sit there is not the strength to die that death. That is not today's trouble for you. It may be tomorrow's. What God calls you to now is not to have the power to do what Vinson did, but to have the trust in God that when your time comes he will give what you need.

Vinson looked up and said, "No, I am not afraid. If you kill me, I will go straight to God." Which he did.¹

Today's mercies for today's troubles; tomorrow's mercies for tomorrow's troubles. "As your days so shall your strength be" (Deut 33:25). Don't be anxious about tomorrow. The troubles and the mercies are appointed day by day.

ENDNOTES

¹This story is taken from *The Elizabeth Elliot Newsletter*, March/April 1994.

The *SBJT* Forum: Applications of Counseling in Ministry

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. D. A. Carson, Larry Crabb, Ed Welch, Mark McMinn, and Charles Tackett have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. The journal's goal for the Forum is to provide significant thinkers' views on topics of interest without requiring lengthy articles from these heavily-committed individuals. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

SBJT: What practical advice would you give to young pastors who want to be careful and faithful in the counseling components of their ministry?

D. A. Carson: These issues are not only complex, but their complexity is compounded by the harsh reality that today people adopt highly polarized positions on these matters. Some are suspicious of almost all counseling. Naturalistic structures of thought govern the dominant psychological theories, it is argued, and those who train in such traditions are almost always tainted by them. What we need is more biblical preaching and teaching. Others concede a place to psychiatrists when there is an organic problem (e.g., a chemical imbalance in the brain), but not elsewhere. On the other hand, many pastors spend less and less time on sermon preparation, swamped as they are by seemingly endless demands for counseling. The moral structures of our culture are falling apart, and people need help. Sermons merely introduce people to broader truths and principles, these pastors argue; beyond that, individuals need individual help. So whether from choice (because some pastors think that counsel-

ing is more effective than preaching) or from sheer necessity (because the demands for counseling never go away), Greek exegesis and homiletic excellence are devoured by Freud and Jung, or at least by Larry Crabb.

What follows are far too many points. Their strengths are: (a) their individual brevity, and (b) the fact that I might easily have trebled the list!

(1) For our purposes, "Christian counseling" is nothing more than what takes place when a Christian who in some area is more informed or more mature helps another person, usually a Christian, or another Christian pair or family, to gain similar maturity or help in that area. Of course, such advice and help can take place on an informal basis at countless levels in the church, but when its structure is more formal, it is appropriately called "counseling."

(2) Pastors must be deeply committed to the priority of what has traditionally been called "the ministry of the Word." But the ministry of the Word must not be restricted to preaching on Sunday and the odd group Bible study. The ministry of the Word is a comprehensive category. Doubt-

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less its high point is public preaching and teaching, but it ought to take place in every conversation in which a Christian is helping another, especially another Christian. It follows that counseling, as here understood, should have as one of its aims to teach the Word of God, especially as that Word is applied to the problem or need or challenge at hand.

(3) That in turn means that pastors should build files on appropriate passages to use for a wide array of circumstances: for the bereaved, for the abused, for those consumed by guilt, for the apathetic, for the discouraged or the lonely, for young couples seeking counsel in preparation for marriage, for those facing death, for the abused, for the postmodern seeker, and on and on. Do not merely make lists of such passages, but add to the lists, study the passages, understand them well and know how to teach them. Develop illustrations that flow from them. As often as possible, use your Bible openly in such sessions, and insist that the person seeking counsel is to bring and use their Bible as well. Understand that counseling, properly done, is part of the ministry of the Word.

(4) Be properly suspicious of those who think that conversion means nothing more than sort of tipping people inside, while the real life-changing power is counseling. This anemic view of the gospel turns out to be a self-fulfilling prediction: it will guarantee that your presentation of and experience of the gospel will be anemic. The gospel, holistically considered, is the power of God unto salvation. It restores us to God, and it transforms us—partly in this life, and climactically at the resurrection. In line with Jesus' prayer, one of the means the gospel uses is God's truth: "Sanctify them by the truth," Jesus prays to his Father; "your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Thus the faithful and penetrating application of the Word, whether in one-on-one sessions (hence counseling) or in large public meetings of the entire body, is the crucial means on which we should rely, rather than on the mere *form* of communication, whether counseling or something else.

(5) Many, many, personal problems are intimately tied to poor relationships. But that means that when the church of God, empowered by God's Spirit, is functioning in line with the gospel, it becomes a home. The body of Christ respects and encourages its weakest members. Mutual encouragement and admonition abound. The solitary individual Christian is embedded in the Christian family. In other words, on the long haul the transforming gospel of Christ ought to build a Christ-centered community of believers, with the result that many ordinary problems of poor relationships will dissolve or be handled (super-)naturally within the life of the community.

(6) In line with your particular responsibilities in ministry, budget certain hours for counseling, and, apart from emergencies, do not exceed those hours. That means that if Mr. Jones asks to see you, and all your counseling hours are booked for the next two weeks, gently probe to make sure that what is on his mind is not in any sense an emergency, and book him into your first free slot. But do not increase the number of hours you allot to counseling, unless it is a *principled* decision, and not the decision of pressure for more. The reason, of course, is that in many churches counseling could easily devour more and more of your hours, until you are finding no time for praying, no time for basic administration, and, worst of all, no time for study and preparation. You end up robbing the flock of God of the nourishment they des-

perately need from their under-shepherd, because you are spending all your time with a handful of troubled sheep.

(7) Almost every church has a few troubled souls who will happily eat up every hour you give them. Like death itself, they always want more, and, for whatever reason, they never change. Identify such people, and refuse to give them much time. Some of them need nothing more than companionship and a sympathetic ear, and in due course you can develop a kind of junior tier of helpers who will devote some of their week to bringing encouragement and patience to these tried and trying people. In other words, try to make some provision for them, but under no circumstance may you justly permit them to take up much of your time. You are called to evangelize, make disciples, and engage heartily in the ministry of the Word and prayer. You are not fulfilling your calling if you spend substantial numbers of hours each week holding the hands of those who will never have enough and who will never change.

(8) Many problems people face take time to heal. Nevertheless, it is helpful to distinguish between two different kinds of temporal demands. The first kind almost always improves with time. The extraordinary loneliness of bereavement, and the pain of abandonment engendered by a divorce precipitated by a marriage partner who has run off with someone else, are two good examples. In the early stages, you will be wise to spend extra time with such people. But others can often share the burden, and in due course such people usually return to an even keel, and, in God's mercy, often become people who can help others who go through similar trials. So mark such people well, and find ways to use them. But the other kind of tempo-

ral demand is trickier. It is found in the person who *could* be improving with time, but instead is nurturing the problem, feeding the sin. Sustained and carefully maintained bitterness is a good example. You might like to think that this will improve as the months or years go by, but sometimes it simply gets worse. In such cases you may be wise to demand change, to set concrete goals, to assign homework—and if these things are not done, you will not see them again. The homework may involve memorizing some substantial passages of Scripture, writing a letter asking for forgiveness, re-establishing a broken friendship. But do not permit your hours of counseling to be chewed up by people who want a sympathetic ear regarding their “problems,” but who frankly refuse to address those problems. Where possible, set achievable goals, and hold people accountable.

(9) Work hard to maintain, so far as practicable, biblical terminology and biblical categories. Counselors in the secular world refer to those who come to them as “clients” or, in the case of psychiatrists, sometimes “patients.” Avoid those categories: you are a pastor, and such terms are loaded with overtones you do not want to foster. The panoply of Freudian or Jungian categories can, if given free rein, so domesticate the gospel that you end up selling your gospel heritage for a mess of psychological pottage. This does not mean that there are not important lessons to be learned from others. It means that ideally the best lessons need to be transmuted into biblical categories, so that people instinctively turn to their Bibles as the supreme source of help. That often means learning where the secular categories are *properly* related to biblical themes, and where they are not. Perhaps no topic of this sort is more

important than questions relating to “self-esteem,” which is scarcely a biblical label, but which can certainly be tied appropriately (and terribly inappropriately!) to various biblical themes. But that would take another article!

(10) Don’t bluff. Admit what you do not know. Keep a list of people you can consult to fill in the many gaps where you find your information or training wanting. If while counseling someone you find yourself coming to the end of your resources, tell the person you are helping that you will try to find better responses and more penetrating biblical insight before you meet again. This is especially important for young pastors whose experience is still quite limited, whether the cases they are dealing with are “ordinary” or extraordinarily convoluted.

(11) How much more important is it, then, to develop strong ties with medical people and with experienced counselors when you are uncertain if you are facing things like bipolar disorders, the onset of schizophrenia, and things of that order. The list of things that a pastor should not handle is not nearly as long as many professional psychologists and psychiatrists think, but you should become aware of what is on the short list!

(12) Recognize that there are often problems behind the problems, sins behind the sins, patterns behind the patterns. A marriage that is falling apart, or a woman sliding into deeper depression, may have lurking in the background suppressed bitterness and fear stemming from child abuse during childhood or puberty. Counselors in the Puritan tradition were considered particularly penetrating in their “cure of souls.” That part of evangelical heritage needs to be restored.

(13) Never forget that we are complex

people, and our spiritual state, our emotional well-being, our perceptions of things, and the chemical balances in our brains can all be related to one another in subtle ways. A Christian going through treatment for cancer may suffer some depression. But is this depression generated by a fear of death? Or has the constant nausea from chemotherapy driven the person down? Or have some of the side effects of the anti-nauseants kicked in (for some of them are known to depress some people)? Or is the depression a subtle mix of all of these factors, and more? You may be able to help this Christian think more clearly about death, and trust Christ more knowledgeably and confidently as the resurrected Lord who has triumphed over death. But even if the depression owes much of its power to the drugs being used, the ongoing depression may be interpreted by this believer as irrefutable evidence that he or she is not *really* trusting the Lord, and the depression may deepen. Once again, good medical advice is crucial: the right antidepressant might be a gift from God.

(14) Preserve a healthy place for common sense! I have counseled people who seem to be in danger from complex and subtle pressures and broken relationships, when a little probing and a modicum of sense made it pretty clear that what this person needed above all was a little less stress and a good deal more sleep. Sometimes the godliest thing in the universe is to go to bed and sleep.

(15) Never overlook the profound importance of the gospel insight that you find your life by losing it, you receive by giving, you live by dying. Some cranky and miserable people have matured remarkably in a matter of weeks, when they have been directed to help out in an AIDS clinic, take on some responsibility in a boys club,

join a prison ministry, teach an inner-city kid how to read, learn how to share the gospel effectively, or the like. One pastor I know was on the edge of resigning from the ministry, beaten down by cynics, little fruit, frustration, and loneliness. I asked him when was the last time he had actually explained the gospel to someone in detail. He looked startled. With a little help, he started two evangelistic groups, and recruited and trained others to do the same. A year later he is full of the joy of the Lord, seeing people being converted, and leaving the whiners to gripe in peace while he gets on with the ministry of the Word and prayer. A great many counselors, including pastoral counselors, do not conscientiously aim to draw *every* person to God-centeredness, to Christ-centeredness, removing them from the ugly focus on self and self-fulfillment that degrades so much of our culture and is nothing more than ruinous and odious idolatry.

(16) Take notes. Often this should be done after the person has left, but take notes. The weakest ink (or computer record) is stronger than the strongest memory. Besides, notes will help you to plan ahead, to think through relevant passages in advance of the next session, to discipline your prayer life for these people. Make sure such notes are secure, especially if others in the church commonly have access to your study (and note: I said “study,” not “office”!).

(17) Read widely—occasionally in the more popular counseling literature, but more systematically in serious treatments *from different perspectives*, including those of secularists, those who are attempting theological integration, and historical examples (such as the Puritans).

(18) Become acquainted with relevant legal issues. For example, if you discover

that your youth pastor has been sleeping with one or more of the young people in his care, in addition to securing sound and godly advice from more senior pastors who have faced such a crisis and handled it well, you must be clear as to the age in your state at which the issue extends beyond fornication to statutory rape. If statutory rape is involved, the youth pastor has not only sinned, but committed a crime, and the police *must* be notified. Not only because our society is terribly litigious, but also because we want both to be clean and to be seen to be clean, it is becoming increasingly urgent, in several domains, to become familiar with the relevant law. Nowadays there are seminars, essays, and even books that sometimes help.

(19) Learn how to talk about death; learn how to prepare people to die. Christians used to be known as those who knew how to die well. Nowadays we are not very differentiable from the world in this respect. This abdication of Christian responsibility must be overthrown.

(20) Be very careful about using examples from your counseling as direct illustrations in your sermons. In addition to the offense you may cause to the person you have counseled, you may unwittingly prompt some others to conclude, “Well, I will never seek counsel from *him*. I may end up as a sermon illustration.”

(21) Although I am a bit suspicious of certain kinds of group therapy in the context of pastoral ministry, sometimes it is an effective way for those facing similar challenges to help and support one another, to bear one another’s burdens (which is surely a biblical injunction).

SBJT: What Should Christians Be Wary of in Contemporary Psychology?

Larry Crabb: When I first enrolled in the

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University of Illinois' doctoral program in clinical psychology, nearly forty years ago, I hoped to become a good psychologist who happened to be a Christian, like plumbers or surgeons or advertising executives who were competent in their professions and, oh by the way, were also Christians. It caught me badly off guard when, in my first year of training, a disturbing thought occurred to me. To be a psychologist (more precisely, a psychotherapist) who happened to be a Christian was, in at least one respect, like being a thief who happened to be a Christian. Both professions required compromise with convictions essential to Christianity.

A thief makes a living by transgressing a moral standard that the Bible clearly upholds. A psychologist, if he remains true to his training, makes a living by violating an even higher biblical value. His clinical work assumes that relief of pain in the soul for the client's experience of comfort is a greater good than walking through that pain to a deeper trust in God for the sake of His pleasure.

Psychotherapy, a term which literally means to promote the well-being of a human soul, is a grand and ultimately futile effort to arrange for personal fulfillment by rearranging the flesh. By "flesh," I mean the self-obsessed energy in all of us that attempts to match personal desires with present opportunities for satisfaction. The therapeutic culture sees no relationship (or an inverse one) between soul health and self-abandonment to God.

We moderns are forever indebted to Jonathan Edwards for surfacing an often hidden truth, that the unquenchable longing for deep joy in every human soul and an utter yieldedness to God for His glory are beautifully compatible, if the latter is valued above the former. Value the former

above the latter and you lose both.

But contemporary psychology, which in its clinical application remains as much a philosophy as a science, dismisses such thinking with a wave of its non-scientific hand. Medieval nonsense. Dangerous fanaticism. Muddle-headed religion. And we are left with personally satisfying adjustment to this world as our aim in life.

Augustine's ancient psychology, especially in *Confessions*, deserves appreciative study. The psychology of medieval Christian mystics merits close attention. Even better is the pre-modern psychology of students of human nature such as Bunyan, Owen and other Puritans, and Jonathan Edwards. Their thinking is filled with gold for today's Christian to mine.

But psychology since Freud should never be approached as authoritative, only catalytic. I regularly read works by secular psychologists to wake up to questions I might not otherwise ask, questions like—why do some teenage girls and not others starve themselves, or what makes an older Christian woman I know cut her wrists when she has no intention to commit suicide and why does she feel no pain when she does so, or what's going on inside a gifted pastor when he finds the urge to download pornography irresistible?

If I did not explore the thinking of sensitive (and to my knowledge secular) thinkers like psychiatrist Irvin Yalom and psychologist Hans Strupp, I might approach anorexics, cutters, and pornographers with simplistic accountability ("Just stop it!") or sentimental support ("I care. I'll listen. I won't judge.") and think it's biblical.

But I must be careful. Contemporary psychology is largely reductionistic, empirical in its epistemology even about matters that can be known only through

revelation, and unashamedly Ptolemaic. Let me briefly explain.

Despite a developing accommodation to the culture's surging interest in spirituality, most psychological theory has a distinctly unsupernatural view of the soul. I have not read a secular psychology text that declares man to be an image-bearing creation of God designed for enjoyment of divine community who has fallen into immoral narcissism that requires both forgiveness and radical transformation by God. Reduce your view of people to something less, and everything—your understanding of problems, your definition of health, your hope for getting healthy—falls off target.

And the core human fault is misunderstood. The fault of rebellion against God that results in self-obsession is obscured beneath elaborate discussions of psychopathology that invite empirically validated treatment rather than biblically revealed redemption. The effect is to value professional involvement and insight over divine forgiveness and transformation.

And the person is still central, in the spirit of first century physicist Claudius Ptolemy who wrongly declared that the sun revolves around an immobile earth. We are in desperate need of a spiritual Copernican revolution patterned after Nicholas Copernicus. After 1500 years of Ptolemaic error, Copernicus insisted that it is we on earth who move around a stable sun in a relationship of subordinate dependence. Psychology remains Ptolemaic. If there is a God, He is here for us. If your religious views promote your well being, fine. If not, change or dismiss them. The notion that we exist for God in a subordinate relationship of profound dependence is offensive to the world view of psychology. Christians need to remember that the journey of the

soul is not from damage to healing, it is from self-obsession to God-obsession. It is not from emptiness to the experience of fulfillment in this world. It is from proud and terrified independence to humble and trusting dependence until we are home.

Christian counseling is a good thing, if by the term we mean wise, caring followers of Jesus speaking with spiritual authenticity and power into the souls of struggling people with the vision of awakening and nourishing their desire for God until it rules their lives. And it is a good thing when Christian counselors read contemporary psychology to provoke more questions and harder thought.

But when we accommodate psychology by letting human desires become the center of our concern; when we pit their satisfaction against the call to self-sacrifice, brokenness, and repentance; when we favor experts of the psyche who treat disorder over elders of the soul who shepherd pilgrims on their journey to God; when we rely on empirical research and psychological theory to guide our helping efforts more than biblical study and theological reflection, then we are in danger of becoming counselors who happen to be Christians. And that is not a good thing. We might as well become Christian thieves.

SBJT: What Is Happening in Counseling Today?

Ed Welch: Counseling and psychotherapy seem to have emerged *ex nihilo* during the 1960s. Suddenly, psychotherapists were on the scene and the church was becoming psychologized. The ascendancy of counseling, however, has its historical reasons. Secular counseling emerged out of a World War II economy in which the government employed thousands of psychologists to develop tests that could place

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military personnel in suitable positions. When the war was over, the government kept many of these psychologists in the Veteran's Hospital system and they began to expand their domain beyond testing into what we know as psychotherapy and pastoral care.

Secular counseling's analogue in the church is the one-to-one ministry of the word, and this has been with the church since its inception. The reason secular psychologies gained authority in pastoral care was that from the 1920s to the 1970s the church was occupied by liberalism and the end times, and developments in pastoral care languished. Into the breach stepped a Christianized version of psychotherapy.

Today there are three recognizable groups in the broader counseling field: secular counseling, Christian counseling, and biblical counseling. Secular counseling comes out of models of the person and change that try to explain the person apart from God. Christian counseling consists of Christians who counsel. Its sympathies are with the triad of secular theories, Scripture, and the professional therapeutic community. Biblical counseling attempts to have its theory and practices emerge from Scripture and its goal is to work under and with the church.

Biblical counseling was considered the counseling gadfly until the 1990s. Today it is busting loose from old stereotypes. In the 1970's and 1980's, biblical counseling was associated with the writings of Jay Adams. His 1970 book, *Competent to Counsel*, was a landmark work that was catalytic for pastors and counselors. For the fifteen years after *Competent to Counsel*, Adams dominated the biblical counseling landscape. Since the early 1980's, however, other authors have broadened the movement and produced new biblical work that has

sought to be faithful to Scripture, alert to cultural issues, and open to critique.

The primary task of biblical counseling today is to broaden and deepen the theory and practice of personal ministry. A secondary task is apologetic. Anytime Scripture is fundamental to our thinking and practice, we will make distinctions, be alert to doctrinal error and vulnerability, and, in dialogue, work to persuade others of the truth while we ourselves learn from others and are persuaded by the truth. With this secondary task in mind, here are a few areas within Christian counseling that Scripture tags as being areas of concern.

An assumption within most Christian counseling is that we are a composite of body, soul, and spirit. In the early years of Christian counseling the motto was, "the spirit to the pastor, the body to the physician, and the soul to the psychologist." This simplistic perspective has never been replaced. The result is that within Christian counseling anything labeled psychological is not directly under Scripture's or spiritual jurisdiction. Therefore, theories that have conflicted with Scripture have been allowed into the Christian counseling fold without a careful look at their assumptions. Biblical counseling opts for a human duality in that we are a unity of spiritual and physical substance, and the expanse of human problems can be understood with those two categories.

Christian counseling has not really examined the dynamics of the human heart. It tends to focus on pain and victimization, which Scripture certainly addresses at length with its pervasive concern about justice, but Christian counseling ends with a passive view of the human condition. Rarely does it get to the fundamental concerns of the heart. Biblical counseling highlights victimization when

appropriate, but it does this within its teaching about a heart that is always active. The basic idea is this: the heart establishes spiritual allegiances. In our hearts we know God and his law, and in our hearts we turn either away from God or toward him. Everything is referenced to the true God. Everything is personal. It is in the heart that God's communication collides with the distorted messages from the demonic kingdom and where choices are made and a life is either won or lost.

- Whom do you love (Deut 6:5; 1 John 2:15)—the world or Jesus?
- Whom (or what) do you worship (2 Kings 17:36)—idols or God?
- Whom will you serve (Matt 6:24)—money or God?
- Whom do you obey (1 John 3:10)—the devil or God?
- For whose glory do you live (Rom 1:21-23)—your own or God's?
- Where is your treasure (Matt 6:21)—in the world or in Christ?
- To whom do you belong (John 8:44)—the devil or God?
- Whom do you trust (Jer 17:5-8)—other people or God?

These are the questions confronting the heart and they are the critical questions of human life. There are none deeper.

Christian counseling's professional and secular instincts suggest that specialized knowledge is necessary for change. Biblical counseling recognizes that some people are more gifted than others but it tries to maintain Scripture's populist ethos. Wisdom is in the public domain, and it should always have direct and overt links to the gospel itself: Christ and him crucified. As such, if biblical counseling is communicated clearly, it should be simple and available to the child who is being bullied in school and sophisticated to the scholar.

Given the differences among counselors, the church should be alert. Most every church has members who meet with

professional counselors. What we do not always realize is that these counselors function as adjunct pastoral staff. But, unlike ordained pastoral staff, counselors are unexamined and unaccountable, and their counsel can be out of step with the preaching and teaching ministries of the church. As such, if a counselor is meeting with a church member, consider asking some questions:

- Of what church are you a member?
- Would you give permission to talk with your pastor in order to have a recommendation?
- What is your training in Scripture?
- Are you familiar with the distinctives of our church? Do you agree with those values? How do you incorporate them into the counseling?
- How do you approach confidentiality? Will you make an effort to obtain a release of information so you can communicate freely with relevant pastoral staff?
- Are you pleased to have someone from the pastoral staff or another member of the church come in during the actual counseling sessions, assuming the counselee agrees to it?
- What is the place of the gospel in the counseling process? Are there psychological problems that can't be deeply answered with the gospel?
- What is your basic philosophy of counseling? Do you follow a particular school of thought? Is there a person's name or a particular book that summarizes your approach?

This is not to single out Christian counseling. We all live under the light and gaze of the Spirit working through the Word, and none of us has the perfect theological system. Instead, we all seek to walk humbly before the Lord, repent when we see sin, search Scripture, submit to ecclesiastical authority, sharpen others and be sharpened by them, and, together, bear fruit as we minister in the name of Jesus.

SBJT: How can Christian counselors better incorporate the doctrine of sin in their counseling?

Mark R. McMinn: Any integrative endeavor that brings together the Christian faith with contemporary methods of counseling should be bi-directional. In one direction, our views of counseling should be transformed by Christian perspectives on sin. In the other direction, our understanding of sin can be enriched through findings of scientific psychology.

Transforming our Views of Counseling with the Doctrine of Sin

After many years of providing psychotherapy and studying the scientific literature on its effectiveness, I am convinced that good therapy works because it is a place that emulates grace. It is a place of acceptance and mercy, a place where sins and consequences of sins can be openly explored without the fear of judgment. This frees people to look honestly at themselves, to become more open in their other relationships, and to move forward into richer and deeper connections with those they love. Sadly, some therapists have lost the language of personal sin and focus only on how the client has been hurt by others. Others have overcompensated by focusing exclusively on personal sin and neglecting the ways clients have been harmed by others. In either case such therapy is rendered half-effective. A place of grace needs to be a place of open exploration and acceptance, where both sin and consequences of sin can be named and grieved. In short, psychotherapy works because of its faint resemblance to the greatest story of all time.

Early in my career I met with a man for six months to help him with his depres-

sion. We evaluated his self-talk and made some systematic adjustments to the way he looked at himself and others, and ultimately he started feeling much better. Several months after he finished treatment, I learned that he had sexually abused his niece for several years when she was a child. I pondered my therapeutic intervention, and though it may have been of some use to him, I think that I missed something much more important. I suspect he came to my office longing for a place where he could confess and enter the long spiritual process of repentance and restitution; perhaps he even hoped for forgiveness and some measure of reconciliation. What he got instead was altered self-talk. The therapeutic systems that I learned in graduate school and in my postdoctoral training did not provide the language of sin that might have cleansed this man deeply. How sad that we missed such an opportunity for contrition and healing.

I do not sit with my clients and tell them they are a mess, and I do not begin each session with, “Hey, sinner, how are you today?” In fact, I rarely use the word “sin” in my sessions. But I have learned to value a theological understanding of sin when I think about the mess we are all in—clients, therapists, and everyone else. If I fail to allow my clients the privilege of confession and repentance, I risk providing symptom relief while robbing them of the chance to turn around and take the first step on their journey of deep healing and change.

Enhancing our Understanding of Sin through Scientific Psychology

It is quite a paradox for me to argue that psychology, a discipline that rarely discusses sin, can be helpful in fleshing out a Christian understanding of sin. It is surprising to learn that many findings from

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scientific psychology, when viewed through a lens of Christian theology, can help us understand how our sin nature affects our everyday life. I have often wished that seminary students were required to take an introductory psychology course—taught from a theistic perspective—to better understand the wonders and brokenness of our human condition.

There is much that could be written on this topic, but in a short forum such as this I will limit my discussion to the topic of pride. For centuries pride has been considered chief among the deadly sins—the sin from which other evils emerge. Not surprisingly then, one of the clearest conclusions from scientific psychology is that we are proud.

Like Yogi Berra—who claimed to be “smarter than the average bear”—most of us see ourselves as smarter than we really are. We also claim to be better leaders, better workers, better parents and spouses, better friends, and better money managers. Not only do we perceive ourselves as more capable than we really are, we also perceive ourselves to be more upright and moral than most others. People think they are better than others—more ethical, considerate, industrious, cooperative, fair, and loyal. One polling expert put it this way: “It’s the great contradiction: the average person believes he is a better person than the average person.”¹ Sixteen centuries earlier Augustine bemoaned: “[My] sin was all the more incurable because I did not judge myself to be a sinner.”²

We also express pride in how we perceive our own successes and failures as well as those of others. When something bad happens, we tend to explain it by saying it is someone else’s fault. It was not a fair test, the person next to me was making noise, the professor teaches poorly, and

so on. So how do we explain good outcomes? Scores of research studies demonstrate that we tend to take personal credit when good things happen (I deserve it, I am a hard-worker, I am smart, and so on). When something bad happens, we blame others. When something good happens, we take credit for it.

It gets even more complicated when looking at bad events that happen to others. When something bad happens to us, we blame others; but when something bad happens to others, we tend to explain it as being their own fault.

Many of these attitudes are not deliberate acts of sin—in fact, we are probably not even aware of them—but they reflect what it means to be fallen humans living in a sinful state, and they have obvious implications for the life and work of Christian counselors. Sin exacts a toll where it costs the most—in our close connections with one another. Even if our relationships have not been jolted with the “big sins” of betrayal, they are still tainted by the daily sin of pride. We see ourselves more highly than we ought, and those we care about most have the same problem. We see others more negatively than we ought, and they look at us through the same negative filter. Over time we feel tired, burned out, fatigued by the work of closeness. And it’s because we are sinners who live with other sinners, each of us beset with pride.

Beneath the armor of our pride we live as vulnerable men and women longing to be loved and known. Our hope is found in cautiously shedding our armor in the safety of caring relationships, acknowledging that we are vulnerable and needy, and clinging to the possibility of grace. The work of Christian counselors is to provide a safe place where people can shed their

armor, look honestly at themselves, and find grace.

ENDNOTES

¹R. L. Berke, as cited in Nicholas Epley and David Dunning, "Feeling 'Holier Than Thou': Are Self-Serving Assessments Produced by Errors in Self or Social Prediction?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (2000) 861–875.

²Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Hal M. Helms (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 1986) 80.

SBJT: What Are the Characteristics of the Godliest Couples that You Have Seen in Your Marital Research Lab to Date?

Charles Tackett: At The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, we have been conducting a Christian marital research project among local couples. There are several characteristics that my research team has uncovered at this point in time. Please note that we consider our findings to be preliminary. Before I discuss these characteristics it is important that I establish the percentages of couples who are living in a godly relationship as husband and wife. First, our early finds suggest that only about five percent of our couples are honestly experiencing a godly Christ-centered relationship with each other. This finding has utterly shocked us. The research team expected to find that about thirty percent of our couples would demonstrate a godly marital relationship. We have found that an additional fifteen percent of couples are on a journey toward godliness in their marital relationship. These couples are seeking to grow in godliness as individuals and to promote godly patterns of thinking, emotion, behavior, and Christ-centered spiritual living toward each other.

Secondly, our most disheartening finding at this time is that about forty percent of our couples appear to be on a rapid divorce trajectory. We estimate that these couples will likely be divorced in approximately five to ten years. These couples seem to be overwhelmed by living the Christian life and have little idea about how to take the text of scripture and apply it to their marital relationship.

Thirdly, we estimate that the remaining forty percent of our couples are on a slow divorce trajectory. If these couples stay on this trajectory they will likely divorce between the fifteenth and twentieth years of their marriage. If our marital research is correct, then approximately eighty percent of the couples in our research studies are headed down the road toward divorce. Obviously, this does not mean that eighty percent of our couples will divorce. The real problem is much more severe than eighty percent of our couples being on the road toward divorce. It is that only twenty percent of our couples have even the foggiest idea of how to live a godly life as individuals and then as a marital couple.

Now it is appropriate to begin to describe some of the godly characteristics that our best couples have as a part of their daily lives as husband and wife. First, our best couples have established an excellent biblical foundation for their marriage. Specifically, their standard is that as followers of Jesus Christ they must live a Christ-centered life before God and before one another. Also, their marital life, how they relate to one another, must be characterized by Christ-centeredness. Our best couples understand that even in marriage they are servants of Jesus Christ. One young husband said it best, "When I see my wife in times of agreement and disagreement I must see the Lord on the cross

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dying for her.” He further said, “When I see her this way, I am reminded of how much she means to the Lord.” This young husband has learned to see his wife as first belonging to Christ because he (Christ) is the one who has given her salvation through his shed blood. His love for his wife is deepened by his understanding of the past and present work of Christ in and through his wife.

A second characteristic of our best couples involves the issue of headship/ownership. Our best couples realize that the husband’s headship does not mean that he owns his wife. These husbands realize that they do not possess their wives because they did not create or save their wives. Many Christian men act as if they are not just the head of their wives, but are truly the owners of their wives. These Christian men believe that because of their position of headship they have the right to control their wives. Our best husbands demonstrate a sacrificial headship before their wives when they make sure to put their wives’ concerns first most of the time in their marriages. So far, all of our best wives have responded to this type of sacrificial headship by putting their husbands’ concerns first. These best couples do argue with each other, but they demonstrate a tendency to argue for the other spouse’s position and needs.

A third characteristic of our best couples involves how the husband leads in the promotion of holiness in his wife’s life. Our best husbands promote holiness with a spiritually natural three-fold method. First, they have learned to lead by being a model of holiness for their wives. They do not push their wives toward holiness. They allow the attractiveness of a life lived for Christ to draw their wives toward a greater commitment and experience of holiness.

Second, these husbands understand that their wives are also their sisters in the Lord. They understand that they must sometimes promote her growth into holiness and that there will not be a direct benefit that they as husbands receive from this work. In fact they may actually pay a personal cost of the loss of convenience in life for this promotion of holiness. Finally, these husbands know that they must promote holiness as it pertains to their wives’ growth and development into their God-assigned roles and functions as wives. They have learned that they must discover with their wives the depth of God’s work in and through the wives.

In most churches we assume that if our Christian couples are still married then they must be acting in a “godly enough way,” otherwise they would be getting divorced. As our findings indicate, this assumption is not necessarily true. It is essential that Christian couples understand that a marital life that honors Christ will yield tangible benefits in this life and in heaven.

Book Reviews

The Pauline Writings: An Annotated Bibliography. By Mark A. Seifrid and Randall K. J. Tan. IBR Bibliographies 9. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002, 245 pp., \$24.99 paper.

To the helpful IBR series of bibliographies, two New Testament scholars of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, have added a remarkable tool for New Testament Studies. The volume offers excellent orientation for all students of Paul, scholars and seminary students alike. While the emphasis is on Paul's writings, the volume also offers good coverage of the life and ministry of Paul.

The following subjects are included: (1) Bibliographical Tools and Surveys; (2) History of Modern Interpretation; (3) Paul's Conversion and Call; (4) History and Chronology of Paul's Mission; (5) Overviews of Paul's Life and Thought; (6) Paul and First-Century Judaism; (7) Paul and the Greco-Roman World; (8) Paul and Jesus; (9) Paul and Earliest Christianity (Paul and the Hellenists, Hymns, Creeds, and Confessions, Paul and His Opponents, Paul and James); (10) Paul's Influence on Early Christian Tradition; (11) The Letters of Paul (Literary Studies, Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, Rhetorical Criticism (with four subdivisions), Epistolography, Pseudonymity, The Pauline Corpus, Paul and the Old Testament, The Paul of the Letters and the Paul of Acts, Commentaries (divided under nine headings)); (12) Special Studies

(on individual letters, again subdivided under nine headings), Pauline Theology (Comprehensive Treatments, Narrative Framework, God, Christ, The Spirit, Salvation □ (thirteen subdivisions), Eschatology, Israel, The Church (8 subheadings, including one on Baptism), and Ethics (four subheadings)). The volume closes with a name index.

Out of the wealth and plethora of Pauline studies the authors have selected 846 contributions, be they commentaries, articles or monographs. As there is a limit due to the format of the series, the authors had to choose carefully and have presented an altogether well rounded, representative picture of current scholarship of Paul, while noting older contributions of importance that still shape the present discussion. While one could of course easily add further titles to their selection (already beyond the original limits), there are few titles one could forgo without loss. Despite resolutions to the contrary, I cannot resist the temptation to add and would like to mention (as an addition to 11.5 Pseudonymity) the helpful study of A. Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum: Mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung* (WUNT II, 138; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001; cf. my forthcoming review in *Novum Testamentum*) and the excellent survey of research by M. Theobald, *Der Römerbrief* (Erträge der Forschung 294; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000).

Too late for inclusion appeared the interesting study of Bo Reicke, *Re-Examining Paul's Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence*, ed. D. P. Moessner, I. Reicke (London: SCM, 2001).

For each title the full bibliographical information is provided (a list of abbreviations is included, pp. 13-16) and a short summary of the content, depending on the size and importance of the contribution under discussion. The annotations are throughout concise and offer accurate summaries and occasionally assessments of the title listed. The evangelical stance of the authors is evident in that they include important conservative and evangelical contributions which are occasionally neglected or ignored by others.

There is a large amount of cross-referencing which makes the volume useful for reference beyond the various headings listed above, for good reasons: "Anyone who studies Paul will (or, at least, ought to) quickly recognise that the whole of his thoughts hangs together. If one pulls any one string of it, one finds oneself unraveling the whole. That means that especially in the theological sections of this bibliography a good deal of cross-referencing is necessary in order to get a good grasp of any particular topic" (11).

In accordance with the readership of the IBR series and recent developments in Pauline studies the authors concentrate on English contributions, though some German (e. g. P. Stuhl-macher, *Das paulinische Evangelium*,

648; W.-H. Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter*; # 650; A. Schlatter, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*, # 660 or K. Haacker, "Glaube", *TRE*, # 664) are included. While several important French contributions could be added (some contributions and translations into English are listed, e.g. nos. 268, 756) from a European evangelical perspective one would like to see C. Spicq's, *Saint Paul: Les Épitres Pastorales*, 4. ed., *Études Bibliques* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969, 2 vols.) included in the commentaries on the Pastorals with its thorough and staunch defense of Pauline authorship (I, 157-214).

In view of its importance to the exegesis of the Corinthian correspondence, Romans, and for Paul's life and theology (unity of the one church of Jews and Gentiles, his salvation-historical thinking), and a growing recent scholarly interest, one wonders whether the Pauline collection would not have deserved a subheading under Paul and Earliest Christianity (cf. e. g. D. Georgi, *Der Armen zu gedenken: Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem*, 2. Aufl.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994 and B.- M. Kim, *Die paulinische Kollekte*, TANZ 38; Tübingen, Basel: A. Francke, 2002). Beyond its potential for ecumenical thought, the Pauline collection also has a bearing on today's Christian-Jewish dialogue.

I have used Seifrid and Tan's volume with great profit during the last term in courses on The Life and Ministry of Paul, Exegesis of Romans, New Approaches to the Exegesis of Romans, and Theology of Missions in the New Testament. In all courses it

has been very helpful and has offered my students and me much guidance and saved me a tremendous amount of work! For me the authors have achieved their goal of providing "a guide that will make the research easier and more efficient for all serious students of the Bible" (from the authors' preface).

Seifrid is known (among others; cf. nos. 58, 619, 706) for his recent contribution to and co-editorship (together with D. A. Carson and P. T. O'Brien) of *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume I: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, WUNT II, 140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck/Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) and his excellent *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, New SBT 9 (Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity Press/Apollos, 2000).

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Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare. By Chuck Lawless. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002, 224 pp., \$11.99 paper.

Evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry once wrote that his prayer for the next-generation church was not necessarily for more theologians or more evangelists, but for theologian-evangelists and evangelist-theologians. Chuck Lawless is an answer to Henry's prayer, as demonstrated by this helpful new volume on one of the most misunderstood ideas in contemporary evangelicalism. Lawless com-

bines theological vigor and careful biblical analysis on the topic of spiritual warfare with a practical and relevant application to every facet of the life of the local congregation.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this book is how far afield it is from most current discussion—on all sides—on the question of spiritual warfare. Some readers may wonder what the book has to do with spiritual warfare at all. There are no mantras for binding ancestral demons, no prayer-walking strategies for mapping territorial spirits, and no lists of the names, rank, and serial numbers of demonic principalities and powers. And yet, Lawless also avoids the equally disturbing overreaction to popular spiritual warfare discussions. It is fashionable in some sectors of conservative evangelicalism to treat the very idea of spiritual warfare as a joke—with evangelical novels detailing angel/demon skirmishes in the skies above Anytown as exhibit A of the loss of the evangelical mind. Some of this is legitimate criticism of undue speculation and market-driven sensationalism. But a great deal of such scoffing about spiritual warfare is just unrecognized anti-supernaturalism—an unconscious genuflection at the graves of David Hume and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Lawless cuts through both the silliness and the cynicism with a balanced, biblical perspective on spiritual warfare. "Spiritual warfare isn't about naming demons," Lawless writes. "It's about so living a righteous life that our very life threatens the Enemy."

Lawless places the focal point of spiritual warfare where Scripture

does—on the life and mission of the local congregation. He therefore provides solid biblical, theological, and practical counsel on issues such as worship, spiritual gifts, preaching, and pastoral leadership. This emphasis is imperative for the contemporary church. After all, the apostle Paul speaks of the very existence of the congregation as a sign “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). The New Testament notes that the demonic powers are scattered by the proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor 4:4-6; Col 1:13) and through the sanctification of the churches (Eph 6:10-18). And so, as Lawless demonstrates, spiritual warfare means evangelistic, praying, disciple-making congregations on mission toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Discipled Warriors is a helpful resource for individuals confused about spiritual warfare. But its usefulness should not end there. Pastors can use this resource in a variety of ways—as part of Sunday school leadership or deacon training as a church-wide discipleship curriculum or as part of new member orientation, for instance. Such would serve to awaken Christians that the “ordinary” aspects of church life—witnessing, worship, preaching, hospitality, etc.—are not so “ordinary” after all. They are instead declarations of war against a rebellious cosmic order that will one day collapse before the kingship of Christ. That message can revitalize a congregation with passion for the gospel and longing for the Kingdom.

Russell D. Moore

New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense. By Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel. Frederick, Maryland: New Covenant Media, 2002, xiv + 324 pp., \$19.95 paper.

The relationship between the OT and the NT, the law and the gospel, the old covenant and the new is one of the most difficult problems in biblical theology. No consensus has ever been reached, and fresh proposals from the standpoint of biblical theology are welcomed. A new movement within Reformed circles has been developing for some years, and now, in this work, we have a book length description and defense of what is called “New Covenant Theology” (henceforth NCT). Two prominent exponents of NCT have contributed to this work, Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel. Both of these men serve as pastors and have written various other studies over the years. One of the virtues of this work is that is written with a friendly and irenic spirit, even in the two chapters where they respond to a recent book by Richard Barcellos that critiques NCT.

What is NCT? NCT argues that the scriptures should be interpreted in light of their eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Whether we are speaking of OT sacrifices, the Passover, the temple, or the Mosaic law, all of these OT practices and institutions must be understood in light of the newness that has dawned with Jesus the Christ. At first glance such a hermeneutical principle may seem to be uncontroversial, but NCT seems to occupy a

place between dispensationalism and covenant theology. Covenant theology emphasizes the continuity between the OT and the NT, and typically argues that the moral law is normative for today. For most exponents of covenant theology the Sabbath command is still in force, though the injunction to rest is transferred to the Lord’s Day. Dispensationalism, even with the changes that have been inaugurated with progressive dispensationalism, stresses the discontinuity between the old covenant and the new, even though most dispensationalists believe that the OT prophecies will be fulfilled literally in the future.

The hermeneutical principle of NCT leads them in a different direction. Wells and Zaspel emphasize that the Mosaic Covenant has come to an end with the coming of Jesus Christ. Dividing the Mosaic law into the three categories of civil, ceremonial, and moral, and seeing the latter as still binding is unpersuasive. The Sinai Covenant has been set aside now that Christ has come. Indeed, the Mosaic Covenant points to Christ and is fulfilled in Christ. They do not conclude from this that believers are no longer under moral norms. Rather, believers are subject to the law of Christ, and the law of Christ is discerned from the NT. Wells and Zaspel maintain that many of the moral norms of the OT (nine of the ten commandments of the Decalogue) continue to be normative. They are normative, however, because they are part of Christ’s law, not because they hail from the Mosaic law. The Sabbath, on the other hand, is no longer binding upon believers. The

Sabbath points to the eschatological rest believers have in Christ, and there is no need for believers to observe it today, for it was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant that is no longer in force.

The difference between NCT and Covenant Theology is quite clear since the latter sees the Sabbath as normative for today. Wells and Zaspel concentrate particularly on the role of the Mosaic Law, and in this sense they are closer to Dispensationalism. Still, the hermeneutical principle, if applied consistently, would likely lead to different eschatological conclusions from what we see in Dispensationalism. Indeed, the hermeneutical principle of interpreting the OT in light of the NT is typical of the eschatology of most who espouse Covenant Theology. Hence, it may be the case that advocates of NCT will truly occupy a place between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.

Wells and Zaspel focus on Matt 5:17-20 in four of their chapters and on the Sabbath in two others. Their interest is clearly in a proper understanding of the law and its relevance for Christians today. They rightly argue that Matt 5:17-20 teaches that the law reaches its eschatological fulfillment in Christ and points to Christ. They are also correct in saying that Matt 5:17-20 points to discontinuity between the OT law and the NT law. If Matt 5:17-20 teaches absolute continuity, then it would follow that believers should practice circumcision and observe food laws. But Matthew clearly implies that food laws are no longer in force in Matt 15:1-20. On the other hand, I am less convinced with their contention that Matt 5:21-48

actually teaches that the law of Christ is superior to and brings to an end the specific Mosaic statutes addressed in these verses. The text is extremely difficult, but I am still more persuaded by the view that Jesus rightly interprets misunderstandings of the OT law. For example, the taking of oaths is not absolutely prohibited by Jesus despite his words in Matt 5:33-37. We see from Matt 23:16-22 that some abused oath-taking through casuistry. An absolute prohibition of oaths is also unlikely since Paul took oaths (cf. Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23), and even God swore by himself (Heb 6:13-17). Even more important, Wells and Zaspel should clarify that NCT does not stand or fall on this issue in any case. Both truths may be explicated in Jesus' ministry, i.e., he rightly interprets the law and he teaches that the law finds its fulfillment in Christ. Perhaps many could agree that the content of the law of Christ is clarified through Jesus' exposition of the law in Matt 5:17-20.

Surely Matt 5:17-20 is important in determining one's view of the law. Still, the authors provide little discussion of the Mosaic Covenant in its OT context. They discuss the OT law frequently and particularly the Decalogue, and yet the covenantal context in which the OT law is placed receives little attention. They emphasize that the law cannot justify, but we are not given much help in understanding the role of the Mosaic Covenant as a whole. One of the key issues for NCT in the future is to explicate more fully in what sense the Mosaic Covenant is gracious and in what sense it leads to death and is to be distinguished from the covenant with

Abraham.

The authors may also underestimate the meaning of the commands in the Decalogue. The prohibition in the tenth commandment against coveting may suggest that each one of the commandments, even in their original context, should not be limited merely to external actions. Even though Job did not receive the Torah, his words in Job 31:1 seem to confirm this view in the injunction against adultery: "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" In some instances it seems that Wells and Zaspel strain to emphasize the discontinuity between the OT law and the law of Christ in order to emphasize the newness of what has come in Christ. But their basic thesis can still stand even if the OT commands are not merely external commands. They rightly say that moral norms for believers are summed up in Christ's law, that Christ's law includes many moral norms from the OT, and that the Mosaic Covenant has been both abolished and fulfilled with the coming of Christ.

Tom Wells has an intriguing chapter on creeds near the end of the book. He worries that creeds may hinder us from engaging in biblical theology, preventing us from seeing new truths in God's word. At the same time, he acknowledges that creeds play an important role in codifying the essentials of the faith. He rightly suggests that some matters in our creeds are non-negotiables, while others are less important. This is an important word for Southern Baptists after the doctrinal conflicts of the last few years. The essentials of the faith must not be sur-

rendered. And yet there must be some freedom to analyze creedal statements in the light of scripture. Otherwise, the notion that scripture is our ultimate norm becomes useless in practice. Our seminaries must never deviate from orthodoxy, but neither should we allow our categories to become so hardened and rigid that any questioning of confessional statements is excluded. Otherwise, we are saying that we have already arrived at a perfect expression of the truth—something rather hard to believe! In conclusion, Wells and Zaspel have examined the relationship between the Mosaic law and the law of Christ from the standpoint of biblical theology. In my mind their solution is basically correct, but we can all be sharpened by further discussion and study.

Thomas R. Schreiner

The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture. Edited by Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, 303 pp., \$28.00 paper.

Few theological books are of such quality that they deserve to be read by every person in the theological disciplines, but *The Trustworthiness of God* is just such a “must read” book. Edited by Paul Helm, Professor of theology and philosophy at Regent College, and Carl Trueman, Associate Professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, the book consists of sixteen essays written by an international cast of contributors. In

an attempt to overcome the fragmentation that sometimes characterizes theological projects, the editors intentionally chose contributors from both biblical studies and theological/philosophical studies in order to produce a broader, more synoptic approach to the crucial and foundational issue of the trustworthiness of God. The editors and most of the contributors come from the Reformed tradition.

There are too many articles to describe adequately in this review, but each article carries its own weight. This reviewer found a number of the biblical studies articles to be particularly helpful. These are not simplistic defenses of God’s trustworthiness, but thoughtful essays which incorporate the best of contemporary hermeneutics in defense of the truth of Scripture. The contributors not only construct interesting defenses of the trustworthiness of God’s Word, but these specialists also provide a useful survey of current-day hermeneutical discussions within various genres of Scripture.

Among the Old Testament contributors, Gordon McConville of the University of Gloucestershire in “Divine Speech and the Book of Jeremiah” utilizes speech-act theory to construct a defense of the connection between both the book of Jeremiah and the speech of the prophet, and the speech of the prophet with the speech of God. He argues, *contra* many contemporary interpreters, that the book of Jeremiah is a reliable reflection of not only the prophet’s speech, but of God’s words.

Craig G. Bartholomew, also on the

faculty of the University of Gloucestershire, contributes a wonderful essay entitled, “A God for Life, and Not Just for Christmas! The Revelation of God and Old Testament Wisdom Literature.” Bartholomew provides hermeneutical clues to help resolve challenges to the veracity of wisdom literature (especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes). He proposes the use of a broader “character-consequence nexus” rather than the narrow “act-consequence structure” which is often utilized to attempt to falsify a proverb. The truthfulness of the proverbs is to be measured in reference to life-long character, not merely individual actions. Bartholomew proposes the wise use of “contradictory juxtaposition” in interpreting Ecclesiastes, in which joyful “*carpe diem*” passages are often juxtaposed with *hebel* (“vanity”) sayings. These juxtapositions of opposites are intentionally enigmatic and call upon the reader to trust God in the absence of clear understanding. Bartholomew also argues that wisdom literature is grounded in the doctrine of creation, and thus should be given a holistic reading rather than an individualistic or privatized interpretation.

P. J. Williams of Tyndale House in Cambridge attempts to square the trustworthiness of God with the incident in 1 Kings 22 in which the prophet Micaiah first communicates a false message to the king of Israel, and then God sends a “lying spirit” upon the prophet to deceive the king. Williams outlines various possible interpretive approaches while affirming that in the end, against all odds, the events come to pass precisely as

God had said they would, and the truthfulness of His Word is vindicated.

Among the New Testament contributors, Donald Macleod of Free Church of Scotland College provides a thorough summary of Jesus' use of Old Testament passages in "Jesus and Scripture." Drake Williams, a minister in the Central Schwenkfelder Church and an adjunct faculty member at Biblical Theological Seminary, contributes an interesting article that utilizes a careful exegesis of Romans 3:1-4, 9:6-29, and chapter 11 to link the faithfulness of God to Israel with the trustworthiness of God's Word in the Old Testament Scripture. David Instone-Brewer, also of Tyndale House in Cambridge, contributes a marvelous article on "Paul's Literal Interpretation of 'Do Not Muzzle the Ox.'" Instone-Brewer argues that Paul's words should be understood literally (not allegorically) because the apostle is utilizing the rabbinical hermeneutical technique of *qal wahomer*, in which "ox" is understood as a shorthand for all animal and human servants. If an ox earns its reward through physical labor, how much more should God's servants deserve adequate compensation for their spiritual labor?

In the theological and historical studies section, Gerald Bray's article on "The Church Fathers and Their Use of Scripture" provides a number of illustrations of the confidence that the church fathers had in Scripture. Carl Trueman's article emphasizes that the Protestant tradition is ectypal, not archetypal theology, and thus relies on Scripture as a consequence of a high degree of confidence in God's trustworthiness to keep His promises.

Timothy Ward, curate of Crowborough in East Sussex, England, constructs an interesting argument in "The Diversity and Sufficiency of Scripture." Addressing the post-modern themes of polyphony and intertextuality, Ward proposes that the various diverse genres of Scripture be interpreted via "traditional intertextuality" (comparing various canonical scriptural accounts) and "canonically limited polyphony" (theological affirmations from Scripture are diverse, but neither monotonous nor cacophonous). In perhaps the best-argued article in the book, Sebastian Rehnman of Johannlund Theological Seminary in Sweden defends a realist conception of revelation.

The book concludes with two interesting responses for which the editors unfortunately give no specific explanation for their inclusion. Colin Gunton of King's College in London challenges Paul Helm's assertion of divine immutability, offering instead a Trinitarian theology that affirms God's constancy and calls upon the church to model the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God. Francis Watson of the University of Aberdeen contributes a concluding "Evangelical Response" which affirms that the trustworthiness of God affirmed in Scripture is seen most clearly through the gospel and Jesus Christ.

This gloriously diverse book affords insights from a number of perspectives on the trustworthiness of God. It is not easy reading, but the diligent reader will discover many gems in this delightful and thought-provoking volume.

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A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic. By Abraham Tal. Handbook of Oriental Studies. Part 1 Ancient Near East, 50. Leiden: Brill, 2000, vol. 1: xlii + 446 pp., vol. 2: xliv + 524 pp., \$276.00.

The author, Emeritus Professor at Tel-Aviv University and presently editor of the *Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language* (The Academy of The Hebrew Language), is a recognized expert in Samaritan Aramaic. He has published a critical edition of its major text, *Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch* (Tel-Aviv, 1980-83) and written extensively on Samaritan Aramaic and Hebrew as well as on Samaritan studies in general.

Samaritan Aramaic was the spoken and literary language of the Samaritan community in Palestine from approximately the second to the twelfth century AD when it succumbed to the influence of Arabic (following the rise of Islam) as well as to Medieval Hebrew. Although study of Samaritan Aramaic began in the western world in the seventeenth century, a reliable dictionary could not be produced until the present time because only in the last decades have reliable critical editions of original texts in this dialect been produced.

The sources for *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (DSA) cover three periods: (1) an early period up to the fourth century represented by the family of MS J of the Samaritan Targum (ST), (2) a main period from the fourth to tenth centuries repre-

sented by the family of MS A of ST, a chronicle called *Asāṭīr*, liturgical poems, and a collection of Samaritan midrashim called *Tibāt Mārqa*, (3) a late period from the tenth century onward represented by a chronicle called *Tulida*, which has many words absorbed from Arabic and Hebrew.

DSA is arranged by roots, like *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Since guessing the verbal root of a noun or adjective is difficult for the dictionary user and indeed scholarly guesswork by the lexicographer for many words, Tal provides at the beginning an index of eighteen pages, three columns each, to aid in finding words according to their roots. While this arrangement follows the practice of early Arabic dictionaries, most lexicographers of Semitic languages have abandoned this practice in the last century and employed a strictly alphabetical approach. In any case, the arrangement of DSA entails a hybrid approach since loanwords must be listed alphabetically.

DSA is ostensibly bilingual giving equivalents and translations of texts in Modern Hebrew and English. The constant shift between right-to-left and left-to-right modes of writing is difficult to follow at times. The bilingualism, however, is deceptive because often only the first illustrative text is translated into English and the rest are given only in Modern Hebrew. Thus DSA will be difficult for English readers to use.

The entries for verbs which are more prolifically used are divided into separate sections according to stems

and extant grammatical forms. This approach, however, is abandoned when few instances are found.

Michael Sokoloff, also an expert in Aramaic and author of *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (1990, 2002) and *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (2002), has published a major review article of DSA in *Aramaic Studies* 1 (2003): 67-101. In addition to the issues already raised, he notes that Tal rarely gives lexical parallels for derived words, and cites comparative material from the texts themselves, thus depriving the reader of gaining information on the range of usage listed by other related lexicons. Also, apart from ST, the texts are cited by manuscript folio number rather than by page number in readily available editions. This does not help the average user. The citing of secondary literature is one sided and focuses on Tal's own articles. Approximately 32 pages of Sokoloff's article consist of a list of corrections of errors, mostly due to poor copy-editing. This reviewer noted an atrocious number of errors in the English Introduction.

In spite of the drawbacks one cannot but express profound gratitude for a long labor of love giving us the first complete dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic. Had the dictionary been properly reviewed before publication both by other scholars as well as by copy-editors, most of the problems could have been easily eliminated.

Peter J. Gentry

Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect. Edited by Scott J. Hafemann. Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity/Apollos, 2002, 300 pp., \$25.00 paper.

The death of biblical theology has been proclaimed more than once in the last generation, and yet the discipline continues to live on. This work represents the essays delivered at the Wheaton Theology Conference of 2000. As with other multi-author works we are not treated to a uni-dimensional program for biblical theology, but a number of different proposals for the discipline.

The book begins with an essay by the editor, Scott Hafemann, which reflects the title of the book. He provides the landscape for the direction of the remainder of the book. The book is split into four different sections: 1) The OT as the foundation for biblical theology; 2) the witness of the NT as the culmination of biblical theology; 3) the unity of the Bible as the challenge of biblical theology; and 4) the prospect of biblical theology. The four sections will provide the outline for this review.

The first section investigates the OT as the foundation of biblical theology. The authors in this part of the book give brief descriptions of the task of OT theology or illustrate how it should be carried out. John Sailhamer maintains that OT theology should focus on the final form of the text as we have it in the Hebrew Bible. Brian Toews argues that Genesis 1-4 introduces the OT as a whole and is programmatic for the rest of OT theology. He relates the law, the prophets, and the writings to the inaugural chapters

in Genesis, highlighting the themes of God, his word, humankind, and the earth. William Dumbrell suggests that Genesis 2:1-17 foreshadows the new creation. The Sabbath points to eschatological rest, and the garden anticipates God's sanctuary, which is ultimately fulfilled in the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22. Adam is God's priest-king in the garden, enjoined with the task to extend God's rule over the entire world. Dumbrell's emphasis on the new creation anticipates Greg Beale's essay in the NT section, though I am skeptical of Dumbrell's suggestion that humans fell but nature is left untouched. A canonical reading, that includes Rom 8:18ff, militates against such a conclusion.

One of the most fascinating essays is Stephen Dempster's proposal regarding the relationship between geography and genealogy and dominion and dynasty. Dempster thinks the order of the Hebrew Tanak provides the structure for doing OT theology. Dempster helps us in particular to perceive the importance of David for OT theology. Furthermore, he rightly discerns thematic connections between various books in the OT. Are Sailhamer and Dempster suggesting that the Tanak represents *the* order for doing OT theology or *an* order? The former hypothesis is too dogmatic and would suggest that the early church with its canonical order could not do OT theology at the same level. We should expect, on the other hand, to discern illuminating connections in the structure of the Tanak since OT theology can be studied profitably from a number of mutually enriching

perspectives.

Richard Schultz surveys a number of different proposals for doing OT theology by focusing on their work in Genesis, including the work of Ronald Clements, Brevard Childs, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, William Dumbrell, John Sailhamer, Paul House, Rolf Rendtdorff, Bruce Birch, et al. Despite the common methodology shared by many practitioners, Schultz argues that in too many cases the actual shape and structure of Genesis is ignored. Canonical theology should be wedded to the literary features of the text.

Gerald Wilson examines the Psalms, directing our attention to the order of the collection and to the order and diversity of the Psalms. The messianic configuration of the Psalms is particularly explored. Jay Wells articulates the "figural" character of the biblical text which he thinks is central to displaying canonical unity. He distinguishes his view from a typological approach, but the definition he applies to figural representation could also be assigned to typology.

Part two of the book presents the witness of the NT as the culmination of biblical theology. James Scott focuses on the restoration of Israel as the basis for biblical theology. Scott represents an approach to biblical theology that is represented today in the scholarship of N. T. Wright. Andreas Köstenberger usefully traces the unity and diversity of the NT, arguing for unity in diversity. He disavows a single center, maintaining that it is "more promising to search for a plurality of integrative NT motifs" (154). The essay concludes by focusing on God, Christ, and the gospel.

Greg Beale charts a course for NT theology under the rubric "new creation," which functions under the umbrella of the "already but not yet." Beale makes a good case for the importance of the new creation theme, but it is doubtful that this theme captures the center of NT theology. Peter Stuhlmacher writes a partially autobiographical essay on biblical theology, reflecting on his writing and teaching for many years. Stuhlmacher insists that the central message of the gospel can be discerned through historical criticism and established on an exegetical basis.

The third segment of the book tackles the issue of the unity of the Bible. Christopher Seitz's essay indicates that the conference was not one in which all agreed. He disagrees strongly with Hartmut Gese and Peter Stuhlmacher that the canon of Scripture was still open in the first century A.D., insisting that it was closed before the coming of Christ. Nicholas Perrin sets forth a dialogic conception of the unity of the testaments by applying Hans Robert Jauss's literary theory to the task of biblical theology. Stephen Fowl repristinates Irenaeus's rule of faith and rejects the historicism of Wrede and Räisänen in doing biblical theology. Daniel Fuller challenges progressive dispensationalism and covenant theology to examine the law-gospel from the standpoint of biblical theology instead of preconceived theological dogmas. Ted Dorman compares and contrasts the programs for biblical theology advocated by Oscar Cullmann and Francis Watson. Dorman, like Fuller and apparently contra to Fowl, sides with

Cullmann, maintaining that we must explore matters like gospel and law and justification and sanctification from the standpoint of biblical theology.

The book closes with part four which articulates the prospect for biblical theology. Paul House sketches in a program and approach for doing canonical biblical theology. House believes that each book should be investigated individually in pursuing biblical theology. Though such an approach is useful in delineating the distinctive themes of each writer, I am hesitant to endorse this as *the* method for doing biblical theology. No one method can capture the breadth and depth of the canon. Biblical theology can also be prosecuted usefully with a thematic or historical approach, and thereby some connections will be evident that are not as clear in a book-by-book approach. It must be acknowledged that no single approach can elucidate the whole of biblical theology. Finally, Graeme Goldsworthy insists that biblical theology should be the heartbeat of Christian ministry and Christian education. Biblical theology should not be relegated to the academy, but should inform and inspire the church.

The authors in this volume do not speak with one voice on every matter. Scholars differ on the matter of a center, and on the status of the OT canon. And yet the authors think there is such a thing as biblical theology, that the theology of the whole Bible is unified, and that this unity is to be discovered by studying and explicating the biblical text. It is gratifying to see that the need for biblical theology is still

acknowledged today.

Thomas R. Schreiner

Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition. By D.G. Hart. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003, 263 pp., \$24.99 paper.

The evangelical marketplace is probably not going to be set aflame by a volume advocating a “high-church Presbyterianism.” That is precisely Hart’s point, however. With this book, he seeks to address first his own denominational kinsmen, calling them to find their identity not just in doctrinal formulations, cultural transformation, or personal piety, but in the structure and worship of the church. In many respects, a Baptist evangelical reading this volume is eavesdropping on an ongoing conversation among our Presbyterian brothers and sisters. It is, however, an important conversation—especially given the bankruptcy of evangelical ecclesiology in most sectors of conservative Protestantism.

Hart’s latest contribution has several significant strengths. He rightly magnifies the centrality of the church in the purposes of God in salvation, pointing to the historic designation of the church as the “mother” of believers. He also helpfully highlights the significance of worship, not just as a means of sanctification for the individual believer, but as the approach of the community before the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb 12:18-29). Hart rightly notes that it is the lack of gravity found in our worship that leads many evangelicals to seek biblical

worship in all the wrong places—the roads to Canterbury, Constantinople, or Rome. Hart’s analysis of contemporary evangelicalism is enriched with a keen eye for contemporary movements, and a rich historical imagination. Hart is thus able, for example, to draw on Gresham Machen’s role in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of the 1920s to inform his analysis of the current Evangelicals and Catholics Together phenomenon.

Despite these strengths, the volume has several problematic features. A key weakness of this volume is the thinness of Hart’s biblical argument, if indeed one can say that there is a biblical argument to be found in these pages. The Scripture index includes less than 30 biblical references. Most of these are fleeting afterthoughts that barely touch on the biblical material. Instead, Hart cites the Westminster Confession of Faith—chapter and verse—as a proof-text throughout the work. Doubtless Hart was intending to speak to his fellow Presbyterians, who already hold to a Reformed confessional understanding of Scripture. Even so, Hart’s vision of a biblically-reformed church falls flat with such anemic attention to Scripture itself. This is especially true when there is such a massive amount of biblical material weighing in on the subject at hand—from, among many other things, the Old Testament foundations of the covenant community to the Pauline references to the church as mystery and as the Body of the Messiah to the Hebrews passages on apostasy and worship. Instead, Hart argues for such things as the reading

of formal prayers by the ordained clergy without any serious interaction with how such fits with the biblical revelation on the priesthood of believers (1 Cor 12:1; 1 Pet 2:9). Even when Hart is right—on the issue of the ordination of women to the pastorate, for example—he relies on church authority in matters of ordination rather than on the relevant biblical data on the issue of male/female roles in the church.

As a result of this lack of biblical argumentation, Hart presents a model of the church without much interaction with the hermeneutical issues that might challenge his ecclesiological vision. Hart wants to move the ecclesiological assumptions of covenant theology to their logical conclusions. Thus, he dismisses as “revivalism” the conversionism of most of American evangelicalism. For Hart, the church marks out her members by visible signs of a visible community—baptism, the Lord’s Supper, covenantal worship—rather than through the kinds of invisible experiential signs he sees so valued in “revivalism” and “pietism.” And yet, is this not precisely the point of the new covenant? The people of God are marked out not through external markings such as circumcision but through the experience of circumcision of the heart, sharing the knowledge of God in Christ and the anointing of His Spirit (Gal 6:15-16; Phil 3:3; 1 John 2:20). Hart here simply assumes an OT model of the covenant community.

Hart likewise assumes a model of the Great Commission that logically fits his ecclesiological assumptions—

one that does not so easily fit the NT. In so doing, he sounds like a caricature of distorted Reformed theology. He critiques the church growth movement for the abuses that would make the church an issue of “brand loyalty.” But he then goes on to criticize the very desire to see the lost come to know Christ. It “might be wrong for Christians to lust after a new car, it may also be unhealthy to long for bigger churches,” Hart writes. “In both cases, God is sovereign, and it is the Christian’s duty to accept the limits.” Thus he proposes that Presbyterian churches replace “church growth” with “elect reach.” It is hard to think of any sentiment more foreign to the missionary impulse of the NT than this. Jesus and His apostles long not only for bare proclamation—but for a great harvest of redeemed humanity and the growth of His church. Is Jesus “lusting” as one lusts for a new car when He weeps over Jerusalem, longing that they might be saved? Is the apostle Paul guilty of an “unhealthy balance” when he agonizes for the salvation of multitudes of his countrymen (Rom 9:1-5; 10:1)?

Hart’s understanding of the Great Commission is limited largely to basic human reproduction, as the church christens the covenant children born into her. As such, he holds that the model for the Christian life is that of Isaac rather than that of Paul. The child of the covenant should gradually awaken to his or her covenant responsibilities. And yet, the apostle Paul does indeed seem to see himself as the prototype of the Christian life, even when writing of the gospel to a young man who had grown up in the

nurture of the faith (1 Tim 1:15-16). Much is at stake in this discussion beyond simply the timing and manner of baptism, although that is important. At stake is the way in which the church views its children—as covenantal Christians to be nurtured or as unregenerate sinners to be both nurtured and evangelized.

Hart’s ecclesiological proposal also suffers from his enduring commitment to a “spirituality of the church” model, which he derives from the thought of Machen and nineteenth-century southern Presbyterians such as R. L. Dabney and applies to a call for withdrawal from contemporary “culture wars” engagement over social and cultural issues. Southern Baptists should be well familiar with this understanding of the mission of the church, since it is the grid through which our forebears argued against churches speaking out against human slavery. Hart remarks that this isolation is “extremely attractive” in an era when evangelical Christianity is sometimes confused with whatever happens to be articulated in the Republican Party platform. Hart’s infatuation with the “spirituality” doctrine, however, glosses over its internal inconsistencies. As historian Paul Harvey has demonstrated, the “spirituality” claim of the nineteenth century was far less “apolitical” than it appeared, since a refusal to address “political” issues was itself a political act, propping up the status quo of a slaveholding society. But, more important than whether the “spirituality of the church” is attractive or consistent is the question of whether it is *true*. Hart does not interact with the

exegetical and theological claims of what he dismisses as “world-and-life-view theologians.” A growing cadre of scholars—many from within Hart’s own tradition—have made a compelling biblical case that the church in the NT is seen as an approximation of the eschatological Kingdom—and thus is compelled to speak to every aspect of life. These biblical arguments are ignored.

Despite its problems, *Recovering Mother Kirk* is in many ways a step in the right direction. In an earlier era, competing ecclesiological books proliferated precisely because the churches actually took the doctrine of the Body of Christ seriously. Evangelical theology desperately needs to recover a conversation on the doctrine of the church. Despite its problems, or perhaps because of them, *Recovering Mother Kirk* may play a role in initiating such a conversation.

Russell D. Moore

Counted Righteous In Christ. By John Piper. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002, 125 pp., \$12.99 paper.

This book is a spirited theological and biblical defense of the classic affirmation of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers. It is my judgment that John Piper makes the argument and makes it well, responding primarily to the challenge to this doctrine set forth by Robert Gundry, who claims, with others, that “the doctrine that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believing sinners needs to be abandoned” (p. 44). Piper argues for the doctrine’s

biblical basis, theological integrity and pastoral encouragement. Our righteousness is not found in our own faith, but in Christ to whom we come in faith. Here a great transaction takes place with Christ taking on our sin and, in return, granting to us by virtue of our union with Him an alien righteousness not our own. This is an important defense of an historic doctrine which is now being questioned, even within evangelical circles. With joy I commend its wide and careful consideration. New perspectives are not always better perspectives. This is certainly true in this instance.

Daniel L. Akin

The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. Edited by Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, xxxii + 1278 pp., \$49.99.

When the first edition of this important work came out in 1988, it was apparent both that it was an indispensable reference tool and at the same time a limited one. It was important because there was nothing like it available and because the work was so well done. Some of the finest scholars in the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition had contributed articles on a host of issues, persons, events, and groups relevant to the theme of the dictionary. I bought a copy and used it frequently in my research into matters Pentecostal. But the work was limited both in its chronological and geographical scope. It pretty much started with issues in

1901 and it was limited to Western movements, for the most part. Pentecostal historiography in the last couple of decades has made it clear that there were “Pentecostals” before Topeka and before Azusa Street. In addition, the greatest growth of the movement has been outside the West. So, this new edition takes cognizance of those matters and the result is a much larger and certainly a much more valuable resource.

In addition, many articles have been updated and rewritten. The new article on the “Charismatic Movement” by Peter Hocken is a very fine treatment. The article on exorcism by Charles Kraft, while it raises some eyebrows, is an important statement. The article on Baptist Pentecostals and Charismatics is a nice summary, though it leaves the impression that Pat Robertson is no longer a Baptist, having embraced Charismatic renewal. This is not the case.

Anyone interested in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal will want to obtain this volume. If nothing else, it provides the researcher with quick references to the increasingly complex world of Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal. I highly recommend it.

Chad Owen Brand

Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament. By Philip S. Johnston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002, 288 pp., \$20.00 paper.

What appears to be at the outset a simple treatise on hell is in fact a comprehensive linguistic, exegetical, and historical analysis of the concept of

afterlife in the Old Testament. This book is a popular version of Philip Johnston's dissertation and scholarly research on the topic. Most scholarly treatises on the concept of the afterlife tend to approach the topic from an "History of Israelite Religion" approach and treat the text as later documents that interject the theology of Yahwism during the time of Hezekiah and Josiah. These studies tend to highlight select texts (e.g. teraphim in the homes of Laban and David, Saul and the Endor witch) to define normative Israelite belief regarding the afterlife as similar to the larger Ancient Near Eastern World. Other studies have analyzed the archaeological data on burial customs of the Iron Age. These studies have also concluded that Israel's early religious beliefs were similar to those throughout the Ancient Near East. Johnston's work is inductive and provides a detailed synthesis of all the biblical, textual (ANE), and cultural data and arrives at a more nuanced description of the concept of Sheol in the Old Testament. The book is systematic in its approach—discussing each text and its context.

The book is divided into four parts each with two or three chapters dealing with a specific topic of the study. The first part discusses death in general, focusing on its use in the biblical text and burial and mourning practices associated with death. The author presents the many euphemisms used in the text for death and the variety of practices. Johnston interprets the phrases "gathered to his people" and "slept with his fathers" as indicating

joining one's ancestors in the afterlife or as formulaic phrases used for national leaders and not representative of Bronze and Iron Age secondary burials as is commonly postulated in the scholarly literature.

The second part discusses the Underworld—terms used to refer to the underworld (Chapter Three), the Psalmists use of the term (Chapter Four), and descriptive terms of the underworld (Chapter Five). Johnston demonstrates that *Sheol* was the most common term (other terms are *the pit* and *destruction*), but concludes that *Sheol* was used as "an infrequent theme and an unwelcome fate" (p. 85). In this section Johnston examines the use of "earth" and "water" with the underworld. He illustrates that these are metaphors, and the Hebrew writers do not have an elaborate or defined description of the underworld as found in other contemporary cultures.

The third part contains three chapters dealing with the Dead. Chapter Six discusses names of the dead (e.g. Rephaim, "gods"), Chapter Seven discusses necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, and Chapter Eight addresses whether Israel had an ancestor cult. It is in this third part of the study that Johnston rejects current scholarly opinion that Israel adopted practices of communicating with the dead or had an elaborate system of the underworld. While there is the use of terms borrowed from other Semitic languages (particularly Ugaritic) and examples of necromancy—these are exceptions to the general practice and should be viewed as anomalies within the wider Israelite culture rather than

the norm.

The last part of the study contains two chapters entitled: Communion Beyond Death (Chapter Nine) and Resurrection from the Dead (Chapter Ten). Johnston examines pertinent texts. He notes that interpretation has veered between reading later Jewish and Christian eschatology of later periods back into the texts or denying that there was any post-mortem individual hope until the Maccabean period (p. 18). Johnston concludes that there are a few texts that hint at some form of continued communion with God, but there are only two that refer to a future individual resurrection.

Philip Johnston has presented his case thoroughly and persuasively. One glaring omission is that Johnston does not interact with the many treatments of Israelite Religion, archaeology, and cult practices associated with the dead. Granted, a monograph whose goal is to present scholarly research to non-specialists should not rehash the various scholarly views; but these should be addressed and summarized in the introduction, especially since Johnston's conclusions are in opposition to the prevalent scholarly opinion. Nevertheless, in light of Johnston's study, scholars will have to reevaluate current theories and models of the concept of afterlife in the Old Testament. His work will also serve as the reference for the development of theology and exegesis of the biblical text. This book's premise and accessibility to non-specialists should place it on the reading lists of Old Testament, Systematic Theology, and Hermeneutics courses. It should be included in the

library of any person who teaches or studies the biblical text.

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