

Supplemental Handouts

For

Module (M.I.T.) 101

Lessons 1-7 (Fundamentals of Biblical Counseling)

Instructions:

Write a Brief (one paragraph to one page) summary of each attached biblical counseling related article in preparation for Module 102.

Timberlake Biblical Counseling & Training Center

- Supplemental articles for each lesson
- Use for enrichment of the Fundamentals Training
- Ignore the page numbers on attached articles

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ACBC – FBC – IABC – TAC Certifications

What is Nouthetic Counseling?

Nouthetic Counseling is Not New

While the name is new, the sort of counseling done by nouthetic counselors is not. From Biblical times onward, God's people have counseled nouthetically. The word itself is Biblical. It comes from the Greek noun *nouthesia* (verb: *noutheteo*). The word, used in the New Testament primarily by the apostle Paul, is translated "admonish, correct or instruct." This term, which probably best describes Biblical counseling, occurs in such passages as Romans 15:14:

I myself am convinced about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and competent to counsel one another.

In that passage, the apostle was encouraging members of the Roman church to do informal, mutual counseling, something that all Christians today should learn, as well. On the other hand, the leaders of a congregation are to counsel nouthetically in a formal manner as a part of their ministry:

Now we ask you, brothers, to recognize those who labor among you, and manage you in the Lord, and counsel you (1 Thess. 5:12).

Nouthetic Counseling Embraces Three Ideas

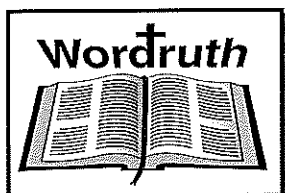
Because the New Testament term is larger than the English word "counsel," and because it doesn't carry any of the "freight" that is attached to the latter term, we have simply imported the Biblical term into English. In that way, the full force of the Biblical concept of counseling may be set forth while avoiding the many contradictory connotations surrounding the English one. The three ideas found in the word *nouthesia* are **confrontation**, **concern**, and **change**. To put it simply, *nouthetic counseling consists of lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires.*

By **confrontation** we mean that one Christian personally gives counsel to another from the Scriptures. He does not confront him with his own ideas or the ideas of others. He limits his counsel strictly to that which may be found in the Bible, believing that

All Scripture is breathed out by God and useful for teaching, for conviction, for correction and for disciplined training in righteousness in order to fit and fully equip the man from God for every good task. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

The nouthetic counselor believes that all that is needed to help another person love God and his neighbor as he should, as the verse above indicates, may be found in the Bible.

By **concern** we mean that counseling is always done for the benefit of the counselee. His welfare is always in view in Biblical counseling. The apostle Paul put it this way: "I am not writing these things to shame you, but to counsel you as my dear children." (1 Corinthians 4:14) Plainly, the familial nature of the word *noutheteo* appears in this verse.



Counseling...Based on What?

For decades, a minority of believers in Christ have faithfully fought to maintain biblical standards regarding counseling beliefs and methodologies in the Body of Christ. At stake in this struggle are such principles as:

- God's ways *versus* man's ways
- Supernatural change of heart *versus* self-motivated change of habits
- Divine power *versus* human effort
- Christ-reliance *versus* self-reliance
- God's wisdom *versus* man's wisdom
- Biblical authority *versus* psychotherapy and secular psychology
- Prayer to God Almighty *versus* self-oriented meditation
- Christ-like growth *versus* self-oriented changes

Discerning believers in Christ easily recognize the battle lines listed above. They know that God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible are more than sufficient to help people face and deal with any challenge of life. As a result, those receiving Christ-centered biblical counsel can glorify God by responding to every situation in a Christ-like manner.

On the other hand, unbelievers as well as many professing Christians continue to rely on secular counseling, a methodology based on worldly psychology and psychotherapy. The birthplace of both secular psychology and psychotherapy is in the graveyard of worldly wisdom, a fact that most Christians ignore or do not realize.

Discerning believers, however, recognize the insurmountable differences and inherent incompatibility between biblical counseling and secular counseling. Yet, hundreds of thousands of church leaders over the last half century have failed to warn fellow believers of the incongruity between the two counseling approaches. Consequently, dozens of denominations, most mission groups, numerous Christian schools, and hundreds of millions of unsuspecting believers have tolerated and, sometimes, even embraced secular counseling, a methodology rooted in the false premises and promises of worldly psychology and psychotherapy.

This article will demonstrate that using secular counseling betrays an ignorance of its tenets or effectiveness and indicates a diminished trust in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible.

THE BASIS FOR COUNSELING IS TRUTH

In responding to life's challenges, every person will choose a source of truth. *(Before continuing in this study, you would profit considerably by reading*

TRUTH: The Measurement for all Aspects of Life and Relationships at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Truth.pdf>).

Truth is the divide between biblical counseling and secular counseling. The article **TRUTH** – referenced above – reminds us that truth is inherent to God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible. However, is truth inherent to secular counseling?

Those who use secular counseling overlook the truth. Take time to review the following three articles.

Truth is Personal, Not Merely a Concept (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Truth%20is%20Personal.pdf>)

The Illusion of Hope in Psychotherapy at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/The%20Illusion%20of%20Hope%20in%20Psychotherapy.pdf>

Counseling Must be Based Solely on the Bible at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Counseling%20Based%20Solely%20on%20the%20Bible.pdf>

These articles emphasize the necessity of recognizing and responding to truth in order to face and deal with life's challenges. When believers understand the reality of God's power and provisions, they will demonstrate trust in the truth by choosing biblical counseling over any hint of secular counseling.

THE BENEFITS OF SECULAR COUNSELING ARE AN ILLUSION

Many teachers, practitioners, and authors who *favor* secular counseling and its underpinnings of psychology and psychotherapy have practiced and evaluated these methodologies and results. Much to their chagrin, they cannot verify the expected beneficial outcomes of such “therapy” for patients and/or counselees. In fact, when measured, the predicted outcomes were illusive, and unintended outcomes were useless or harmful.

Note the following observations from secular psychologists who realized the illusion of truth in their professions.

The following material, listed by page number, is used by permission and is reprinted from Psychoheresy (revised and expanded edition): The Psychological Seduction of Christianity by Martin and Deidre Bobgan (Eastgate Publishers, 2012).¹

You may download the book at no cost from <http://www.pamweb.org/e-books/PHR-ebk.pdf>

Page 102 - Psychologist Roger Mills, in his article “Psychology Goes Insane, Botches Role as Science,” says: The field of psychology today is literally a mess. There are as many techniques, methods and theories around as there are researchers and therapists. I have personally seen therapists convince their clients that all of their problems come from their mothers, the stars, their bio-chemical make-up, their diet, their life-style and even the “kharma” from their past lives.

Page 108 – Sir Karl Popper declares that psychological theories formulated by Freud, Adler, and others, “though posing as sciences, had in fact more in common with primitive myths than with science; that they resembled astrology rather than astronomy.”

Page 109 - Research psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey, in his book *The Mind Game*, says, “The techniques used by Western psychiatrists are, with few exceptions, on exactly the same scientific plane as the techniques used by witchdoctors.”

Page 109 - Psychiatrist Lee Coleman titled his book about psychiatry *The Reign of Error*. In this book he demonstrates that “psychiatry does not deserve the legal power it has been given” and that “psychiatry is not a science.” He says, “I have testified in over one hundred and thirty criminal and civil trials around the country, countering the authority of psychiatrists or psychologists hired by one side or the other. In each case I try to educate the judge or jury about why the opinions produced by these professionals have no scientific merit.”

Page 121 - Psychologist Carol Tavris compares astrology and psychotherapy. She says, “Now the irony is that many people who are not fooled by astrology for one minute subject themselves to therapy for years, where the same errors of logic and interpretation often occur.”

Page 139 – Dr. Thomas Szasz refers to the dangers of psychotherapy as religion: It is not merely a religion that pretends to be a science, it is actually a fake religion that seeks to destroy true religion.

Page 180 - Professor of psychiatry Donald Klein, in his testimony before the Subcommittee on Health of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Finance, said, “I believe that, at present, the scientific evidence for psychotherapy efficacy cannot justify public support.”

Page 181 - Michael Shepherd from the Institute of Psychiatry in London summarizes the outcome studies in psychotherapy: A host of studies have now been conducted which, with all their imperfections, have made it clear that (1) any advantage accruing from psychotherapy is small at best; (2) the difference between the effects of different forms of therapy are negligible; and (3) psychotherapeutic intervention is capable of doing harm.

Page 184 - A book entitled Psychotherapy Research: Methodological and Efficacy Issues, published by the American Psychiatric Association, indicates that a definite answer to the question, “Is psychotherapy effective?” may be unattainable.

Page 185 – In reviewing this book (mentioned in previous paragraph), the Brain/Mind Bulletin says, “Research often fails to demonstrate an unequivocal advantage from psychotherapy.” The following is an interesting example from the book... an experiment at the All-India Institute of Mental Health in Bangalore found that Western-trained psychiatrists and native healers had a comparable recovery rate. The most notable difference was that the so-called “witch doctors” released their patients sooner.

Page 187 - One group of researchers, after surveying the “best minds in the field of psychotherapy” conclude: It is clear that negative effects of psychotherapy are overwhelmingly regarded by experts in the field as a significant problem requiring the attention and concern of practitioners and researchers alike.

Page 188 - Michael Scriven, when he was a member of the American Psychological Association Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility, questioned “the moral justification for dispensing psychotherapy, given the state of outcome studies which would lead the FDA to ban its sale if it were a drug.”

The above evaluations illustrate the views of many in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy, the building blocks of secular counseling.

Although some Christians believe that secular psychology can produce illegitimate or harmful results, they also erroneously believe in the benefits of “Christian psychology.” They do not realize that the supposed field of Christian psychology does not exist.

Page 245 - . . . quoting the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS), “there is no acceptable Christian psychology that is markedly different from non-Christian psychology.” CAPS confesses, “It is difficult to imply that we function in a manner that is fundamentally distinct from our non-Christian colleagues.”

Although some Christian counselors use psychology in their practices, this use does not make unbiblical, secular viewpoints Christ-honoring, glorifying to God, or helpful to counselees.

Page 125 - Although the church has quite universally accepted and endorsed the psychological way, there are others who have not. Dr. Jay Adams says, “In my opinion, advocating, allowing and practicing psychiatric and psychoanalytical dogmas within the church is every bit as pagan and heretical (and therefore perilous) as propagating the teachings of some of the most bizarre cults. The only vital difference is that the cults are less dangerous because their errors are more identifiable.”

Page 126-27 - God has given believers far more than psychology can offer. There are hundreds of Bible verses that attend to this, such as 2 Peter 1:3: “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”

Irenaeus, an early church father, wrote a treatise against Gnosticism titled *On the Detection and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So Called*. Counseling psychology is not only “science falsely so called”; it is “knowledge falsely so called.” It is out of this false science and false knowledge that there are almost 500 often incompatible psychological approaches and thousands of conflicting techniques. In a word, this all results in psychoheresy!

Psychotherapy is a most subtle and devious spectre haunting the church, because it is perceived and received as a scientific salve for the sick soul rather than as what it truly is: a pseudo-scientific substitute system of religious relief.

A SIGNIFICANT EXAMPLE OF A DEPARTURE FROM TRUTH IN COUNSELING

In the latter part of the 20th century, one of psychology’s most common, yet false, claims featured the supposed need for good self-esteem. Surprisingly, many trusted Christian leaders and Christian institutions ignored biblical truth and embraced this error.

When leading psychologists and psychiatrists – and much of the church world – accepted the self-esteem fallacy as truth, “self-esteem” became a cornerstone of counseling theory and practice.

The articles below show the error of the need for good self-esteem, a concept birthed, nurtured, and promoted by adherents of secular psychology.

False Teaching in the Church (<http://wordtruth.net/PDF/False%20Teaching%20in%20the%20Church.pdf>)

Scriptural Response to Self-Esteem Teaching at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Scriptural%20Response%20to%20Self-Esteem%20Teaching.pdf>

The Folly of Good Self-Esteem (<http://wordtruth.net/PDF/The%20Folly%20of%20Good%20Self-Esteem.pdf>)

Self-Esteem Fallacy Unmasked Years Ago at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Self%20Esteem%20Fallacy%20Unmasked%20Years%20Ago.pdf>

Self-Orientation Cripples Spiritual Awareness (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Self%20Orientation.pdf>)

THE VALUE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

Are psychological insights always wrong? The short answer is “no.” Many practitioners and researchers in the field of psychology are astute observers of human behavior. However, the field of psychology has no accepted authority underpinning it.

Psychology is not a science with recognized and uniformly accepted parameters. Without an accepted authority, the psychological world is disunified. Today, psychologists and psychiatrists use about 500 different psychological perspectives in counseling practices world-wide. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

Many Christians study psychology and its varied applications. Christian colleges teach and even offer degrees in “Christian psychology.” Although many Christians have degrees in psychology, as mentioned earlier, a recognized field of “Christian Psychology” does not exist as of this writing (2016).

WHAT ABOUT INTEGRATING SECULAR COUNSELING WITH BIBLICAL COUNSELING?

Believers disregard truth when they attempt to integrate secular counseling and biblical counseling. This integration supposedly produces better results than either counseling approach could achieve alone. However, can integration ever work between two belief systems based on opposing sources of authority and expressed in conflicting methodologies? Can a mixture of divine wisdom and natural wisdom provide the best outcome? Can the “wisdom” of Adler, Freud, Jung, Ellis, Perls, Erickson, Glasser, Kinsey, Lang, Maslow, Rogers, and other leading secular psychologists add to and improve on the wisdom of God? Can a mixture of divine wisdom and natural wisdom provide a better outcome than divine wisdom alone? Obviously not. Integrating biblical counseling with secular counseling cannot glorify God.

Significant questions arise when Christians try to integrate biblical truth with worldly wisdom. How did Christians overcome life’s challenges before secular counseling entered the church? Were Christians ill-equipped to deal with problems when their only printed resource was the Holy Scriptures and their only power was the Holy Spirit living within them? Believers who accept secular counseling ignore almost 2,000 years of Christian history in which Christians were more than conquerors without the aid of psychology and psychotherapy.

Still, unbelievers as well as many naive believers trust secular counseling, either by itself or as part of the pseudo-mix of biblical and secular counseling. Today, most Christian organizations, church leaders, and fellow believers approve of adding man’s way with God’s way in dealing with life’s difficulties. Despite this prevailing view, relying on secular counseling demonstrates a lack of trust in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible.

THE BIBLE REVEALS THAT NO EARTHLY INSIGHT OR POWER CAN COMPARE TO GOD THE FATHER, JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Bible presents unalterable and astounding truths about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

God of the Bible – Divinity of the Trinity

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/God%20of%20the%20Bible%20-%20Divinity%20of%20the%20Trinity.pdf>

God’s Attributes (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Gods%20Attributes.pdf>)

Jesus – Who is He? (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Jesus%20-%20Who%20is%20He.pdf>)

Holy Spirit – The Divine Developer (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Holy%20Spirit%20Divine%20Developer.pdf>)

The Bible also proclaims the reality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Jesus IS Lord (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Jesus%20IS%20Lord.pdf>)

Is Jesus Lord of Your Life? (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Is%20Jesus%20Lord%20of%20Your%20Life.pdf>)

The Bible presents many aspects of a believer’s relationship with Christ.

Spiritual Realities Before and After Receiving Christ (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Spiritual%20Realities%20Before%20and%20After%20Receiving%20Christ.pdf>)

Your Identity in Christ (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Your%20Identity%20in%20Christ.pdf>)

Jesus has no deficiencies and possesses strength upon strength. He is perfect. Secular psychology and psychotherapy, two significant examples of the world’s wisdom, can never make believers in Christ more like Him.

1 Corinthians 3:19-20 (NASB), For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*”; ²⁰ and again, “*THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.*”

TRUSTING GOD’S WORD IS VITAL

God’s Word proclaims truth, but does it contain sufficient truth for all aspects of life and relationships? Scripture answers that question with a resounding “yes.”

Psalms 19:7-11, The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.¹¹ Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12, For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

If God's Word does not have totally sufficient truth to offer salvation in Jesus Christ and to instruct believers how to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord, then God's Word is deficient . . . which is obviously not the case.

See **Divine Sufficiency or Divine Deficiency** at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Divine%20Sufficiency%20or%20Divine%20Deficiency.pdf>

When seeking wisdom or counsel in any aspect of life and relationships, remember, God's Word contrasts earthly wisdom with divine wisdom and emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ for all of life.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31, For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

DYING TO SELF IS NECESSARY FOR A BELIEVER TO LIVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY FOR GOD

Instead of following the world's wisdom (which is foolishness), a believer can learn from God's Word how to die to self, grow in Christ, and glorify God. Secular counseling has no power to help a believer grow spiritually because Christ-like growth is a result of a believer's loving obedience to Scripture and a corresponding reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Christ Crucified – The Solution to Self-Dependency at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Christ%20Crucified%20Study%20with%20Outline.pdf> and

Holy Spirit: The Divine Developer, read *Point II. The Holy Spirit provides an overcoming and abundant life for believers in Christ* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Holy%20Spirit%20Divine%20Developer.pdf>

WHERE YOU LOOK FOR COUNSEL REVEALS WHERE YOU PUT YOUR TRUST

When facing difficulties in life, people seek counsel from sources they trust the most. Would they go to secular counselors if they fully trusted God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible to help them deal with life's challenges? The answer is obvious; they would not choose the wisdom of the world found in secular counseling.

CONCLUSION

If you have read this article and the referenced studies, you know the biblical answer to the following question – *What do God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible lack that requires anyone to use secular psychology or psychotherapy to face and deal with life's challenges?*

- Is God, the maker and sustainer of the universe, too weak to help people facing life's challenges?
- Is the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and supreme example, somehow deficient in His life, death, and resurrection so that believers are still enslaved to sin and have no adequate example of how to live to please God?
- Is the Holy Spirit lacking wisdom and power or ill equipped to direct God's children and strengthen them to face and deal with life's challenges?
- Is the Bible incomplete and, thus, unable to give believers adequate direction for glorifying God in every situation?

Answering "yes" to any of the four questions above is blasphemous! Yet, many professing believers actually demonstrate that they agree with similar blasphemy when they do not depend solely on God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Bible to face and deal with life's challenges.

Believers and unbelievers alike realize that the foundation determines the value of anything or anyone. This is especially true with regard to counseling. This study began with eight contrasting principles in the counseling world.

- God's ways *versus* man's ways
- Supernatural change of heart *versus* self-motivated change of habits
- Divine power *versus* human effort
- Christ-reliance *versus* self-reliance
- God's wisdom *versus* man's wisdom
- Biblical authority *versus* psychotherapy and secular psychology
- Prayer to God Almighty *versus* self-oriented meditation
- Christ-like growth *versus* self-oriented changes

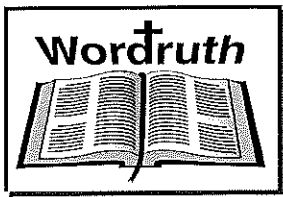
The left side of the list identifies eight foundation blocks of biblical counseling. The right side identifies eight pretenders of truth. May God grant each of us the wisdom to distinguish the two sides and to base our spiritual growth and service on the sure foundation of the Word so that God will receive all the glory.

1 Corinthians 10:31, Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Peter 4:11, Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹ Comprehensive, biblical information refuting secular psychology and psychotherapy is available on the Psychoheresy website which can be accessed at <http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/mainpage.html>

The free e-book Psychoheresy (468 pages) is at: <http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/e-books/PHR-ebk.pdf>
and 16 free e-books written by the Bobgans are available at <http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/bksonline.html>



Counseling...What Is It?

Counseling occurs every day between friends, family members, work associates, team members, fellow students and, sometimes, between complete strangers.

The definition of counseling implies its occurrence in daily life. Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary says that counseling is "advice and support that is given to people to help them deal with problems, make important decisions, etc."¹ Dictionary.com defines counseling as "advice, opinion, or instruction given in directing the judgment or conduct of another."² Other sources define counseling similarly. Basically, counseling occurs when one or more persons help another by means of purposeful communication.

BILLIONS OF COUNSELING CONVERSATIONS EACH DAY

Counseling may occur over an extended period of time; but it may also last a few seconds. For example – A visitor lost in a city asks a stranger for directions, and the stranger responds accordingly. This verbal interchange concerns specific directions but, by definition, counseling occurs because *one person helps another by means of purposeful communication*.

More counseling examples – a novice carpenter asks his supervisor how to install a door frame . . . a daughter asks her mother how to make oatmeal . . . a young child asks his parents how to grow flowers . . . a math student asks his teacher how to solve an equation . . . a mother asks a friend about effective child discipline . . . a medical intern asks a doctor about a patient's medical needs.

Each day, billions of similar conversations occur, and all involve counseling *since one or more persons help another through purposeful communication*. Billions of people routinely counsel in their roles as parents, teachers, coaches, lawyers, medical personnel, or supervisors. In fact, anyone who offers someone advice for present or future situations is counseling.

People who define counseling as "giving professional, psychological help and advice" would not view the above examples as counseling. Their counseling stereotype involves a psychiatrist or other credentialed professional, scheduled appointments, an office setting, patients/counselees, a meeting time limit, talk therapy, a fee for services rendered, and sometimes a "medical diagnosis" such as manic-depressive, schizophrenic, bipolar, ADHD, etc. *This counseling model has existed for decades with questionable success in diagnosing and treating people with problems.*

See *Quick Facts About Psychiatry* at <http://www.cchr.org/quick-facts/introduction.html>

Citizens Commission on Human Rights at <http://www.cchr.org/>

Biblical Counseling – Part 1, pages 2-3 at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

FINE-TUNING THE DEFINITION OF COUNSELING

To understand what biblical counseling is, let's consider two key elements of counseling ... **help** and **purposeful communication**.

• HELP

Helping others is foundational to counseling, but some "help" can be harmful, as the websites referenced above indicate. Some "help" can also be sinful, for example:

- ☞ An accomplice could *help* a fellow thief plan a bank robbery by *purposefully communicating* how to access the vault.
- ☞ An adulteress could *help* her adulterous partner continue in sin by *purposefully communicating* details for their next rendezvous.
- ☞ A friend could *help* another friend avoid paying taxes by *purposefully communicating* how to falsify a tax return.
- ☞ A student could *help* a fellow student cheat on an exam by *purposefully communicating* answers for the test.

The above situations illustrate *sinful* counseling. In each of these cases, the counselor encourages another person to sin. The earthly birthplace of sinful counseling is the Garden of Eden. In that idyllic setting, Satan counseled Eve to disobey God's explicit command. Eve foolishly followed Satan's counsel as did her husband Adam. As Adam and Eve discovered, so-called help that disregards God and, instead, appeals to self-centeredness is devastating to lives and relationships.

See *Genesis chapter 3* at <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+3&version=NASB>

The End of the Beginning ... The Fall of Adam and Eve at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/End%20of%20the%20Beginning.pdf>

Biblically-based help condemns self-centeredness and always opposes sinful behavior. Real help relies on biblical truth to benefit others and bring glory to God.

- **PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION**

The primary purpose of biblical counseling is to glorify God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Peter 4:11, Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In counseling and in all other areas of life and relationships, God's glory is paramount.

(Do All for the Glory of God at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Do%20All%20For%20the%20Glory%20of%20God.pdf>)

The vast majority of counseling deals with daily routines, tasks, and responsibilities. Human (natural) wisdom is often useful for these situations. However, challenges involving personal difficulties, relationships, and seemingly unsolvable problems require divine wisdom (Proverbs 3:5-6, 1 Corinthians 3:19-20, 1 Peter 4:11).

Proverbs 3:5-6, Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

1 Corinthians 3:19-20, For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*"; ²⁰ and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS."

1 Peter 4:11, Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The first study in this Biblical Counseling series noted that hundreds of counseling perspectives derived from human wisdom compete with one another and contradict God's Word.

See *Counseling . . . Based on What?* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

Biblical counseling, however, provides totally sufficient truth and trustworthy help from the Bible. Such counseling focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ (our eternal Redeemer and the embodiment of divine truth) and the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of truth Who empowers believers to think, speak, act, and live in a manner that glorifies God).

See *TRUTH – The Measurement for All Aspects of Life and Relationships* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Truth.pdf>

THE TWO PRIMARY EMPHASES OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The primary emphases of biblical counseling are evangelism (the Gospel/the Good News) and sanctification (growth in the Christ-life).

- **EVANGELISM**

Evangelism presents unbelievers with the Good News of Jesus Christ, offering forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 3:23-24, 5:10-11; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:11-12).

John 3:16, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Romans 3:23-24, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:10-11, For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

1 Peter 1:3-5, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 John 5:11-12, And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Other studies related to evangelism are . . .

This is the Gospel . . . the Good News

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/This%20is%20the%20Gospel%20-%20The%20Good%20News.pdf>

Growing in the Christ-life – Part 1... Biblical Possibility of Christ-like Change

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Growing%20in%20the%20Christ-life%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

• SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification deals with a believer's on-going growth in the Christ-life (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 5:16-23).

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 5:16-23, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Other studies related to sanctification are listed below . . .

Growing in the Christ-life – Part 3 ... What does Growing in the Christ-life Look Like? at

<http://wordtruth.org/Growing%20in%20the%20Christ-life%20-%20Part%203.pdf>

Abiding in God . . . A Necessity for Christ-like Development at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Abiding%20in%20God%20A%20Necessity%20for%20Christ-like%20Development.pdf>

Becoming a Christ-like Servant at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Becoming%20a%20Christ-like%20Servant.pdf>

Change Hurts like Heaven at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Change%20Hurts%20Like%20Heaven.pdf>

Christ Crucified: The Solution to Self-Dependency at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Christ%20Crucified%20Study%20with%20Outline.pdf>

Gratifying Yourself or Glorifying Your Savior at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Gratifying%20Yourself%20or%20Glorifying%20Your%20Savior.pdf>

Humility – God's Path to Edification and Exaltation at

[http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Humility%20-%20Gods%20Path%20to%20Edification%20and%20Exaltation%20\(KIR\).pdf](http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Humility%20-%20Gods%20Path%20to%20Edification%20and%20Exaltation%20(KIR).pdf)

Is Dying to Self Really Necessary? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Dying%20to%20Self.pdf>

Is Jesus Lord of Your Life? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Is%20Jesus%20Lord%20of%20Your%20Life.pdf>

Knowing Jesus or Just Knowing About Jesus? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Knowing%20Jesus.pdf>

Living by Feelings or Living by Faith at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Living%20by%20Feelings%20or%20Living%20by%20Faith.pdf>

Living for yourSELF . . . or Your SAVIOR at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Living%20for%20YourSELF%20or%20Your%20SAVIOR.pdf>

Servanthood – The Low Road to our High Calling at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Servanthood%20-%20Low%20Road%20to%20High%20Calling.pdf>

VALID BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Those who counsel biblically realize that evangelism and sanctification are essential to biblical counseling. Valid biblical counseling is not based on professional notoriety, academic degrees, ministry or teaching positions, speaking skills, government licensing, published material, church membership, counseling training, or certification.

Instead, valid biblical counseling occurs when the counselor (a biblically obedient believer dependent on the Holy Spirit) provides help based on scriptural truth through purposeful communication that glorifies God by emphasizing salvation through Jesus Christ (evangelism) and faithful growth in the Christ-life (sanctification).

A new Christian's knowledge and use of the Bible will not have the breadth and depth that a mature disciple will have. Nevertheless, *all* believers can counsel biblically to the degree they use scriptural truth and rely on the Holy Spirit to help others glorify God in all aspects of life and relationships.

COUNSELING BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

Those who seek help with challenges of life and relationships are either believers or unbelievers. When counseling unbelievers, a biblical counselor presents the Gospel in the context of the unbeliever's difficulties. Biblical counselors realize that apart from belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, unbelievers cannot adequately understand scriptural truth concerning life's challenges and relationships.

1 Corinthians 2:14, But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

If an unbeliever persistently rejects Jesus Christ, a biblical counselor should patiently focus on the Gospel and the inevitable results of self-centered choices. It may be helpful to ask an unbeliever, "Do you recognize the hopelessness and difficulties you have experienced going your own way and rejecting any consideration of Jesus Christ?"

At this point, if the non-Christian counselee seems confused or begins to recount his problems and spiritual situation, kindly bring his attention back to the Gospel as the basis for facing and dealing with his life in a manner that glorifies God.

(Life's Most Important Decision at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Lifes%20Most%20Important%20Decision.pdf>)

If the Gospel has been faithfully presented many times, yet the counselee still rejects Jesus Christ, a biblical counselor may eventually respond with something like this . . .

"We have reached an impasse in our counseling. Everything I have to offer you from God's Word is linked to your belief in Jesus Christ and the salvation He provides. I will continue to pray that God will help you see the importance of trusting Him and believing the truth of God's Word. If you want, I will provide appropriate material to help you prayerfully reconsider your response to God's love that was demonstrated through the cross of Jesus Christ. I would also consider it a privilege to meet with you again for the specific purpose of reviewing God's plan of salvation and its impact on your life and relationships.

"God's Word says that apart from believing in Christ, you cannot experience God's power to help you overcome your challenges. You also cannot fully understand God's truth in the Bible and its application to your situation. If, by God's grace, you respond to His love and place your faith in Jesus Christ, I will rejoice with you that your sins are forgiven and that you have received eternal life. I would also enjoy the possibility of further counseling with you so we can discover Christ-honoring solutions to your difficulties."

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

On the other hand, biblical counseling among believers is beneficial and glorifies God due to:

- a common foundation of salvation in Jesus Christ,
- a common trust in the truth and sufficiency of God's Word,
- a common reliance on the power and leading of the Holy Spirit,
- a common belief in the necessity and benefits of prayer, and
- a common fellowship with other believers that is accompanied by diverse ministries in the Body of Christ.

Most counseling among believers is simply a facet of biblical discipleship, the joyous life-long process of learning God's Word, obeying its truth, and growing in the Christ-life. Communication in this regard can involve encouragement, instruction, rebuke, comfort, restoration, exhortation, and correction, to name but a few benefits of counseling among believers. In various settings and situations, believers can pray for and remind one another to obey God's Word and apply divine truth to all aspects of life and relationships (Colossians 1:9-12).

Colossians 1:9-12, For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

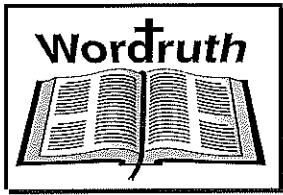
SUMMARY OF THIS STUDY

- Counseling occurs when one or more persons help another by means of purposeful communication.
- Biblically based help (biblical counseling) always brings glory to God, discourages self-centeredness, opposes and reveals sinful behavior, emphasizes the need for salvation through Christ, and encourages believers to grow in the Christ-life.
- The primary emphases of biblical counseling are evangelism (the Gospel) and sanctification (growth in the Christ-life).
- Counselees who persistently reject salvation through Jesus Christ are unable to understand biblical truth fully and may eventually be dismissed from on-going counseling for a period of time. At this dismissal, unbelieving counselees are encouraged to reconsider their biblical need of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ in order for them to be overwhelming conquerors through Him.
- In the Body of Christ, biblical counseling is integral to the discipleship process.

Endnotes:

¹<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counseling?show=0&t=1353347135>

²<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/counseling?s=t>



Biblical Counseling / Discipleship

Intertwined and Inseparable

The definition of biblical counseling in this series indicates that believers growing in the Christ-life have the privilege of helping others face and deal with various aspects of life and relationships by relying on the Holy Spirit and the complete sufficiency of God's Word.

Valid biblical counseling occurs when the counselor (a biblically obedient believer dependent on the Holy Spirit) provides help based on scriptural truth through purposeful communication that glorifies God by emphasizing salvation through Jesus Christ (evangelism) and faithful growth in the Christ-life (sanctification).

See *Counseling . . . What Is It?* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%202.pdf>

The primary focus of biblical counseling is not counseling methods or procedures but, rather, Jesus Christ. Those receiving counsel need help to live Christ-honoring lives for God's glory. Biblical counseling explains salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and emphasizes sanctification (on-going growth in the Christ-life), a process that concludes with the believer's glorification (being in the physical presence of Jesus forever).

Authentic believers throughout history have counseled others regarding salvation in Christ. They have also counseled fellow believers to grow in Christ-likeness by relying on prayer, God's Word (the Bible), and the power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout two millennia, biblical counseling has been an integral part of Christ-honoring discipleship.

In *Counseling One Another* (Oct. 2, 2012), Paul Tautges explains and lists Christian interactions that exemplify the link between biblical counseling and discipleship.

Biblical counseling is an intensely focused and personal aspect of the discipleship process, whereby believers come alongside one another for three main purposes:

First, to help each other consistently apply Scriptural theology to life in order to experience victory over sin through obedience to Christ;

Second, [to warn] each other, in love, of the consequences of sinful actions; and

Third, [to lead] each other to make consistent progress in the ongoing process of biblical change in order that all may become spiritually reproductive followers of Jesus Christ.

This definition describes the aim of biblical discipleship. Basically, counseling is helping one another within the Body of Christ to grow to maturity in Him.

DISCIPLESHIP/COUNSELING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Pastor Tautges reminds us that the New Testament uses different words to emphasize this more concentrated aspect of the disciple-making process, including: *parakaleo*, *noutheteo*, *sterizo*, *paramutheomai*, *marturomai*, *oikodomeo*, and *sophronizo*. The meanings and uses of these Greek words describe a well-rounded ministry geared toward helping people change to greater Christ-likeness.

Parakaleo

In the same blog quoted above, Tautges describes *parakaleo* saying:

According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the Greek word *parakaleo* means 'to call to one's side,' hence, 'to call to one's aid.' It is used for every kind of calling which is meant to produce a particular effect, hence its various meanings, such as 'comfort, exhort, desire, call for.' The Apostle Peter uses this word to urge Christians to abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Peter 2:11), and the author of Hebrews insists that believers are to encourage one another to be faithful to their local assembly (Hebrews 10:25).

1 Peter 2:11, Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Hebrews 10:25, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

God's plan for personal character transformation has always included other persons in the community of faith because normal spiritual growth does not take place in isolation but, rather, alongside others.

Noutheteo

Tautges explains *noutheteo* with the following observations:

A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament says that the Greek word *noutheteo* means to admonish or warn. It means to put before the mind so as to 'correct through instruction and warning.' It differs slightly from teaching in that it is normally a response to some kind of error or it is a warning against spiritual danger, present or potential. When Paul counseled the Ephesian elders about the danger of the emerging false teachers who would seek to make disciples by their false doctrines, he reminded them of the three years in which he did not cease to admonish them (Acts 20:31). Romans 15:14 teaches that believers can admonish one another biblically. This should always be toward the goal of spiritual maturity (Colossians 1:28), and therefore believers should appreciate the shepherds who give them instruction toward that end (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Acts 20:31, Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Romans 15:14, And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

Colossians 1:28, We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:12, But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

The noun form, noutesia, means 'training by word—either of encouragement, when this is sufficient, or of remonstrance, reproof, or blame, where required.' Therefore, we will also discover that God's plan for making disciples requires believers to care enough to confront one another when brothers or sisters they love are in error and to firmly warn or instruct them concerning their spiritual danger.

Sterizo

Another New Testament word related to discipleship is *sterizo*. According to *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, the word *sterizo* means "to make stable, place firmly . . . to strengthen, make firm, . . . to render constant, confirm one's mind." The ministry of strengthening one another is so significant that, when Satan asked permission to sift the apostles, Jesus charged Peter to strengthen the brothers when he returned from the test (Luke 22:32).

Luke 22:32, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Peter obeyed his charge to strengthen the brothers by reminding them of the resources believers have for growing in grace as a result of responding to the Gospel. He urged them to be diligent in making their calling certain and pointed out that believers are established (strengthened) in the truth (2 Peter 1:10, 12).

2 Peter 1:10, Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

2 Peter 1:12, Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.

Ultimately, God strengthens or establishes believers (Roman 16:25; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, 3:3; 1 Peter 5:10).

Romans 16:25, Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past

1 Thessalonians 3:13, so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace,¹⁷ comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

2 Thessalonians 3:3, But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

1 Peter 5:10, After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

However, believers have both the responsibility to strengthen themselves (James 5:8, Revelation 3:2) and the privilege of strengthening one another (Romans 1:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:2).

James 5:8, You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Revelation 3:2, Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

Romans 1:11, For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

1 Thessalonians 3:2, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.

The ministry of counseling helps believers become so established in the truth that they are able to stand firm in difficulties and help others in the process.

Paramutheomai

When describing his ministry discipling the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul said that he exhorted (*parakaleo*), encouraged (*paramutheomai*), and implored (*marturomai*) them as a father would his own children to live in a manner worthy of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,¹² so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines the word for encourage, *paramutheomai*, as "to speak to, address one, whether by way of admonition and incentive, or to calm and console; hence, equivalent to encourage, console." The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 that believers are to "encourage the fainthearted." In John 11:19 and 31, the Jews came to console Martha and Mary over the loss of their brother Lazarus. These passages indicate that the counselor comes alongside the one in need and speaks truth compassionately.

1 Thessalonians 5:14, We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

John 11:19, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.

John 11:31, Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Marturomai

The word *marturomai* refers to summoning a witness to testify in court. *Strong's Concordance* defines it as to "call to witness, testify, solemnly charge." In his trial before King Agrippa, Paul said that he testified to the truth of the Scriptures (Acts 26:22-23). In Ephesians 4:17, Paul implores believers not to live like Gentiles. The counselor presents the truth of God's Word as a witness of God's grace and the changes God charges the counselee to make.

Acts 26:22-23, So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;²³ that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

Ephesians 4:17, So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.

Oikodomeo

The word *oikodomeo* literally means to build a house. According to *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, when the word is used metaphorically . . .

Those who, by action, instruction, exhortation, comfort, promote the Christian wisdom of others and help them to live a correspondent life are regarded as taking part in the [building of the temple in which God dwells], and hence, are said [to oikodomeo] i.e.... to promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, and blessedness.

Believers are to encourage one another and build up each other by reminding one another of the hope of the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11). The counsel they give should not spring merely from knowledge, but rather, it must be rooted in love (1 Corinthians 8:1).

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11, For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

1 Corinthians 8:1, Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

Sophronizo

Finally, HELPS Word-studies defines *sophronizo* as

... literally “living in divine moderation” ... moving in the “bigger picture” transforming someone to be “radically-balanced” according to the Lord’s will. This radical-moderation requires a complete perspective that ... [combines] the legitimate extremities of truth from both sides of a matter.

In other words, mature believers present the correct tension between such apparently contradictory truths as God’s mercy and His justice, His sovereignty and human responsibility, etc., and encourage disciples to walk in love toward one another. The word is used in Titus 2:4 of the ministry that older women are to have toward younger women.

Titus 2:3-5, Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good,⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

SUMMARY OF COUNSELING/DISCIPLESHIP TERMS

All New Testament terms addressed in this study show that believers can help one another through biblical, Christ-honoring counsel. The Greek words indicate that godly counsel takes many forms. Faithful believers can comfort, exhort, come alongside, encourage, restore, instruct, admonish, correct, warn, and advise one another by depending on the Holy Spirit, prayer, and God’s Word.

In light of the biblical terms related to counseling/discipleship, Paul Tautges makes the following observation.

The counsel dispensed is always in the form of words spoken from the commitment of biblical love. Proverbs 18:21 says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” As biblical counselors, we must take great care in the words we use with fellow disciples, for speech has the power to kill them with despair or to give them the hope of life ... The power of counsel lies in the degree to which our words are filled with the Word.*

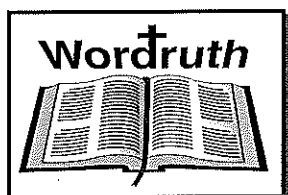
Biblical discipleship/counseling regularly occurs when believers purposefully communicate and interact as fellow disciples in life and ministry ... all for God’s glory. As expected, this Christ-oriented ministry is radically different from secular counseling.

See Counseling ... Based on What? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf> and Overview of Humanistic Psychology and Major Schools of Thought in Psychology at <https://www.verywell.com/what-is-humanistic-psychology-2795242>

Endnotes

* <http://counselingoneanother.com/2012/10/02/our-working-definition-of-counseling/> This reference is from *Counseling One Another*, a book by Paul Tautges that can be purchased at Shepherd Press (<http://www.shepherdpress.com/product/counseling-one-another/>). A review of the book is available at *Theology for You* at <http://www.theologyforyou.com/counseling-one-another/>

NOTE: You can receive a complimentary subscription to *Counseling One Another*, a blog by Pastor Paul Tautges, at <http://counselingoneanother.com/about/purpose>



Misunderstandings and Observations about Discipleship / Biblical Counseling

Part 3 of this series highlighted the indivisible linkage between discipleship and biblical counseling (<http://wordtruth.org/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%203.pdf>). This linkage is evident by common terminology and ministries related to both discipleship and biblical counseling. In fact, an overview of the New Testament emphasizes that all believers can and should counsel biblically as part of the discipleship process. If discipleship and biblical counseling go hand in hand, what commonalities do they have?

First, the terms *believer*, *disciple*, and *Christian* are equivalent and refer to anyone who has received salvation through Jesus Christ.

(See *Are You a Christian or a Disciple? Is There a Difference? Why it Matters!* at http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Are_You_a_Christian_or_a_Disciple_page1 and

What is Discipleship and How is it Done? (audio and in print) at <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done>)

Second, all believers/disciples/Christians are uniquely and sovereignly equipped with spiritual gifts for ministry to and with others (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Third, all believers/disciples/Christians are to grow in the Christ-life and encourage fellow believers to do likewise (Hebrews 3:13, 10:23-24).

Hebrews 3:13, But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:23-24, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

As believers grow in Christ, they learn to deal biblically with life’s challenges and, in the process, become more skilled at helping others. In assisting others, faithful disciples of Jesus realize the importance of providing counsel based on biblical truth untainted by worldly wisdom. James 3:15 describes all other counsel as earthly, natural (unspiritual), and demonic.

James 3:15, This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP AND BIBLICAL COUNSELING

#1 . . . Definition of biblical counseling

People often think of counseling as a complex process requiring specialized skills and the use of certain techniques. However, another view of biblical counseling was introduced in *Counseling – What Is It?* (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%202.pdf>).

Valid biblical counseling occurs when the counselor (a biblically obedient believer dependent on the Holy Spirit) provides help, based on scriptural truth, through purposeful communication that glorifies God by emphasizing salvation through Jesus Christ (evangelism) and faithful growth in the Christ-life (sanctification).

All believers can counsel biblically to the degree they use scriptural truth and rely on the Holy Spirit to help others glorify God in all aspects of life and relationships. God can and will use any number of believers to provide biblical help to someone needing direction and/or comfort. This biblical help typically corresponds with each believer’s understanding of God’s Word that is linked to one’s personal growth in the Christ-life.

Romans 15:14, And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

#2 . . . Separating discipleship from biblical counseling in the Body of Christ

Some churches, colleges, and seminaries separate discipleship training from biblical counseling training. Separating these subjects may help focus instruction, but it can also further the illusion that discipleship is separate from biblical counseling. However, valid biblical counseling and Christ-honoring discipleship are one and the same whenever believers help fellow Christians grow in the Christ-life.

Believers who separate discipleship and biblical counseling often respond to a fellow believer facing difficulties by saying, “You need counseling.” That statement may or may not be appropriate, but it is helpful for believers to remind one another that difficulties always provide opportunities to grow in Christ. For example, speaking kindly with a fellow believer facing difficulties, one could also say, “This is your opportunity to grow even more as a disciple of Christ.” Scripture does not separate on-going growth in Christ from dealing with life's problems. In fact, these two aspects of the Christian life are intertwined.

*(See **What Do You Believe? . . . No, Really** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/What%20do%20you%20believe.pdf>)*

John 16:33 (spoken by Jesus), These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Romans 5:3-5, And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 8:18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11, But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

James 1:2-4, Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1 Peter 1:6-7, In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:12-13, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

(The Three Victories in Trials at <http://wordtruth.net/PDF/Three%20Victories%20in%20Trials.pdf>)

Believers should note that biblical counseling is a focused aspect of the discipleship process.

#3 . . . Separating evangelism from biblical counseling

Christians often classify sharing the Gospel with an unbeliever as an evangelism encounter without recognizing that biblical counseling has also occurred. Evangelism involves counseling at some level because evangelism explains to the non-Christian that one's deepest need is to have right relationships with God and others and presents Christ as the only One through whom that need can be met. Evangelism is one of two primary emphases of biblical counseling (the other emphasis is sanctification, or “growing in the Christ-life”). Of course, evangelism is basic to discipleship as well.

* Biblical counseling and sharing the Gospel are one and the same when the conversation between a believer and an unbeliever emphasizes the Gospel (evangelism focus).

* Biblical counseling and discipleship instruction are one and the same when the conversation involves believers and emphasizes growth in Christ (sanctification focus).

#4 . . . Requiring specific training for believers to counsel biblically

Churches often encourage believers with little or no evangelism training to share the Gospel with unbelievers. Likewise, churches often urge believers with little or no discipleship training to disciple fellow believers. Paradoxically, however, these same churches may erroneously assume that only believers with specific biblical counseling training can counsel others effectively.

Evangelism training, discipleship training, and biblical counseling training are all beneficial. Obviously, a new Christian's knowledge and use of the Bible will not have the breadth and depth that a more mature disciple will have. Likewise, Christians having discipleship and/or biblical counseling training usually know more verses and understand more biblical insights regarding growth in Christ than fellow believers who lack training. A lack of specialized training, however, should not inhibit a faithful and biblically obedient student of the Word from impacting others by relying on God's sovereignty, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the biblical truth one knows – even a single verse applied to the need of the moment – to assist others facing life's challenges.

#5 . . . Deferring to “professional counselors”

This misunderstanding occurs when believers and unbelievers associate valid and effective biblical counseling primarily with professional counselors who have advanced degrees, accept clients/patients, schedule on-going office appointments, and charge a fee for services rendered.

(See *Counseling Based on What?* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>)

NOTE: Charging a fee for biblical counseling is a practice birthed in the secular (psychological, psycho-therapeutic) world and, arguably, violates scriptural principles of ministry. For example, what is the biblical basis for charging an unbeliever a fee to hear the Gospel? Correspondingly, charging a fee for biblical ministry to others disregards the mandate of “freely you received, freely give”

Matthew 10:7-9, (stated by Jesus to His disciples) And as you go, preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. ⁹ Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts. (insert added)

Commenting on this perspective, David Guzik states, “Even though the twelve could expect their needs to be met through the people they served, they should never require their needs to be met as payment. The foundational principle was freely you have received, freely give.”

(See *Blue Letter Bible Text Commentaries*, David Guzik study guides . . . refer to Matthew commentary, chapter 10 in https://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/guzik_david/)

The Biblical Counseling Foundation (BCF), one of the few Christian counseling organizations that oppose charging a fee for counseling, states in the BCF Standards of Conduct and Code of Ethics for Biblical Disciples/Counselors that a biblical counselor . . .

. . . provides his time, resources, and energy as a ministering service to the church or faith group as well as to the individual or family in need. Recipients or beneficiaries of his services are not subject to any charge or fee or any financial requirement, actual or implied.

(See <http://www.bcfministries.org/downloads/pub-standardssofconduct.pdf>)

Also, see *Charging Fees for Biblical Counseling? . . . Relationship, Responsibility, and Remuneration* at <http://www.christiandiscernment.com/Christian%20Discernment/CD%20PDF/Theology%20pdf/Fees%20Counseling%20Paper.pdf>)

God can use any biblically obedient believer as a catalyst of mercy, wisdom, and grace in another's life. Such biblical help may occur over a few minutes or extend through many interactions over several months. The settings and time commitment for those involved in discipleship/counseling situations are variable.

Remember . . . valid biblical counseling and Christ-honoring discipleship are one and the same whenever believers help fellow Christians to grow in the Christ-life. Every biblically obedient believer can participate at some level with regard to making disciples (counseling others).

MINISTRY OBSERVATIONS TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS AND CHURCHES TO COUNSEL BIBLICALLY

#1 . . . Valid biblical counseling can occur in any church, but its beneficial impact will vary from church to church as well as from believer to believer. Biblical counseling in a church family typically improves when pastors/leaders regularly encourage believers to support one another through prayer and the encouragement of God's Word. Remember, every believer growing in Christ can provide biblical counsel corresponding to his or her personal level of Christ-like development. The same is true regarding believers sharing the Gospel, since most believers can recount how they came to faith in Christ.

(See *Preparing Your Personal Testimony* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Preparing%20Your%20Personal%20Testimony.pdf> and *This is the Gospel . . . the Good News* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/This%20is%20the%20Gospel%20-%20The%20Good%20News.pdf>)

#2 . . . All believers growing in the Christ-life can, in varying degrees, counsel others facing life's challenges. (*NOTE: Some of life's difficulties also require the involvement of medical, legal, and/or law enforcement personnel.*) Biblical counseling can occur in an office or in any number of casual settings – on a walk, over lunch, sitting in the park, in a car or restaurant or home . . . in fact, anywhere a conversation is possible.

Believers qualify to provide effective biblical counsel by faithfully praying, obeying God's Word, submitting to the Holy Spirit, and maturing in the Christ-life. Believers growing in Christ display the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Galatians 5:22-23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Believers characterized by the fruit of the Spirit are "doers of the Word" who develop habits such as:

- * trusting, reading, studying, memorizing, and applying the truth of God's Word for all situations of life
- * giving God glory for Who He is
- * thanking God for what He has done and what He continues to do
- * praying faithfully while depending on His sovereignty in every situation
- * setting aside times for praise and worship, often with fellow believers
- * changing thoughts, actions, and speech from focusing on self to honoring Christ
- * demonstrating Christ-like love
- * telling others the Good News of Jesus Christ
- * maintaining relationships with fellow believers through cooperative ministries and mutual edification
- * helping restore fellow believers who have sinned
- * forgiving others who have sinned against them
- * confessing personal sins to God and, when applicable, also to others
- * helping others understand God's Word and its application to life and relationships
- * coming alongside those who face difficulties
- * sharing/giving personal resources that help alleviate suffering in others' lives

A believer displaying these characteristics is an obvious disciple of Jesus Christ. Such a believer recognizes he or she is a work in progress and, by God's grace, will faithfully evaluate his or her own life according to God's Word and the person of Jesus Christ.

Through consistent, biblical self-evaluation – disregarding self-oriented ideas/feelings as well as any comparisons with others – a believer can faithfully grow in Christ and, correspondingly, demonstrate love for God and others. Such believers can counsel others biblically in varying degrees, even though others in the Body of Christ may overlook this reality.

#3 . . . The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) encompasses Christ-honoring discipleship and authentic biblical counseling.

Matthew 28:18-20, And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus told His followers to "make disciples . . . teaching them to observe *all* that I commanded you." Jesus also told His disciples to love God and love one another (Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34, 1 John 3:23).

Matthew 22:36-40, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' " ³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' " ⁴⁰ "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

John 13:34, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

1 **John 3:23**, This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

In His teaching, Jesus showed what love for one another looks like. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples how to love when dealing with persecution, anger, lust, marriage problems, oaths, vengeance, enemies, fear, worry, etc. He did not distinguish counseling topics from discipleship topics. The term “counseling” encompasses every aspect of a person's life. Yet, Jesus used the term “disciple” when He charged His disciples to teach *all* that He commanded which, like biblical counseling, encompasses every aspect of a person's life. (*See Professional Counseling versus Body Life Sanctification at http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/body_life.html*)

#4 . . . Challenges of life and relationships remind believers to study and obey God's Word. Obviously, no believer can recall all verses pertaining to every aspect of life's challenges. However, God's Word is without error and is totally sufficient to address all facets of life and relationships. As a result, every Christian can be assured that a prayerful, on-going study and application of the Scriptures will increase one's understanding of the Bible as well as reveal scriptural responses to life's challenges for one's self and for other persons seeking counsel.

God often uses believers' personal challenges as well as others' difficulties as an impetus for one to study Scripture and discover/review biblical truths applicable to life's challenges and on-going growth in Christ.

THE CHARGE TO COUNSEL BIBLICALLY

With such all-encompassing divine resources as God Almighty, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible – coupled with personal prayer, scriptural obedience, and the Christ-honoring assistance of fellow believers – how could followers of Christ choose the wisdom of the world (psychology, psychotherapy, popular perspectives, and/or “common sense”) as authoritative resources for dealing with life's difficulties instead of relying on divine resources? Have we in the Body of Christ forgotten that the “wisdom of the world is foolishness before God” (1 Corinthians 3:19)?

For further study related to the above paragraph, see . . .

Biblical Counseling – Part 1: Counseling . . . Based on What? at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

Divine Sufficiency or Divine Deficiency at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Divine%20Sufficiency%20or%20Divine%20Deficiency.pdf>

Biblical Basics of Dealing with Problems at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Basics%20of%20Dealing%20with%20Problems.pdf>

Counseling Must be Based Solely on the Bible at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Counseling%20Based%20Solely%20on%20the%20Bible.pdf>

God's Truth is Your Foundation for Life at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Gods%20Truth%20is%20Your%20Foundation%20for%20Life.pdf>

Anchors of Hope for Any Trial at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Anchors%20of%20Hope%20for%20Any%20Trial.pdf>

God of the Bible . . . Divinity of the Trinity at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/God%20of%20the%20Bible%20-%20Divinity%20of%20the%20Trinity.pdf>

Jesus IS Lord at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Jesus%20IS%20Lord.pdf>

Lasting Peace Comes Only Through Jesus at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Lasting%20Peace%20Comes%20Only%20Through%20Jesus.pdf>

Holy Spirit: The Divine Developer at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Holy%20Spirit%20Divine%20Developer.pdf>

Prayerlessness: A Reflection of Self-Centeredness at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Prayerlessness.pdf>

The Apostle Paul's encouragement to the Galatian believers in the first century is applicable for believers in any century.

Galatians 6:1-2, Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

The Anthropology of the Thief

by Cameron Buettel

I have good news and bad news.

No one wants to hear those words from a medical doctor. Most would rather just hear the good news alone. But often the good news isn't truly *good* until we truly understand the bad news.

The same principle applies to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The word *gospel* is a synonym for good news, but the true goodness of that news hinges on the bad news that precedes it. And it is the bad news of our guilt that is a pill too bitter to swallow for many.

That's why, as John MacArthur observes, the gospel has always aroused hostility and resentment.

Although all people like to think of themselves as basically good, the testimony of God's Word is precisely the opposite. Scripture states unequivocally that the entire human race is evil. In the vernacular of our times, humanity is bad to the bone—corrupt to the core. To put it in familiar theological terms, we are totally depraved.

We are naturally, intuitively, painfully aware of our guilt too. A ubiquitous sense of shame goes with being a fallen creature. It's what made Adam and Eve mask their nakedness with leaves. That's a perfect metaphor for the futile ways people try to paper over the shame of their wickedness. They don't want to face it. They try to eliminate that sense of guilt by adopting a more convenient kind of morality, or by silencing their crying conscience. [1]

Natural men refuse to accept God's verdict—they reject the evidence put forth in their prosecution by His Word. Sinners want nothing to do with their guilt, preferring to cling

to delusions of personal goodness. Such false notions keep their self-esteem and false sense of respectability intact.

Conceding to God's Verdict

The anthropology—that is, the doctrine of man—displayed by the repentant thief on the cross stands in sharp contrast to the default perspective of fallen humanity.

We've **already seen** that the thief had excellent theology—he feared God. And his basic grasp of God's holiness produced a sound and sober assessment of his own undeniable guilt.

One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? *And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds*; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39–43 emphasis added)

Don't assume that the thief was some petty criminal. It's important to remember that Christ's cross was originally intended for Barabbas—a violent insurrectionist and murderer (Luke 23:18–24). In all likelihood, the two thieves on either side of Jesus were probably convicted of similarly egregious crimes. They were utterly wicked men.

Yet amazingly, one of them was willing to humble himself and concede the judicial fairness of his punishment: "We indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds" (Luke 23:41). The fact that he believed crucifixion was the just punishment for his crimes means he must have understood how evil his sins were. John MacArthur highlights the necessity of biblical anthropology as the natural companion to a right view of God.

Closely connected to fear of God's judgment is the second evidence of a changed heart, a sense of sinfulness. The repentant thief's further rebuke of the other malefactor reflects his acknowledgment of his own sinfulness. "We indeed are suffering justly," he reminded him, "for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds." Like the prodigal son in Christ's parable (Luke 15:17-19), this man came to his senses and admitted that he was a sinner. He understood that justice operates in the world of men, but more perfectly in God's realm.

Here is an example of the true convert who confesses his guilt and absolute spiritual bankruptcy. He recognizes that he has nothing to offer God, nothing to commend himself to Him. He knows that he needs mercy and grace to escape judgment and be forgiven, because he is an unworthy sinner, a crouching, cringing, cowering beggar mourning over his transgressions (Matthew 5:3-4). [2]

That is the bad news sinners must accept before they can appreciate the good news of the gospel. They must acknowledge their need for a Savior in order for salvation to make sense. And they must understand the immense cost of their crimes—more on that next time.

The contrition and confession modeled by the thief is an extremely rare commodity in our therapeutic culture overflowing with victimhood. The whole world resonates with a false cry of innocence. As Solomon lamented, "All the ways of man are clean in his own sight" (Proverbs 16:2). "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness" (Proverb 20:6 KJV).

Just as all good theology begins with a reverential fear of God, it should also produce a biblical view of man. Like the thief, true Christians would sooner humble themselves than protest their innocence. We should go to the seminary we find in Luke 23:39-43, emulate the thief, and agree with God and what He says concerning our condition. The thief reminds us that it's never too late to confess our sins.

People Are Basically Good

by Cameron Buettel

"In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery and death." [Citation Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, The Definitive Edition, Translated by Susan Massotty (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 333.] Those are heartbreaking words for a couple of reasons.

They were penned by Anne Frank, a young Jewish girl, while she spent two years hiding in Nazi-occupied Holland. She died tragically in a concentration camp soon after, but her writings would go on posthumously to become a widely celebrated bestseller: *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

It's staggering to think that in spite of the unimaginable atrocities she must have witnessed and experienced, she still clung to the belief that people are basically good. She even admitted her beliefs were "in spite of" the evidence, not because of it. For her, the alternative was simply too unthinkable. It would seem her beliefs hinged more on hope than conviction.

The other reason Anne Frank's words are so heartbreaking is because she believed a widespread and popular lie.

Pelagian Origins

The belief that people are basically good is an ancient falsehood going back to the fourth-century AD. It was first propagated, at least in a theological sense, by a British monk called Pelagius. He fervently and persuasively argued against the biblical doctrine of *original sin*—the belief that all of mankind has been morally corrupted through Adam's fall.

The Pelagian heresy was defeated at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. But Pelagius's beliefs have been readily imbibed by most secular cultures and are alive and well in the present day. Atheism and Darwinism may have toned it down by embracing an anthropology of moral neutrality rather than goodness. But their worldview remains essentially Pelagian because they still deny the inherent sinfulness of man.

In that sense, Pelagius still stalks the hallways of government, higher education, and the mainstream media. Most foreign policy disasters are connected to the naïve assumption that people are basically good. Welfare programs flounder because of beneficiaries who prefer to extort the system rather than behave ethically. Psychologists continue to exclude the possibility of a sinful nature from their study of the human experience. Behavioral experts relentlessly try to solve bad behavior with better education. And society at large is now burdened with a younger generation that identifies as victims rather than perpetrators, refusing to be held accountable for its actions.

The realm of parenting has also been poisoned by the belief that people are basically good. Our children *should* be the greatest empirical proof of original sin. After all, we don't have to teach them to lie, throw tantrums, or be selfish—they are all born with ready-made expertise in sinning. But like Anne Frank, many parents prefer to believe in the inherent goodness of their kids despite the massive weight of evidence to the contrary. Consequently, appeasement and medication have usurped the role of discipline in far too many families.

We get an even harsher dose of reality when we honestly assess our *own lives*. God has written His morality upon our hearts and consciences (Romans 2:14–15)—we instinctively know right from wrong. But we live with the natural desire to rebel against what we know is right. Those who choose to deny this truth end up affirming it through their denial anyway.

Clearly then, the Pelagian lie is incredibly pervasive in the world. Churches thus carry an enormous responsibility to repudiate it. Unfortunately, that isn't happening. The belief

that people are basically good is now a thriving heresy in some of the most popular churches in America.

Pelagian Churches

Bethel Church in Redding, California, is a prime example. Pastored by Bill Johnson, Bethel is perhaps the most influential charismatic church in the country. They are most widely known for their Jesus Culture music, testimonies of trips to heaven, gold dust “miracles” pouring out of their ventilation system, and many other bizarre claims and antics. But undergirding these strange recent phenomena is well-worn ancient heresy.

Eric Johnson (the son of Bill Johnson) is one of the pastors on staff at Bethel. In his sermon “The Joy of Consecration,” [1] he argues:

You’re not born evil. It’s amazing how many teachings and theologies start with that thought. Anytime you start with that you will create a controlling, manipulative environment.

Every government, every structure . . . every system fundamentally and theologically must start with the concept and the idea that people are good and they mean to do good. Even if they are not saved, we have to start from that premise.

Like a pope speaking ex cathedra, Eric Johnson usurps the clear teaching of Scripture and insists on redefining it according to his own theological preferences. And just to make himself clear, Johnson explicitly restates his Pelagian worldview later in the sermon:

We have to adjust our theology. We have to adjust our fundamental stance when we look at people. . . . We have to adjust our perspective of people. We have to realize that people are good and they mean to do good.

Johnson's error is nothing short of catastrophic. In one fell swoop he has made repentance redundant in the lives of his massive audience and completely obliterated the reason for the gospel. His false gospel will damn those who embrace it.

Man Is Totally Depraved

The undeniable truth is that man is totally depraved. That doesn't mean unregenerate sinners are incapable of doing anything good or noble. But it does mean that sin has permeated every part of their nature, and even the seemingly good things they do are ultimately done with sinful motives.

Keeping one's head in the proverbial sand is the only way to ignore the doctrine of total depravity. It is the reason we have arguments, assaults, and wars. It's the reason we need governments, police, and the military. It's the reason for locks on our doors, walls around our prisons, and armed guards at our borders.

And the wrong things people do aren't because of ignorance or a lack of education. Sinners deliberately rebel against what they know to be true about God and His righteousness. As the Lord Jesus Himself said,

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

As far back as Genesis 6—prior to God's judgment in the Flood—the depravity of man's sinful heart was obvious. "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

The apostle Paul delivered a powerful reminder to all believers that the primary struggle for unbelievers is never the lack of evidence for God, but their love for every form of defiance against Him.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:18–20)

Atheism, Darwinism, hedonism, and victimhood are all excuses for the fact that people love sin, hate God, and refuse to be held accountable for their guilt. And that's because all people are sinners by nature—a nature passed on to every descendant of Adam after the Fall (Genesis 3). “Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). “Through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners” (Romans 5:19).

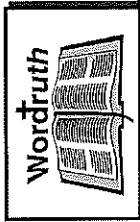
In his book *The Gospel According to Paul*, John MacArthur explains the imputation of Adam's sin to all of his descendants:

All humanity was plunged into this guilty condition because of Adam's sin. “For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners” (Romans 5:19). This is the doctrine of *original sin*, a truth that is expounded by Paul in Romans 5:12–19. . . . We prove our willing complicity in Adam's rebellion every time we sin. And since no one other than Jesus has ever lived a sinless life, no one is really in a position to doubt the doctrine of original sin, much less deem it unjust. [2]

We need to abandon the lie that people are basically good, and instead embrace the truth that man is totally depraved. Understandably, it is an unsavory subject for most people. And without the gospel, it is only bad news.

But without the bad news, the gospel becomes strange and nonsensical. The cross becomes confusing. And there is no good reason for Christ to die as a sin-bearing substitute. If mankind is basically good, the gospel is an unnecessary farce, and the death of Christ a tragic waste. Choosing to deny the imputation of Adam's sin demands that you also reject the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of His righteousness to our account. It cuts you off from the Savior, and any hope of salvation.

Ultimately, the difference between believing the soothing lie of Pelagius or the harsh truth of depravity is the doctrinal divide that separates heaven from hell.



Your Way or God's Way ... Your Choice

Life's greatest victories and worst failures are often the result of personal choices, the crossroad catalysts of life. In making these momentous decisions, you reveal where your trust is placed . . . either in yourself or in God.

According to the Bible, there are significant consequences that result from choosing your own way instead of God's way. For example, you are guaranteed foolishness when you choose your own natural wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:19), which inherently gravitates toward pride, coveting, and gratifying fleshly desires (1 John 2:16). You can expect deficiency when you ignore God's ways and thoughts and, instead, choose your own perspective (Isaiah 55:8-9).

On the other hand, you can have God's wisdom in any of life's challenges (James 3:13-18). Divine wisdom is available through Jesus (Colossians 2:3), the Bible (Psalm 19:7), the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13), and prayer (James 1:5). Because these sources are Truth, they will never contradict each other.

Since it is beneficial to follow God instead of self-oriented desires, why would anyone choose one's own way over God's way? Basically, this occurs because of two reasons . . . spiritual ignorance and willful disobedience.

Spiritual ignorance dominates the life of an unbeliever, a person who does not have eternal life through faith in Christ. An unbeliever is unable to understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14), so following self-oriented desires is a way of life .

A believer, on the other hand, has God's sources of Divine Truth (Jesus, Holy Spirit, and the Bible) and, as a result, can know God's ways. Having these Sources available and following them, however, are two different things. A believer may choose to disregard God's truth for a time, choosing to follow one's own way instead of following the Lord. When this occurs, one of the consequences is incomplete knowledge, or spiritual ignorance. In this condition, a believer will remain stunted spiritually unless God's truth is diligently sought and obeyed.

The second reason that a believer chooses one's own way instead of God's way is willful disobedience. A believer who is aware of scriptural truth, but has a greater desire to live by feelings instead of by faith, will choose to sin (James 4:17). For a disobedient believer, knowing what to do in order to follow God's way is not the issue . . . doing it certainly is.

Every person, at one time or another, has been ignorant of God's ways or has willfully disobeyed God's Truth. By God's abundant grace and mercy, however, one can change by confessing one's own sinfulness in order to follow the Lord. This can happen for an unbeliever (Romans 10:9-10) to begin a life of faith or a believer (1 John 1:9), to continue in a walk of faith. In every situation of life, God's way is designed to bring Him glory and bring His followers the ultimate good (Romans 8:28). Will you choose your way or God's way? It's your choice.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1 Corinthians 3:19, For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness"

1 John 2:16, For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Isaiah 55:8-9, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

James 3:13-18, Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Colossians 2:3, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Psalms 19:7, The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple—

1 Corinthians 2:13, And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

James 1:5, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

1 Corinthians 2:14, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

James 4:17, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Romans 10:9-10, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 8:28, And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

The Dangers of an Oversimplified Gospel

by John MacArthur

What needs to be conveyed to unbelievers in order that they might understand and embrace salvation?

Many of the modern trends in evangelism have tended to take a minimalist approach to the question. Unfortunately, the legitimate desire to express the heart of the gospel clearly has given way to a less wholesome endeavor. It is a campaign to distill the essentials of the message to the barest possible terms.

The glorious gospel of Christ—that which Paul called “the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16)—includes all the truth about Christ. But American evangelicalism tends to regard the gospel as a “plan of salvation.” We have reduced the message to a list of facts stated in the fewest possible words—and getting fewer all the time: “Six Steps to Peace with God”; “Five Things God Wants You to Know”; “Four Spiritual Laws”; “Three Truths You Can’t Live Without”; “Two Ways to Live”; or “One Way to Heaven.” (This is not a critique of these specific presentations, but is merely an observation that we seem eager to produce and use “plans of salvation” that enumerate and consolidate the gospel message.)

Another trend, equally dangerous, is to reduce evangelism to a memorized script. Often, evangelism training consists of having Christians memorize a series of questions, anticipating that each question will fall into one of a few categories that has a preplanned response.

But the gospel is not a message that can be capsulated, abridged, shrink-wrapped, and then offered as a generic remedy for every kind of sinner. Ignorant sinners need to be instructed about who God is and why He has the right to demand their obedience. Self-righteous sinners need to have their sin exposed by the demands of God’s law. Careless sinners need to be confronted with the reality of God’s impending judgment. Fearful sinners need to hear that God in His mercy has provided a way of deliverance. All sinners must understand how utterly holy God is. They must comprehend the basic truths of Christ’s sacrificial death and the triumph of His resurrection. They need to be confronted with God’s demand that they turn from their sin to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior.

Furthermore, in all the instances where Jesus and the apostles evangelized—whether they were ministering to individuals or crowds—there are no two incidents where they presented the message in precisely the same terminology. They knew that salvation is a sovereign work of God. Their role was to preach truth; the Holy Spirit would apply it individually to the hearts of His elect.


The form of the message will vary in each case. But the content must always drive home the reality of God's holiness and the sinner's helpless condition. Then it points sinners to Christ as a sovereign but merciful Lord who has purchased full atonement for all who will turn to Him in faith.

Christians today are often cautioned about the danger of saying too much to the lost. Certain spiritual issues are labeled taboo when speaking to the unconverted: God's law, Christ's lordship, repentance, surrender, obedience, judgment, and hell. Such things are not to be mentioned, lest we "add something to the offer of God's free gift."

Worse still, there are some who take this reductionist evangelism to its furthest extreme. Wrongly applying the Reformed doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone), they make faith the only permissible topic when speaking to non-Christians about their duty before God. Then they render faith utterly meaningless by stripping it of everything but its notional aspects. This, some believe, preserves the purity of the gospel. But what it has actually done is undercut the power of the message of salvation.

It has also populated the church with false converts whose faith is counterfeit and whose hope hangs on a bogus promise. Numbly saying they "accept Christ as Savior," they brazenly reject His rightful claim as Lord. Paying Him glib lip service, they utterly scorn Him with their hearts (Mark 7:6). Casually affirming Him with their mouths, they deliberately deny Him with their deeds (Titus 1:16). Addressing Him superficially as "Lord, Lord," they stubbornly decline to do His bidding (Luke 6:46). Such people fit the tragic description of the "many" in Matthew 7:22-23 who will one day be stunned to hear Him say, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

If there is no simple description for an evangelistic conversation, then what should the evangelist say when proclaiming the gospel? What are the points we need to make clear if we are to articulate the gospel as precisely as possible? In the days ahead we're going to lay out the basic, yet fundamental, building blocks for faithfully communicating the way of salvation to a sinner: the holiness of God, the depravity of man, the work of Christ, and God's demands upon the sinner. These are truths we need to embrace as Christ's people and master as His witnesses.



(Adapted from *The John MacArthur Pastor's Library: Evangelism.*)

Evangelism in Counseling Visual Theology

Illustrative – Eph.2:8

1. Answer the following question: “*What are the steps we must take to have to go to Heaven?*”

LIST STEPS AS EXPRESSED:

1.

2. Share Ephesians 2:8-9 (have them read it), then Illustrate it below.

3.

4.

Defined: (Grace is all a gift of God) (Faith = Trust) (Works = our efforts)

5.

We are saved by GRACE -----→through FAITH, and NOT of our WORKS

6.

7.

8.

9. There are only two ways to attempt salvation; Grace through Faith, or
Works through our efforts.

4. Place a “W” next to every work they gave or at “F” next to every faith they

expressed. (Have the Counselee call that out as you verbalize their list.)

5. At the conclusion of a works-based salvation, you should say something like this...

“According to your own admission, you are working your way to Heaven and

you are probably not saved.” (Wait for conviction and remorse before proceeding)

PROOF OF SALVATION by John MacArthur

Genuine Faith

Note: The following article comes from Grace to You, the teaching ministry of John MacArthur.
What kind of things do and do not prove the genuineness of saving faith?

Churches today are filled with people who hold to a faith that does not save. James referred to this as a "dead faith"-meaning a mere empty profession (James 2:17, 20, 26). Paul wrote to the people in the church at Corinth to test or examine themselves to see if they were truly in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). As important as it was in Paul's day, how much more important it is for people in our churches today to put their faith to the test and to make sure they have not been deceived.

But where do we start? By what criteria do we determine true from empty faith? What are the distinguishing marks of genuine saving faith? Surprisingly, there are a number of popular standards or tests that really don't prove the genuineness of one's faith one way or the other. So before we look at the tests that prove genuine faith, let's take a look at some popular tests that neither prove nor disprove the genuineness of one's faith. Here is a list of seven conditions that do not prove or disprove the genuineness of saving faith. One can be a Christian and possess these things or one may not be a Christian at all and still possess them. While they don't prove or disprove one's faith, they're important to know and understand so you will not be deceived.

Seven conditions that do not prove or disprove genuine saving faith.

1. Visible Morality

There are some people who just seem to be good people. They can be religious, moral, honest, and forthright [trustworthy] in their dealings with people. They may seem to be grateful, loving, kind and tenderhearted toward others. They have visible virtues and an external morality. The Pharisees of Jesus day rested on visible morality for their hope and yet some of Christ's harshest words were directed at them for this very thing. Many who possess visible morality know nothing of sincere love for God. Whatever good works they appear to possess, they know nothing of serving the true God and living for His glory. Whatever the person does or leaves undone does not involve God. They're honest in their dealings with everyone-but God. They won't rob anyone-but God. They're thankful and loyal to everyone-but God. They speak contemptuously and reproachfully of no one-but God. They have good relationships with everyone-but God. They are like the rich young ruler who said, "All these things [conditions] have I kept, what do I lack?" Their focus is on visible morality, but that visible morality doesn't necessarily mean salvation. Jesus told one of the Pharisees "you must be born again" (John 3:6), not "you must put on an external morality." People can "clean up their act" by reformation rather than regeneration-so reformation in itself is not a mark of saving faith.

2. Intellectual Knowledge

Another condition that can be misleading is intellectual knowledge. People can possess an intellectual understanding and knowledge of the truth and yet not be saved. While the knowledge of the truth is necessary for salvation, and visible morality is a fruit of salvation, neither of these conditions by themselves translate into true saving faith. People can know all about God, all about Jesus, who He was, that He came into the world, that He died on the cross, that He rose again, that He's coming again, and even many details about the life of Christ-and still turn their backs on Him.

That's what the writer of Hebrews was warning against in Hebrews 6:4-6. There were people in the church who knew all about God and understood gospel truths. They even had a measure of experience with gospel truth. They'd seen the ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in people's lives-and yet knowing all of that, they stood in grave danger of turning away and rejecting Christ.

In Hebrews 10 the writer warns this kind of man that he is treading underfoot the blood of Christ by not believing what he knows to be true. There are many people who know the Scriptures but are on their way to hell! A man cannot be saved without the knowledge of the truth, but possessing that knowledge alone does not save.

3. Religious Involvement

Religious involvement is not necessarily a proof of true faith. According to Paul there are people who possess an outward form (a mere external appearance) of godliness but who have denied the power of it. They have an empty form of religion. Jesus illustrated this when He told of the virgins in Matthew 25. They waited and waited and waited for the coming of the bridegroom, who is Christ. And even though they waited a long time, when He came they didn't go in. They had everything together except the oil in their lamps. That which was most necessary was missing. The oil is probably emblematic of the new life; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They weren't regenerate. They had religious involvement but were not regenerate. A person can be visibly moral, know the truth, be religiously involved, and yet not possess genuine saving faith.

4. Active Ministry

It is possible to have an active and even a public ministry, and yet not possess genuine saving faith. Balaam was a prophet who turned out to be false (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). Saul of Tarsus (later becoming the apostle Paul) thought he was serving God by killing Christians. Judas was a public preacher and one of the twelve disciples of Christ-but he was an apostate. In Matthew 7:22-23 Jesus said, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Those whom Jesus spoke of had been involved in active and public ministry-but Jesus said he never knew them. Sobering words indeed.

5. Conviction of Sin

By itself, even conviction of sin is not a proof of salvation. Our world is filled with guilt-ridden people. Many even feel badly about their sin. Felix trembled under conviction at the preaching of the apostle Paul, but he never left his idols or turned to God (Acts 24:24-6). The Holy Spirit works to convict men of sin, righteousness, and of judgment, but many do not respond in true repentance. Some may confess their sins and even abandon the sins they feel guilty about. They say, "I don't like living this way. I want to change." They may amend their ways and yet fall short of genuine saving faith. That's external reformation, not internal regeneration. No degree of conviction of sin is conclusive evidence of saving faith. Even the demons are convicted of their sins-that's why they tremble-but they are not saved.

6. The Feeling of Assurance

Feeling like you are saved is no guarantee you are indeed saved. Someone may say, "Well, I must be a Christian because I feel that I am. I think I am one." But that is faulty reasoning. If thinking one is a Christian is what makes one a Christian, then no one could be deceived. And then, by definition, it would not be possible to be a deceived non-Christian, and that doesn't square with the whole point of Satan's deception. He wants people who are not truly saved to think they are. Satan has deceived multiplied millions of religious people into thinking they are saved even though they are not. They may say to themselves, "God won't condemn me. I feel good about myself. I have assurance. I'm ok." But that doesn't necessarily mean a thing.

7. A Time of Decision

So often people say things like: "Well, I know I'm a Christian, because I remember when I signed the card," or "I remember when I prayed a prayer," or "I remember when I walked the aisle" or "went forward in church." A person may remember exactly when it happened and where they were when "it" happened, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. Our salvation is not verified by a past moment. Many people have prayed prayers, gone forward in church services, signed cards, gone into prayer rooms, been baptized, and joined churches without ever experiencing genuine saving faith.

These are seven common conditions or tests that don't necessarily prove or disprove the existence of saving faith. What then are the marks of genuine saving faith? Are there some reliable tests from the Word of God that enable us to know for certain whether one's faith is real? Thankfully there are at least nine biblical criteria for examining the genuineness of saving faith.

Nine conditions that proves genuine saving faith.

1. Love for God

First of all a deep and abiding love for God is one of the supreme evidences of genuine saving faith. This gets to the heart of the issue. Romans 8:7 says **"the carnal mind is enmity [hostility, hatred] against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."** Thus, if a man's heart is at enmity with God there is no basis for assuming the presence of saving faith. Those who are truly saved love God, but those who are not truly saved resent God and His sovereignty. Internally they are rebellious toward God and His plan for their life. But the regenerate person is set to love the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. His delight is in the infinite excellencies of God. God is the first and highest affection of his renewed soul. God has become his chief happiness and source of satisfaction. He seeks after God and thirsts for the living God.

By the way, we must be careful to distinguish the difference between that kind of true love for God that seeks His glory from the kind of self-serving love that sees God primarily as a means of personal fulfillment and gain. True saving faith doesn't believe in Christ so that Christ will make one happy. The heart that truly loves God desires to please God and glorify Him. Jesus taught that if someone loved their father and mother more than they loved Christ, they were not worthy of Him. In Matthew 10:37-39 Jesus put it like this: **"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."** (Matthew 10:37-39)

The question then is this: Do you love God? Do you love His nature? Do you love His glory? Do you love His name? Do you love His kingdom? Do you love His holiness? Do you love His will? Is your heart lifted when you sing His praises-because you love Him? Supreme love for God is decisive evidence of true faith.

2. Repentance from Sin

A proper love for God necessarily involves a hatred for sin that leads to repentance. That should be obvious. Who wouldn't understand that? If we truly love someone we seek their best interests. Their well being is our greatest concern. If a man says to his wife, "I love you but I could care less what happens to you," we would rightly question his love for her. True love seeks the highest good of its object. If we say that we love God, then we will hate whatever is an offense to Him. Sin blasphemes God. Sin curses God. Sin seeks to destroy God's work and His kingdom. Sin killed His Son. So when someone says, "I love God, but I tolerate sin," then there is every reason to question the genuineness of his love for God. One cannot love God without hating that which is set to destroy Him. True love for God will therefore manifest itself through confession and repentance. The man who loves God will be grieved over his sin and will want to confess it to God and forsake it.

In examining our faith we should ask: "Do I have a settled conviction concerning the evil of all sin? Does sin appear to me as the evil and bitter thing that it really is? Does conviction of sin increase in me as I walk with Christ? Do I hate it not primarily because it is ruinous to my own soul or because it is an offense to the God I love? Does the sin itself grieve me or am I only grieved over the consequences of my sin. What grieves me most-my misfortune or my sin? Do my sins appear to me as many, frequent and aggravated? Do I find myself grieved over my own sin more than the sins of others?" Genuine saving faith loves God and hates what He hates, which is sin. That attitude results in real repentance.

3. Genuine Humility

Saving faith is manifested through genuine humility. Jesus said blessed are those who are poor in spirit, and those who mourn [their sin], and those who are meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:3-6)-all marks of humility. In Matthew 18 Jesus said that **"unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 18:3). True saving faith comes as a little child-humble and dependent. It is not the man who is full of himself who is saved, but the man who denies himself, takes up his cross daily and follows Christ (Matthew 16:24).

In the Old Testament we see that the Lord receives those who come with a broken and contrite spirit (Psalm 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2). James wrote: **"God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble"** (James 4:6). We must come as the prodigal son, broken and humble. Remember what he said to his father- **"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son"** (Luke 15:21). Those possessing genuine saving faith do not come boastfully to God with their religious achievements or spiritual accomplishments in hand. They come empty-handed in genuine humility.

4. Devotion to God's Glory

True saving faith is manifested by a devotion to God's glory. Whatever believers do, whether they eat or drink, their desire is to see God glorified. Christians do what they do because they want to bring glory to God. Without question Christians fail in each of these areas, but the direction of a Christian's life is to love God, hate sin, to live in humility and self-denial, recognizing his unworthiness and being devoted to the glory of God. It is not the perfection of one's life but the direction of a life that provides evidence of regeneration.

5. Continual Prayer

Humble, submissive, believing prayer is mark of true faith. We cry "Abba, Father" because the Spirit within us prompts that cry. Jonathan Edwards once preached a sermon titled, "Hypocrites are Deficient in the Duty of Secret Prayer." It's true. Hypocrites may pray publicly, because that's what hypocrites want to do. Their desire is to impress people-but they are deficient in the duty of secret prayer. True believers have a personal and private prayer life with God. They regularly seek communion with God through prayer.

6. Selfless Love

An important characteristic of genuine saving faith is selfless love. James wrote, **"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well"** (James 2:8). John wrote, **"Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"** (1 John 3:17). If you love God you will not only hate what offends Him, but you will love those whom He loves. **"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death"** (1 John 3:14). And why do we love God and love others? Because this is the believer's response to His love for us. **"We love Him because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). Jesus said we will know that we are His disciples by our love for each other (John 13:35).

7. Separation from the World

Positively, believers are marked by a love for God and for fellow believers. Negatively, the Christian is characterized by the absence of love for the world. True believers are not those who are ruled by worldly affections, but their affection and devotion is toward God and His kingdom.

In 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul wrote that **"we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."** In 1 John 2:15 we read: **"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."** (1 John 2:15). True saving faith separates one from the pursuits of this world--not perfectly, as we all fail in these areas, but the direction of a believer's life is upward. He feels the pull of heaven on his soul. Christians are those whom God has delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of His Son. The believer is marked by the absence of love or enslavement to the satanically controlled world system (Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:13; James 4:4).

8. Spiritual Growth

True believers grow. When God begins a true work of salvation in a person, He finishes and perfects that work. Paul expressed that assurance when he wrote in Philippians 1:6, **"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."**

If you are a true Christian, you are going to be growing-and that means you are going to be more and more like Christ. Life produces itself. If you're alive you are going to grow, there's no other way. You'll improve. You'll increase. The Spirit will move you from one level of glory to the next. So examine your life. Do you see spiritual growth? Do you see the decreasing frequency of sin? Is there an increasing pattern of righteousness and devotion to God?

9. Obedience

Obedient living is not one of the optional tracks given for believers to walk. All true believers are called to a life of obedience. Jesus taught that every branch that abides in Him bears fruit (John 15:1-8). Paul wrote that believers **"are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"** (Ephesians 2:10). That speaks of obedience. We are saved unto the obedience of faith (see 1 Peter 1:2).

How can we know our faith is genuine? Examine your life in the light of God's Word. Do you see these characteristics in your life? Do you have a love for God, hatred for sin, humility, devotion to God's glory, a pattern of personal and private prayer, selfless love, separation from the world, the evidence of spiritual growth and obedience? These are the real evidences of genuine saving faith.

Proclaiming & Living in light of the Gospel¹

Stuart W. Scott

May God bless you as you seek to be faithful in presenting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in its biblical context.

I. Understanding God—Part 1: A Few Specific Attributes

- A. There is no one like the one true God—Deut. 4:35; Ps. 86:8, 10; Isa. 40:18, 25–26; 44:6–7a; 46:5, 9.
- B. He is triune (three distinct persons, of one substance, different in function)—Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:1, 14; 5:18; 10:30; Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 2:9; 1 Thess. 1:2–5; 1 Peter 1:2.
- C. He is the creator, and he is personal —Gen. 1:26; Ps. 95:6–7; 100:3; Isa. 44:24; John 16:14; 17:1, 4, 22–26; Acts 17:24–25; Col. 1:16–17 (“through him and for him.”)
- D. He is almighty and sovereign—Deut. 32:39; Ps. 24:1–2; 47:7–8; 103:19; 135:5–6; Isa. 46:9–11; Rom. 1:20; 8:28–29.
- E. He is eternal—Isa. 57:15; Col. 1:16–20; Jude 24–25.
- F. He is righteous and holy—1 Sam. 2:2; Ps. 5:4; Isa. 6:3; Hab. 1:13; 1 Peter 1:14–16; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 4:8.
- G. He is just—Deut. 32:4; Ps. 9:7–8; 89:14; Acts 17:31; Gal. 3:10; 1 Peter 3:18.

II. Understanding Man as Originally Created before the Fall

- A. Created in God’s image to worship God, delight in him, reflect his glory, live for his advantage, and proclaim his majesty—Deut. 10:12–13; Ps. 16:11; 73:25–26; Isa. 43:6–7; Col. 1:16–18.
- B. Created to be loved, cared for, blessed by, taught by, satisfied by, and comforted by God, and to walk with him—Gen. 1:27–30; 2:15–17; 3:8; Ex. 6:7; Deut. 4:20; Ps. 100:3; 107:8–9; Isa. 30:18; 43:4; Ezek. 14:11; John 4:24; 14:22–23; Titus 2:14.

III. Understanding Sin—Breaking or Not Keeping God’s Law

- A. Sin began with Satan in heaven—Gen. 3:1–15; Isa. 14:12; Luke 10:18; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6.
- B. Sin on earth began with Adam and has been passed to all mankind—Gen. 2:17–18; 3:1–7; Rom. 3:23; 5:12, 18.

¹¹ This is used by permission. The outline is an appendix in the book by Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent* (P&R Publishers, 2010). No duplication can be made without permission.

- C. Jesus' death: paid in full for our sin; removed God's wrath; imputed Christ's righteousness for believers—Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13–14; 1 Peter 3:18.
- D. God the Father was satisfied with Christ's death—Isa. 53:10–11.
- E. Jesus' resurrection: power over death and hope to come—1 Cor. 15:3–4; 1 Peter 1:3–5.
- F. God offers reconciliation by grace through faith in Christ—Acts 17:30–31; Rom. 6:23; 10:13; 2 Cor. 5:18–19; Eph. 2:13.
- G. God declares believers to be justified through Christ—Rom. 3:24–26.
- H. God offers forgiveness of sins and heaven to believers only through Jesus—John 14:1–6; Acts 4:12; Col. 2:13.
- I. God seeks worshipers and a people for himself through Jesus—Isa. 45:22; John 4:23; Eph. 1:4.

VII. Understanding Saving Faith (“believing”)—John 1:12; 3:16

- A. The knowledge (content) of the gospel, with Jesus as the object of faith—John 17:3; Heb. 6:4; 10:26; James 2:19.
- B. The agreement (intellectual assent) with the gospel facts—Matt. 13:20; John 6:44, 65; Acts 26; Heb. 6:4; James 2:19.
- C. A personal transfer of reliance from oneself to Jesus alone for justification—Isa. 55:6–7; Matt. 13:23; Luke 14:25–33; John 14:21; Acts 3:19; 11:18; 2 Cor. 5:15; Phil. 3:9; 1 Thess. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:25–26). This involves godly sorrow and repentance for all sin, an about-face and an all-out pursuit to love, submit to, fully trust in, and follow after the Lord Jesus Christ in obedience to his revealed will, by the Spirit's enablement (grace, Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). This saving faith will always result in good works (Eph. 2:10; James 2:26). Faith and repentance are the only evidences that a man has a new heart: turning from sin to Christ reveals a new heart; failure to turn from sin and to Christ reveals an old heart.

VIII. Coming to Christ

- A. Not in the wrong way—Matt. 7:21; 19:16–22.
 - 1. Doing God a favor that is deserving of his grace—“I’m so special.”
 - 2. Only for fire insurance (to avoid hell at death)—“I don’t want to suffer forever.”
 - 3. Adding a good and helpful thing to my life—“Why not, it can’t hurt?”
 - 4. So I can go to heaven with my family—“I want to see and be with them.”
 - 5. Wanting to become a better person—“I’m already good and this can make me better.”
 - 6. So Jesus can give me what I want, but I’m still living for my advantage.
 - 7. Wanting to be saved “in my sin” and not “from my sin.”
- B. But in the right way

D. They will never experience what a life of worshiping God is like—Matt. 19:16–22; John 10:10.

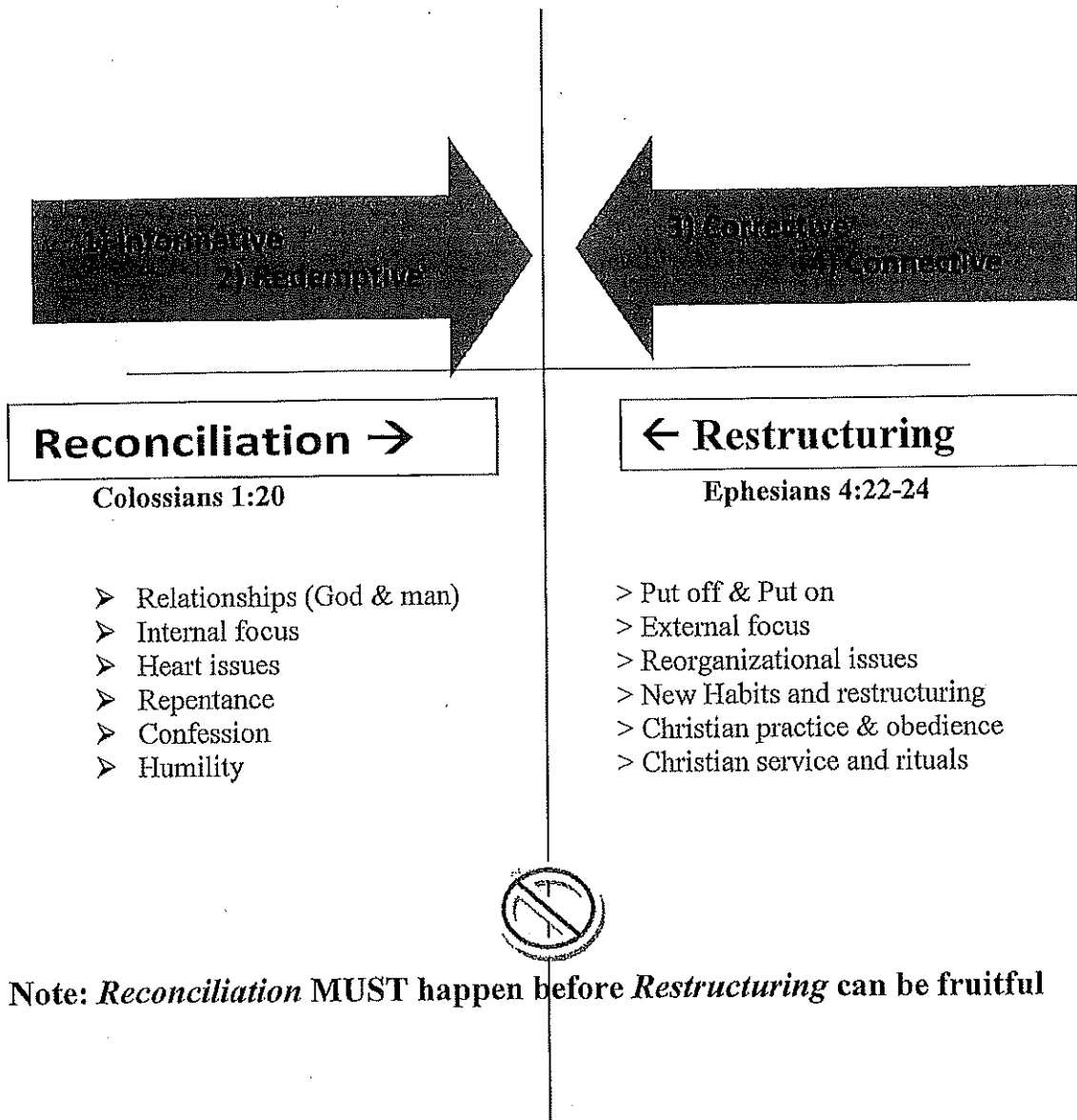
E. They will be separated from God and his grace forever—Rev. 20:12–15; 21:8.

You may download the PowerPoint presentation from www.oneeightycounseling.com

Some helpful resources:

- *A Sure Guide to Heaven*, Joseph Alleine
- *Ultimate Questions*, John Blanchard
- *Right with God*, John Blanchard
- *Pursuing God*, Jim Elliff
- *Which Way to God*, Peter Jeffery
- *The Gospel for Children*, John Leuzarder
- *The Gospel according to Jesus*, John MacArthur
- *Hard to Believe*, John MacArthur
- *Bad Record, Bad Heart*, Al Martin
- *The Almost Christian Discovered*, Matthew Mead
- *What Should We Think of "The Carnal Christian"?*, Ernest C. Reisinger
- *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Henry Scougal

Biblical Counseling Simplified



Counseling Quick Guide – Counselor's AGENDA

(By Dr. Mark Hager, Timberlake Biblical Counseling and Training Center)

1. Collect data and information

- Your counseling reports should reflect most of the data gathered
- Ask lots of questions before instructing and teaching
- Don't forget to determine or assess their spiritual life and relationship with the Savior
- ASK FOR A COMMITMENT! Are you willing to invest in 8 weeks or 12 weeks to resolve this? Lay out expectations early (homework, counseling time, crisis issues, etc.)

2. Develop a list of issues

- What are the issues that need correction and repentance?
- Prioritize the list of issues
- Think in terms of put off and put on

3. Isolate the problem

- What are the reconciliations issues that will facilitate good restructuring?
- Use the Word of God and good homework to focus on the main problem.

4. Counsel the isolated problem (one at a time)

- Resist "Talk therapy" by being biblical and objective in teaching and role playing
- Think in terms of 'put off and put on' and allow them time to use logs, homework and projects to correct each problem.
- Be prepared for counseling each week. Do YOUR homework before the session.
- Set your agenda in the session. If you don't, they will. Stay on track. You can't fix their issues or correct a problem in one 2 to 3 hour session. Small bites with good homework is better.
- Don't fear confronting sin and calling for repentance. Confrontation, confession, and repentance are at the core of counseling nouthetically.
- Keep good notes: This is the most violated area of counseling. This usually is where liability issues are most prevalent with counseling problem-centered and psychologized people.
- Rethink the list of issues and problems. Has the priority changed? Is their progress?

5. Use good homework

- You can call it what you want, but this is where change usually happens.
- Be creative with homework but be very objective and focused on the biblical solution
- No busy work. Try to keep the homework focused on addressing the issues at hand
- Evaluate homework at the next session. This validates the importance of homework.
- Keep good notes. This is the most violated area of counseling and evoking the most liability for counselors.
- Don't forget to teach them how and what to pray. (not just a list mentality or it's all about me)

6. Connect them.

- Use an advocate when possible. You assign them an advocate or allow them to find someone in their church that will help them with homework and accountability
- Connect them to church. Are you sure they are going to church? What are they learning? Are they being disciplined by their church (not just a program)?

7. Encourage them.

- Always end the sessions with hope and prayer. Read them something from scripture and encourage them on their progress or God's faithfulness in the process.
- Humility breeds grace!

Counseling lessons to incorporate:

- Teach biblical thinking (Phil.4:8; Rom.12:1-2; 1Cor.2:16; Col.3:2; 2Cor.10:4-5)
- Teach "Self-Talk" with Truth (Eph.4:15; Phil.4:8; Eph.4:20-24; Matt.4:4;
- Use biblical words & terminology (1Cor.1, 2)

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The Apparent Paradox of Sanctification

Scripture: Philippians 2:12–13

Code: B140702

How do you overcome sin and live the Christian life? Is defeating sin something God does in you, or do you defeat it by obeying the commands of Scripture? In other words, is the Christian life an exercise in *passive* trust or *active* obedience? Is it all God's doing, all the believer's doing, or a combination of both? Those questions are as old as the church, and the varied answers have spawned movements and denominations.

This is not an unusual issue when dealing with spiritual truth. Many doctrines involve seeming paradoxes. For example, Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man; and while Scripture was written by human authors, God wrote every word. The gospel is offered to the whole world, yet applied only to the elect. God eternally secures believers' salvation, yet they are commanded to persevere.

Christians who try to reconcile every doctrine in a *humanly* rational way are inevitably drawn to extremes. Seeking to remove all mystery and paradox, they emphasize one truth or aspect of God's Word at the expense of another which seems to contradict it. This is precisely how many Christians have handled the doctrine of sanctification. One view of sanctification emphasizes God's role to the virtual exclusion of the believer's effort. This is often referred to as *quietism*. The opposite extreme is called *pietism*.

The quietist sees believers as passive in sanctification. A common maxim is, "Let go and let God." Another is, "I can't; God can." Quietism tends to be mystical and subjective, focusing on personal feelings and experiences. A person who is utterly submitted to and dependent on God, they say, will be divinely protected from sin and led into faithful living. Trying to strive against sin or discipline oneself to produce good works is considered not only futile but unspiritual and counterproductive.

One champion of this view was the devout Quaker Hannah Whitall Smith, whose book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* has been read by millions. In it she writes,

What *can* be said about man's part in this great work but that he must continually surrender himself and continually trust? But when we come to God's side of the question, what is there that may not be said as to the manifold ways, in which He accomplishes the work entrusted to Him? It is here that the growing comes in. The lump of clay could never grow into a beautiful vessel if it stayed in the clay pit for thousands of years; but when it is put into the hands of a skilful potter it grows rapidly, under his fashioning, into the vessel he intends it to be. And in the same way the soul, abandoned to the working of the Heavenly Potter, is made into a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use. (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1952, 32. Italics in original.)

How a Christian can fall into sin is a difficult question for the quietist to answer. They are forced to argue that such a person obviously misunderstands the matter of complete surrender, and has taken himself out of the hands of the heavenly Potter. But that flawed answer brings God's sovereignty into

question—if the Lord is completely in control, how can a believer take *himself* out of God's hands?

Pietists, on the other hand, are typically aggressive in their pursuit of doctrinal and moral purity.

Historically, this movement originated in seventeenth-century Germany as a reaction to the dead orthodoxy of many Protestant churches. To their credit, most pietists place strong emphasis on Bible study, holy living, self-discipline, and practical Christianity. They emphasize such passages as "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1) and "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:17).

Unfortunately, this unbalanced view often leads to an overemphasis on self-effort to the virtual exclusion of dependence on divine power. As you might expect, pietism frequently leads to legalism, moralism, self-righteousness, a judgmental spirit, pride, and hypocrisy.

The quietist says, "Do nothing."

The pietist says, "Do everything."

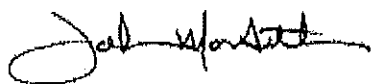
In Philippians 2:12–13, Paul presents the appropriate resolution between the two. He makes no effort to rationally harmonize the believer's part and God's part in sanctification. He is content with the paradox and simply states both truths, saying on the one hand, sanctification is of believers (Philippians 2:12), and on the other hand, it is of God (Philippians 2:13).

The truth is that sanctification is God's work, but He performs it through the diligent self-discipline and righteous pursuits of His people, not in spite of them. God's sovereign work does not absolve believers from the need for obedience; it means their obedience is itself a Spirit-empowered work of God.

Today there is an intense debate within the church about this vital issue. The stakes are high—your view of sanctification informs and directs how you understand your new nature in Christ, how you evangelize others, pursue godliness, govern your heart and mind, how you raise and discipline your children, and how you understand and follow God's commands in Scripture. For pastors and church leaders, your position on this issue will determine how you preach and teach, how you give counsel to troubled hearts, and how you engage in church discipline.

Neither quietism nor pietism represents the biblical path of sanctification. Both are spiritual ditches to steer clear of—they will impede your spiritual progress, and potentially obstruct it altogether.

In the days ahead, we're going to examine the model of sanctification Paul presents in Philippians 2, and explore the dual realities of God's sovereign work and man's responsibility.



(Adapted from *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians.*)

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The Steps of Biblical Sanctification

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:13–14; 1 Peter 2:2

Code: B120913

You probably hear a lot about God's sanctifying work in your life through His Word. But what does that process look like? How do you know if the living truth of Scripture is actually at work in your life? How do you know that God's Word has actually taken root in your life?

To help you understand your own spiritual growth and how God's Word works in your life, I want to highlight the key steps in the process of sanctification with three simple words.

The first is *cognition*. God's pattern for spiritual growth starts with understanding what the Bible says and what it means. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture—if you don't know what it means, you don't have the truth. So the process of spiritual growth starts with understanding what the Bible says.

Many years ago as a child, the importance of knowing and understanding God's Word was impressed upon me. I began to read my Bible repetitiously—day after day, over and over. The further I went, the more connections I was able to draw from book to book. After a few years, I was overwhelmed with the understanding that the Bible is its own interpreter. And you can see that conviction borne out in my teaching to this day.

True sanctification begins with renewing your mind. You must know the truth, plain and simple. There's no premium on ignorance in sanctification. You're not going to get there through some emotional or mystical experience. Spiritual growth won't happen by osmosis—it requires the discipline of constantly putting God's truth in your mind.

Don't confuse childlike faith with childish thinking. There are no shortcuts in sanctification—a lack of biblical knowledge will always retard your spiritual growth. Apart from the truth of Scripture, there simply is no mechanism to restrain your sinful flesh. Legalism can't do it. Pragmatism can't either. The same goes for mysticism and sacramentalism. The only certain method for true spiritual growth starts with absorbing God's eternal truth.

Cognition leads to a second step: *conviction*. As you grow in your understanding of the Bible, you begin to develop convictions out of that understanding. Those convictions or beliefs determine how you live, or at least how you endeavor to live. As God's truth takes over your mind, it produces principles that you do not desire to violate. That's sanctification—it's the transformation of your heart and your will that compels you to obey God's Word.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul talks about the persecution and threats he faced on a daily basis. Every day presented a new danger to him, a new plot to silence his preaching, and a new threat to his life. In verse 11 he says he and his companions were "constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake." There was never a time when he wasn't in danger for preaching God's truth.

Why would he live a life that invited that kind of persecution? He tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:13-14.

But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

"I believed, therefore I spoke." As far as Paul was concerned, he didn't have any other options. His belief in the Lord compelled him to preach the truth, in spite of the dangers he faced. That's conviction.

John Bunyan spent twelve years in jail, but it wasn't the stone and the steel that held him there. He could have gone free if he simply agreed to stop preaching. Instead, he wrote,

"If nothing will do, unless I make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter-shop, unless putting out my own eyes I commit me to the blind to lead me, I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on mine eye-brows rather than thus to violate my faith and principles."¹ John Bunyan, *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*, 3 vols. (London, Blackie and Son, 1862), 2:594.

His convictions wouldn't allow him to compromise, no matter the cost.

When you read the Bible, you're not just trying to know it academically. You're studying the Word of God to develop a set of convictions that rule your life, inform your conscience, and guide you toward greater Christlikeness.

Biblical truth is established in your mind through cognition—that same truth guides your life through conviction.

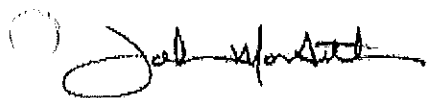
The third step in the biblical process of sanctification is *affection*. Throughout Scripture we see over and over that God's people truly love His truth. As David says in Psalm 19, the Word of God is "more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." Take some time in the next few days and read through Psalm 119, keeping track of all the times David says he loves and delights in the Law of the Lord. Loving God's Word is an inescapable theme throughout the psalms, and it's an attitude that will be reflected in the process of our sanctification.

If you're truly growing spiritually, you don't read the Bible as mere education. You don't read it as a curiosity meant simply for intellectual stimulation. You don't study it just to win an argument. You don't approach it casually or carelessly, and you don't flippantly disregard its truth.

If you're truly growing, you come to Scripture eager for the spiritual nourishment it alone provides. Just as Peter wrote, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow" (1 Peter 2:2). Your affection and hunger for God's truth will be insatiable, and nothing will keep you from it.

But you won't truly love God's Word if it's not already shaping the way you live. And it can't shape the

way you live if you don't know it. That's why any methods or patterns for spiritual growth that don't start with the study of God's truth cannot lead you to true sanctification.



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How do I know what homework to assign?

Without proper homework, counseling will usually fail. There are three fundamental purposes for giving homework assignments. These are:

1. To put into practice commitments and to solidify gains,
2. To correct failures,
3. To gather data.

The third one of these has been discussed elsewhere in this book. I shall simply add here that at any time when a matter is uncertain because of seeming lack of data, assigning homework designed to ferret out more data is always appropriate. Doing so may involve asking the counselee to make lists, to have him interview other persons, to bring in certain records, etc.

The second reason for assigning homework is to correct failed actions. These assignments may require one to go to another, confess his sins and seek forgiveness. They may be designed to have a person redo some assignment that he failed to do properly, and so forth.

Perhaps the most frequently-given assignment is the follow-through assignment in which after a commitment made in counseling (or to another person) the counselee begins to do what the commitment requires. It may also be given in stages, if that is the way that the counselee must learn to do accomplish it. So, one week he begins with an assignment for stage one, the next week he is told "Continue doing what you did last week, but also do this as well." And. So on, until the assignment -- stretched out over several weeks because it is too great to do in one week -- is completed. In continuing the first assignments, while adding further ones, gains from the original assignment are solidified. You must use wisdom in assigning homework, learning how much to give to whom for what purposes. And homework must be given in logical sequence, each assignment growing out of the previous one, when the two are integrally related.

Jay e adams

Homework Assignments

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1986

In all of my counseling sessions, I assigned homework for the counselee. If the counselee did not do homework assignments, the counseling process stops.

Homework assignments serve six purposes, writes Jay Adams,

1. Regular homework assignments set a pattern for expectation of change.
2. Homework clarifies expectations.
3. Homework enables the counselor to do more counseling more rapidly.
4. Homework keeps counsees from becoming dependent upon the counselor.
5. Homework enables both the counselor and the counselee to gauge progress or lack of it.
6. Homework allows the counselor to deal with problems and patterns that develop under controlled current conditions.¹

Homework assignments help the counselor in four ways, writes Jay Adams,

1. Homework assignments help regulate and discipline his counseling.
2. Homework helps to prevent sessions in which nothing but counter-productive talk about the problem occurs.
3. Homework places a demand upon the counselee to think about solutions in terms of biblical patterns of living, it drives them to the Scripture.
4. Homework gives to the counselor a natural, ready-made starting point for the next session that brings continuity to the counseling as a whole.

I have tried to develop homework assignments for not only myself, but to be used by Pastors and Christian counselors to help the others work through problem areas. These homework assignments will also help acquire counseling data and provide opportunities for discussion in the counseling sessions.

¹Jay E. Adams, The Christian Counselor's Manual, pp. 301-320.

²Ibid.



ONGOING JOURNALING DURING COUNSELING



Journal about your most difficult times this week

What you were doing or supposed to be doing	Rate of difficulty, 1 being least and 5 being most	What did you think about God in relationship to what was going on

Idols of the Heart and "Vanity Fair"

by David Powlison

One of the great questions facing Christians in the social sciences and helping professions is this one: How do we legitimately and meaningfully connect the conceptual stock of the Bible and Christian tradition with the technical terminologies and observational riches of the behavioral sciences? Within this perennial question, two particular sub-questions have long intrigued and perplexed me.

One sort of question is a Bible relevancy question. Why is idolatry so important in the Bible? Idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Scriptures.¹ So what? Is the problem of idolatry even relevant today, except on certain mission fields where worshipers still bow to images?

The second kind of question is a counseling question, a "psychology" question. How do we make sense of the myriad significant factors that shape and determine human behavior? In particular, can we ever make satisfying sense of the fact that people are simultaneously inner-directed and socially-shaped?

These questions—and their answers—eventually intertwined. That intertwining has been fruitful both in my personal life and in my counseling of troubled people.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION TO SOCIOLOGICAL CONDITIONING

The relevance of massive chunks of Scripture hangs on our understanding of idolatry. But let me focus the question through a particular verse in the New Testament which long troubled me. The last line of 1 John woos, then commands us: "Beloved children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). In a 105-verse treatise on living in vital fellowship with Jesus, the Son of God, how on earth does that unexpected command merit being the final word? Is it perhaps a scribal emendation? Is it an

¹The "First Great Commandment," like the first two or three commandments from the decalogue, contrasts fidelity to the Lord with infidelities. The open battle with idolatry appears vividly with the golden calf and reappears throughout Judges, Samuel, Kings, the prophets, and Psalms.

awkward *faux pas* by a writer who typically weaves dense and orderly tapestries of meaning with simple, repetitive language? Is it a culture-bound, practical application tacked onto the end of one of the most timeless and heaven-dwelling epistles? Each of these alternatives misses the integrity and power of John's final words.

Instead, John's last line properly leaves us with that most basic question which God continually poses to each human heart. Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight? It is a question bearing on the immediate motivation for one's behavior, thoughts, and feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question. Who or what "rules" my behavior, the Lord or a substitute? The undesirable answers to this question—answers which inform our understanding of the "idolatry" we are to avoid—are most graphically presented in 1 John 2:15-17, 3:7-10, 4:1-6, and 5:19. It is striking how these verses portray a confluence of the "sociological," the "psychological," and the "demonological" perspectives on idolatrous motivation.²

The inwardness of motivation is captured by the inordinate and proud "desires of the flesh" (1 John 2:16), our inertial self-centeredness, the wants, hopes, fears, expectations, "needs" that crowd our hearts. The externality of motivation is captured by "the world" (1 John 2:15-17, 4:1-6), all that invites, models, reinforces, and conditions us into such inertia, teaching us lies. The "demonological" dimension of motivation is the Devil's behavior-determining lordship (1 John 3:7-10, 5:19), standing as a ruler over his kingdom of flesh and world. In contrast, to "keep yourself from idols" is to live with a whole heart of faith in Jesus. It is to be controlled by all that lies behind the address "Beloved children" (see especially 1 John 3:1-3, 4:7-5:12). The alternative to Jesus, the swarm of alternatives, whether approached through the lens of flesh, world, or the Evil One, is idolatry.

An Internal Problem

The notion of idolatry most often emerges in discussions of the worship of actual physical images, the creation of false gods. But the Scriptures develop the

²This confluence of the world, the flesh, and the devil is unsurprising, as it recurs throughout the Scriptures: see Ephesians 2:1-3 and James 4:1-7 for particularly condensed examples.

idolatry theme in at least two major directions pertinent to my discussion here. First, the Bible internalizes the problem. "Idols of the heart" are graphically portrayed in Ezekiel 14:1-8. The worship of tangible idols is, ominously, an expression of a prior heart defection from YHWH your God.³ "Idols of the heart" is only one of many metaphors which move the locus of God's concerns into the human heart, establishing an unbreakable

That idolatries are both generated from within and insinuated from without has provocative implications for contemporary counseling questions.

bond between specifics of heart and specifics of behavior: hands, tongue, and all the other members. The First Great Commandment, to "love God heart, soul, mind, and might," also demonstrates the essential "inwardness" of the law regarding idolatry. The language of love, trust, fear, hope, seeking, serving—terms describing a relationship to the true God—is continually utilized in the Bible to describe our false loves, false trusts, false fears, false hopes, false pursuits, false masters.

If "idolatry" is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then "desires" (*epithumiai*) is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for the same drift.⁴ Both are shorthand for the problem of human beings. The New Testament language of problematic "desires" is a dramatic expansion of the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting (*epithumia*). The tenth commandment is also a command that internalizes the problem of sin, making sin "psychodynamic." It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes it in Romans 7. Interestingly (and unsurprisingly) the New Testament merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires.

³ "Heart" is the most comprehensive biblical term for what determines our life direction, behavior, thoughts, etc. See Proverbs 4:23, Mark 7:21-23, Hebrews 4:12f, etc. The metaphor of "circumcision or uncircumcision of heart" is similar to "idols of the heart," in that an external religious activity is employed to portray the inward motivational dynamics which the outward act reflects.

⁴ See such summary statements by Paul, Peter, John, and James as Galatians 5:16ff; Ephesians 2:3 & 4:22; 1 Peter 2:11 & 4:2; 1 John 2:16; James 1:14f, where *epithumiai* is the catch-all for what is wrong with us.

Idolatry becomes a problem of the heart, a metaphor for human lust, craving, yearning, and greedy demand.⁵

A Social Problem

Second, the Bible treats idolatry as a central feature of the social context, "the world," which shapes and molds us. The world is a "Vanity Fair," as John Bunyan strikingly phrased it in *Pilgrim's Progress*.⁶ Bunyan's entire book, and the Vanity Fair section in particular, can be seen as portraying the interaction of powerful, enticing, and intimidating social shapers of behavior with the self-determining tendencies of Christian's own heart. Will Christian serve the Living God or any of a fluid multitude of idols crafted by his wife, neighbors, acquaintances, enemies, fellow members of idolatrous human society...and, ultimately, his own heart?⁷

That idolatries are both generated from within and insinuated from without has provocative implications for contemporary counseling questions. Of course, the Bible does not tackle our contemporary issues in psychological jargon or using our observational data.⁸ Yet, for example, the Bible lacks the rich particulars of what psychologists today might describe as a "dysfunctional family or marital system" only because it does not put those particular pieces of human behavior and mutual

⁵ Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5.

⁶ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), pages 84-93.

⁷ I'm commenting here only on the impact of "negative" social influences, which both communicate their idols to us and provoke our hearts to produce idols. If you rage at me, I tend to learn from you something about the supreme importance of getting my own way, as well as a few tricks and techniques for accomplishing that. I also instinctively tend to generate compensatory idols in order to retaliate, to defend, or to escape. We tend to return evil for evil.

I could equally comment on the impact of "positive" social influences—both in Bunyan and in life—which communicate faith to us and tend to encourage faith in our hearts and repentance from idolatry. The biblical way to deal with "enemies," returning good for evil, is both learned from others and a product of the heart.

⁸ Sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of psychiatry have described how most symptoms and all diagnostic labels are culture-bound. This is especially true with regard to functional problems (as opposed to the distinctly organic problems) which comprise the vast bulk of human misery and bad behavior. This relativizing observation means that diagnostic labels are not "scientific" and "objectively true." Labels are occasionally useful heuristically if we recognize them for what they are: crude taxonomic orderings of observations. But labels are elements within schemas of value and interpretation. Because diagnostic categories are philosophically and theologically "loaded," a Christian who seeks to be true to the Bible's system of value and interpretation must generate biblical categories and must approach secular categories with extreme skepticism.

influence under the microscope. The "lack" is only in specific application. The biblical categories do comprehend how individuals in a family system—or any other size or kind of social grouping—work and influence one another for good or ill. For example, the life patterns often labeled "codependency" are more precisely and penetratingly understood as instances of "co-idolatry." In the case of a "co-idolatrous relationship," then, two people's typical idol patterns reinforce and compete with each other. They fit together in an uncanny way, creating massively destructive feedback loops.

The classic alcoholic husband and rescuing wife are enslaved within an idol system whose components complement each other all too well. There are many possible configurations to this common pattern of false gods. In one typical configuration, the idol constellation in the husband's use of alcohol might combine a ruling and enslaving love of pleasure, the escapist pursuit of a false savior from the pains and frustrations in his life, playing the angry and self-righteous judge of his wife's clinging and dependent ways, the self-crucifying of his periodic remorse, a trust in man which seeks personal validation through acceptance by his bar companions, and so forth.

The idol pattern in the wife's rescuing behavior might combine playing the martyred savior of her husband and family, playing the proud and self-righteous judge of her husband's iniquity, a trust in man which overvalues the opinions of her friends, a fear of man which generates an inordinate desire for a male's love and affection as crucial to her survival, and so forth. Each of their idols (and consequent behavior, thoughts, and emotions) is "logical" within the idol system, the miniature Vanity Fair of allurements and threats within which both live. Their idols sometimes are modeled, taught, and encouraged by the other person(s) involved: her nagging and his anger mirror and magnify each other; his bar buddies and her girl friends reinforce their respective self-righteousness and self-pity. The idols sometimes are reactive and compensatory to the other person: he reacts to her nagging with drinking, and she reacts to his drinking by trying to rescue and to change him. Vanity Fair is an ever so tempting...hell on earth.

Spiritual Counterfeits

Idols counterfeit aspects of God's identity and character, as can be seen in the vignette above: Judge, savior, source of blessing, sin-bearer, object of trust, author of a will which must be obeyed, and so forth. Each idol that clusters in the system makes false promises and gives false warnings: "if only...then..." For example, the wife's "enabling" behavior expresses an idolatrous playing of the savior. This idol promises and warns her, "If only

you can give the right thing and can make it all better, then your husband will change. But if you don't cover for him, then disaster will occur." Because both the promises and warnings are lies, service to each idol results in a hangover of misery and accursedness. Idols lie, enslave, and murder. They are continually insinuated by the one who was a liar, slave master and murderer from the beginning. They are under the immediate wrath of God who frequently does not allow such things to work well in His world.⁹

The simple picture of idolatry—a worshiper prostrated before a figure of wood, metal or stone—is powerfully extended by the Bible. Idolatry becomes a concept with which to comprehend the intricacies of both individual motivation and social conditioning. The idols of the heart lead us to defect from God in many ways. They manifest and express themselves everywhere, down to the minute details of both inner and outer life. Such idols of the heart fit hand in glove with the wares offered in the Vanity Fair of social life. The invitations and the threats of our social existence beguile us towards defection into idolatries. These themes provide a foundational perspective on the "bad news" that per-

⁹It is obvious that if idolatry is the problem of the "co-dependent," then repentant faith in Christ is the solution. This stands in marked contrast to the solutions proffered in the co-dependency literature, whether secular or glossed with Christian phrases. That literature often perceptively describes the patterns of dysfunctional idols—addictions and dependencies—which curse and enslave people. The idols which enslave the rescuer or the compulsive drinker do not work very well for them.

The literature may even use "idolatry" as a metaphor, without meaning "idolatry against God, therefore repentance." The solution, without exception, is to offer different and presumably more workable idols, rather than repentance unto the Bible's Christ! Secularistic therapies teach people eufunctional idols, idols which do "work" for people and "bless" them with temporarily happy lives (Psalm 73).

So, for example, self-esteem is nurtured as the replacement for trying to please unpleasable others, rather than esteem for the Lamb who was slain for me, a sinner. Acceptance and love from new significant others, starting with the therapist, create successful versions of the fear of man and trust in man rather than teaching essential trust in God. Self-trust and self-confidence are boosted as I am taught to set expectations for myself to which I can attain. The fruit looks good but is fundamentally counterfeit. Believers in false gospels are sometimes allowed to flourish temporarily.

Therapy systems without repentance at their core leave the idol system intact. They simply rehabilitate and rebuild fundamental godlessness to function more successfully.

The Bible's idolatry motif diagnoses the ultimately self-destructive basis on which happy, healthy, and confident people build their lives (eufunctional idols), just as perceptively as it diagnoses unhappy people, who are more obviously and immediately self-destructive (dysfunctional idols).

vades the Bible.

In sum, behavioral sins are always portrayed in the Bible as "motivated" or ruled by a "god" or "gods." The problem in human motivation—the question of practical covenantal allegiance, God or any of the substitutes—is frequently and usefully portrayed as the problem of idolatry. Idolatry is a problem both rooted deeply in the human heart and powerfully impinging on us from our social environment.

This brings us squarely to the second kind of question mentioned at the outset. This second question is a counseling question. How on earth do we put together the following three things? First, people are responsible for their behavioral sins. Whether called sin, personal problems, or dysfunctional living, people are responsible for the destructive things which they think, feel and do.¹⁰ If I am violent or fearful, that is *my problem*.

Second, people with problems come from families or marriages or sub-cultures where the other people involved also have problems. People suffer and are victimized and misguided by the destructive things other people think, want, fear, value, feel, and do. These may be subtle environmental influences: social shaping via modeling of attitudes and the like. These may be acutely traumatic influences: loss or victimization. My problems are often embedded in a tight feedback loop with your problems. If you attack me, I tend to strike back or withdraw in fear. *Your problem* shapes my problems.

Third, behavior is motivated from the inside by complex, life-driving patterns of thoughts, desires, fears, views of the world, and the like, of which a person may be almost wholly unaware. We may be quite profoundly self-deceived about what pilots and propels us. My behavioral violence or avoidance manifests patterns of expectation that own me. "You might hurt me...so I'd better keep my distance or attack first." My behavior is a strategy which expresses *my motives*: my trusts, my wants, my fears, my "felt needs." Such motives range along a spectrum from the consciously calculating to the blindly compulsive.

How are we—and those we counsel—simultaneously socially conditioned, self-deceived, and responsible for our behavior without any factor cancelling out the others?! That is *the* question of the social and behavioral sciences (and it is the place they all fail when they excise God). It is also *the* question that any Christian counselor must attempt to answer both in theory and practice in a

way that reflects Christ's mind. The Bible's view of man—both individual and social life—alone holds these things together.

A Three-Way Tension

Motives are simply what move us, the causes of or inducements to action, both the causal "springs" of life and the telic "goals" of life.¹¹ The notion of motivation captures the inward-drivenness and goal-oriented nature of human life in its most important and troublesome features. All psychologies grapple with these issues. But no psychology has conceptual resources adequate to make sense of the interface between responsible behavior, a shaping social milieu, and a heart which is both self-deceived and life-determining.

Here are some examples. Moralism—the working psychology of the proverbial man on the street—sticks with responsible behavior. Complex causalities are muted *in toto*. Behavioral psychologies see both drives and rewards but cast their lot with the milieu, taking drives as untransformable givens. Both responsible behavior and a semi-conscious but renewable heart are muted. Humanistic psychologies see the interplay of inner desire/need with external fulfillment or frustration but cast their final vote for human self-determination. Both responsible behavior and the power of extrinsic forces are muted. Ego psychologies see the twisted conflict between heart's desire and well-internalized social contingencies. But the present milieu and responsible behavior are muted. It is *hard* to keep three seemingly simple elements together.

Unity 'with Respect to God'

The Bible—the voice of the Maker of humankind, in other words!—speaks to the same set of issues with a uniquely unified vision. There is no question that we are morally responsible: our works or fruit count. There is no question that fruit comes from an inner root to which we are often blind. "Idols of the heart," "desires of the flesh," "fear of man," "love of money," "chasing after...," "earthly-minded," "pride," and a host of other word pictures capture well the biblical view of inner drives experienced as deceptively self-evident needs or goals. There is also no question that we are powerfully constrained by social forces around us. The "world," "Vanity Fair," "the counsel of the wicked," "false proph-

¹⁰Terminology is, of course, not indifferent. "Personal problems" and "dysfunctional living" imply a primary responsibility only to oneself, family, and society. "Sin" implies a primary responsibility to God the Judge, with personal and social responsibilities entailed as secondary consequences.

¹¹ The Bible's mode of everyday observation is comfortable describing both the push and the pull of human motivation as complementary perspectives. Psychologies tend to throw their weight either towards drives or towards goals. Idolatry is a fertile and flexible conceptual category which stays close to the data of life, unlike the speculative abstractions of alternative and unbiblical explanations.

ets," "temptation and trial," and the like capture something of the influences upon us. Other people model and purvey false laws or false standards, things which misdefine value and stigma, blessedness and accursedness, the way of life, and the way of death. They sin against us. God quite comfortably juxtaposes these three simple things which tend to fly apart in human formulations. I am responsible for my sins: "Johnny is a bad boy." My will is in bondage: "Johnny can't help it." I am deceived and led about by others: "Johnny got in

The final question is, "Who is the master of this pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior?"

with a bad crowd." How can these be simultaneously true?

The answer, which all the psychologies and sociologies miss, is actually quite simple. Human motivation is always "with respect to God." The social and behavioral sciences miss this "intentionality," because they themselves are idolatrously motivated. In a massive irony, they build into their charter and methodology a blindness to the essential nature of their subject matter.

Human motivation is intrinsic neither to the individual nor to human society. Human motivation is never strictly psychological or psycho-social or psychosocial-somatic. It is not strictly either psychodynamic or sociological or biological or any combination of these. These terms are at best metaphors for components in a unitary phenomenon which is essentially religious or covenantal. Motivation is always God-relational. Thus human motivation is not essentially the sort of unitary species-wide phenomenon that the human sciences pursue. It is encountered and observed in actual life as an intrinsically binary phenomenon: faith or idolatry. The only unitary point in human motives is the old theological construct: human beings are worshipping creatures, willy-nilly. Seeing this, the Bible's view alone can unify the seemingly contradictory elements in the explanation of behavior.

The deep question of motivation is not "What is motivating me?" The final question is, "Who is the master of this pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior?" In the biblical view, we are religious, inevitably bound to one god or another. People do not have needs. We have masters, lords, gods, be they oneself, other people, valued objects, Satan. The metaphor of an idolatrous

heart and society capture the fact that human motivation bears an automatic relationship to God: Who, other than the true God, is my god? Let me give two examples, one dear to the heart of behaviorists and the other dear to the heart of humanistic psychologists.

Hunger as Idolatry

When a "hunger drive" propels my life or a segment of my life, I am actually engaging in religious behavior. I—"the flesh"—have become my own god, and food has become the object of my will, desires, and fears. The Bible observes the same mass of motives which the behavioral sciences see as a "primary drive." Something biological is certainly going on. Something psychological, and even sociological, is going on. But the Bible's conceptualization differs radically. I am not "hunger-driven." I am "hunger-driven-rather-than-God-driven."

We are meant to relate to food by thankfully eating what we know we have received and by sharing generously. I am an active idolater when normal hunger pangs are the wellspring of problem behavior and attitudes. Normal desires tend to become inordinate and enslaving. The various visible sins which can attend such an idolatry—gluttony, anxiety, thanklessness, food obsessions and "eating disorders," irritability when dinner is delayed, angling to get the bigger piece of pie, miserliness, eating to feel good, and the like—make perfect sense as outworkings of the idol that constrains my heart.¹² Problem behavior roots in the heart and has to do with God.

The idolatries inhabiting our relations with food, however, are as social as they are biological or psychological. Perhaps my father modeled identical attitudes. Perhaps my mother used food to get love and to quell anxiety. Perhaps they went through the Great Depression and experienced severe privation, which has left its mark on them and made food a particular object of anxiety. Perhaps food has always been my family's drug of choice. Perhaps food is the medium through which love, happiness, anger and power are expressed. Perhaps I am bombarded with provocative food advertisements. The variations and permutations are endless.

Membership in the society of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam ensures that we will each be a food idolater in one way or another.¹³ Membership in American consumer society shapes that idolatry into typical forms. A complex system of idolatrous values can be

¹²Matthew 4:1-4, 6:25-34, John 6, and Deuteronomy 8 are four passages, among many, which work out these themes in greater practical detail. Notice how the language of relating to God—love, trust, fear, hope, seek, serve, take refuge, etc.—can be applied to relating to food.

¹³Matthew 6:32: "The nations run after these things."

attached to food. For example, we characteristically lust for a great variety of foodstuffs. Food plays a role in the images of beauty and strength which we serve, in desires for health and fears of death. Food—the quantities and types prepared, the modes of preparation and consumption—is a register of social status. Membership in a famished Ethiopian society would have shaped the generic idolatry into different typical forms. Member-

*Many Christian counselors absolutize
a need or yearning for love.*

ship in the micro-society of my family further particularizes the style of food idolatry: for example, perhaps in our family system hunger legitimized irritability, and eating was salvific, delivering us from destroying our family with anger. Yet in all these levels of social participation, my individuality is not lost. I put my own idiosyncratic stamp on food idolatry. For example, perhaps I am peculiarly enslaved to Fritos when tense and peculiarly nervous about whether red food dyes are carcinogenic!

Security as Idolatry

Behaviorists speak of “drives” and tend to “lower” the focus to the ways we are most similar to animals. Humanists and existentialists, on the other hand, speak of “needs” and tend to “raise” the focus to uniquely human social and existential goals. But the same critique applies. When a “need for security” propels my life or a segment of my life, I am again engaging in religious behavior. Rather than serving the true God, the god I serve is the approval and respect of people, either myself or others. I am an idolater. I am not “motivated by a need for security.” I am “motivated by a lust for security *rather than* ruled by God.” Or, since desire and fear are complementary perspectives on human motivation, “I fear man” instead of “I fear and trust God.” Need theories, like drive theories, can never comprehend the “rather than God,” which is always built into the issue of human motivation. They can never comprehend the fundamental idolatry issue, which sees that the things which typically drive us really exist as inordinate desires of the flesh that are direct alternatives to submitting to the desires of the Spirit.

Our lusts for security, of course, are tutored as well as spontaneous. “Vanity Fair” operates as effectively here as it does with our hunger. Powerful and persuasive people woo and intimidate us that we might trust or fear them. In convicting us of our false trusts and ac-

knowledging the potency of the pressures on us, the Scriptures again offer us the liberating alternative of knowing the Lord.¹⁴

Idols: A Secondary Development?

When the conceptual structures of humanistic psychology are “baptized” by Christians, the fundamental “rather than God” at the bottom of human motivation continues to be missed. For example, many Christian counselors absolutize a need or yearning for love. As observant human beings, they accurately see that fallen and cursed people are driven to seek stability, love, acceptance, and affirmation, and that we look for such blessings in empty idols. As committed Christians they often want to lead people to trust Jesus Christ rather than their idols. But they improperly insert an *a priori* and unitary relational need, an in-built yearning or empty love tank as underpinning the heart’s subsequent divide between faith and idolatry.

They baptize this “need,” describing it as God-created. Idolatry becomes an improper way to meet a legitimate need, and our failure to love others becomes a product of unmet needs. The Gospel of Christ is redefined as the proper way to meet this need. In this theory then, idolatry is only a secondary development: our idols are wrong ways to meet legitimate needs. Repentance from idolatry is thus also secondary, being instrumental to the satisfaction of needs. Such satisfaction is construed to be the primary content of God’s good news in Christ. Biblically, however, idolatry is the primary motivational factor. We fail to love people because we are idolaters who love neither God nor neighbor. We become objectively insecure because we abide under God’s curse and because other people are just as self-centered as we are. We create and experience estrangement from both God and other people. The love of God teaches us to repent of our “need for love,” seeing it as a lust, receiving merciful real love, and beginning to learn how to love rather than being consumed with getting love.

Humans lust after all sorts of good things and false gods—including love—in attempting to escape the rule of God. The love-need psychologies do not dethrone the inner sanctum of our heart’s idolatry. Structurally, the logic of love-need systems is analogous to the “health and wealth” false gospels. Jesus gives you what you deeply yearn for without challenging those yearnings.

It is no surprise that, for good or ill, love-need psychology only rings the bells of certain kinds of counselees, who are particularly attuned to the wavelength of what we might call the intimacy idols. Such theories

¹⁴Proverbs 29:25; Jeremiah 17:5-8.

lack appeal and effectiveness "cross-culturally" to people and places where the reigning idols are not intimacy idols but, for example, power, status, sensual pleasure, success, or money. A love-need system must interpret such idols reductionistically, as displacements or compensatory versions of the "real need" which motivates people.

The Bible is simpler. Any one of the idols may have an independent hold on the human heart. Idols *may* reduce to one another in part; for example, a man with an intractable pornography and lust problem may be significantly helped by repentantly realizing that his lust expresses a tantrum over a frustrated desire to be married, a desire which he has never recognized as idolatrous. Idols can be compounded on top of idols. But sexual lust has its own valid primary existence as an idol as well. A biblical understanding of the idolatry motif explains why need models seem plausible and also thoroughly remakes the model. In biblical reality—in reality, in other words!—there is no such thing as that neutral, normal and *a priori* love need at the root of human motivation.

The biblical theme of idolatry provides a penetrating tool for understanding both the springs of and the inducements to sinful behavior. The causes of particular sins, whether "biological drives," "psychodynamic forces from within," "socio-cultural conditioning from without," or "demonic temptation and attack" can be truly comprehended through the lens of idolatry. Such comprehension plows the field for Christian counseling to become Christian in deed as well as name, to become ministry of the many-faceted good news of Jesus Christ.

CASE STUDY AND ANALYSIS

Using a case study of a hurt-angry-fearful person, this article will now explore in greater detail the relationship between "world" and "heart" in the production of complex and dysfunctional behaviors, emotional responses, cognitive processes, and attitudes.

Wally is a 33-year-old man.¹⁵ He has been married to Ellen for eight years. They have two children. He is a highly committed Christian. He works for his church half time as an administrator and building overseer and

¹⁵ Resemblances between "Wally" and any actual human being are purely coincidental products of the essential similarities among all of us. The external details of this case study are fabricated of snippets and patterns from many different lives, altered in all the particulars of behavior, gender, age, background, etc.

Similarly, the analysis of idolatries derives from a biblical analysis of the generic human heart—my own heart included—rather than from any particular individuals. Wally is Everyman, idiosyncratically manifesting idolatrous human nature.

half time in a diaconal ministry of mercy among inner city poor. He and his wife sought counseling after an explosion in their often-simmering marriage. He became enraged and beat her up. Then he ran away, threatening never to come back. He reappeared three days later, full of guilt, remorse, and a global sense of failure.

The current marital problems are exacerbated versions of long-standing problems: anger, inability to deeply reconcile, threats of violence alternating with threats of suicide, depression, workaholicism alternating with escapism, a pattern of moderate drinking when under stress, generally poor communication, use of pornography, and loneliness. Wally has no close friends.

Several years ago Wally became involved sexually with a woman he was working with diaconally: "I know it was wrong, but I just felt so bad for her and how rough she'd had it that I found myself trying to comfort her physically." He broke it off, and Ellen forgave him; but both acknowledge there has been a residue of guilt and mistrust.

He oscillates between "the flame-thrower and the deep freeze." On the one hand he can be abrasive, manipulative, angry, and unforgiving. On the other hand he withdraws, feels hurt, anxious, guilty, and afraid of people. He oscillates between anger at Ellen's "bossiness, nagging, controlling me, not supporting me or listening to me" and depression at his own sins. Her patterns and his create a feedback system in which each tends to bring out and reinforce the worst in the other.

Wally grew up in a secular, Jewish, working class family. He was born when his father was 52 years old and his mother, 42. By dint of hard work, long hours, and scraping by, they bought a house in a relatively affluent WASP suburb shortly after Wally was born. Wally's father was a critical man, impossible to please. "If I got all A's with one B, it was 'What's this?' If I mowed and raked the lawn, it was 'You missed a spot behind the garage.'"

After his retirement at age 70, Wally's father became "much more mellow; and, with my having become a Christian and trying to forgive him, our relationship wasn't half bad the last five years of his life." His mother was "well-meaning, nice, but ineffective, totally intimidated by my Dad." Wally had been a bit of a "weirdo" in high school: "I never matched up to the bourgeois values. I was too smart, too uncoordinated, too ugly, too shy, too awkward, and too poor to cut it in school."

Wally became a Christian during his first year in college and immediately gravitated towards work with the poor and downcast. "I have little sympathy for rich, suburban Christians; but I love the poor, the single parents, the ex-addicts, the psychiatric patients, the ex-

cons, the orphans and widows, the handicapped, the losers." His Christian commitment is intense and life-dominating. He loves Jesus Christ. He believes the Gospel. He desires to share Christ with others. He knows what his behavioral sins are, but he feels trapped. "I just react instinctively. Then I feel guilty. You know the pattern!"

Financially, Wally and Ellen are not well off. They are not extravagant spenders, but they face continual financial decisions: Dental work for the children? Should we buy a house? Should we take a vacation or work side jobs to earn a little extra money? How many hours a week should Ellen try to work outside the home? Can we really afford to tithe? Should we accede to the kids' desire for a VCR? They live month to month, and the bill cycle periodically creates quite a bit of stress.

How are Christian counselors to understand Wally in order to help him?

"Vanity Fair": The Sociology of Idolatry

Idols define good and evil in ways contrary to God's definitions. They establish a locus of control that is earth-bound: either in objects (e.g., lust for money), other people ("I need to please my critical father"), or myself (e.g., self-trusting pursuit of my personal agenda). Such false gods create false laws, false definitions of success and failure, of value and stigma. Idols promise blessing and warn of curses for those who succeed or fail against the law: "If you get a large enough IRA, you will be secure. If I can get certain people to like and respect me, then my life is valid." There are numerous idolatrous values which influenced Wally and continue to pressure him: beguiling him, frightening him, controlling him, constraining him, enslaving him.

His father's perfectionistic demands were one of the prominent idols impressed into Wally's personal history: "You must please *me* in whatever way I determine." Wally believed his father's sinful, lying demand. "Fear of man" describes the phenomenon from the psychological side of the equation, a particular "idol of the heart." "Oppression" and "injustice" describe his father's powerful demands on the sociological side. We see the dominion of a father whose leadership style was that of a tyrant-king, not that of a servant-king promoting the well-being of his son.¹⁶ In essence, he lied, bullied, enslaved, and condemned. "I can remember lying on my bed while my Dad went on and on lecturing me, ranting and raving." Wally was conditioned to be very concerned with what significant people thought of him. At the same time Wally bought the idol. He is simultaneously a victim and guilty. He was abused by

powerful idols operative within his family system. He also instinctively both bought into those idols and produced his own competitive idols.

Relationships are rarely static. There were various sides and various phases to Wally's relationship with his father's critical opinion. At times Wally temporarily

Idols define good and evil in ways contrary to God's definitions.

succeeded in pleasing his father and felt good about himself. At other times he failed in his father's eyes, earning only scorn for being "a spaz, girlishly emotional." At other times he obsessively, almost maniacally, strived to please his father. He once spent a summer, with dismal results, trying to learn to dribble a basketball in a way that did not "look like a six-year-old girl." Some of the classic "low self-esteem" symptom patterns were established in this crucible.

At other times Wally rebelled against his father and his father's implacable demands. He pitted his will against his father. Being highly intelligent, he was formidable and creative as a rebel. In his teens he succeeded in driving his father half crazy by setting up contrary value systems (serving contrary idols): rock music, bizarre dress and hairstyle, left-wing politics, marijuana use. One idol—"I need to please my father"—led into another—"I'll do what I want and set myself in opposition to my father."¹⁷

There are even elements in Wally's conversion to Christianity which might be construed as part of this tendency to define himself in opposition to his father's secular, ethnic Jewish, upwardly mobile culture. His Christianity could be used at times to torment his father. Idols are fluid. The rebellious stance ultimately became Wally's predominant long-term commitment and undergirds a certain low-grade resentment he still feels at the memory of his father, now five years dead. But rebellion is not unmixed. It can be tinctured with regrets, a sense of failure, or even with merciful and gentle tendencies. "Sometimes I think I have really come to peace with my father—an honest, merciful peace that Christ has painstakingly wrought in me. At other times

¹⁶Mark 10:42-45.

¹⁷John Calvin, in his remarkable discussion of the nature of man in the opening section of his *Institutes*, comments on the way that idols "boil up from within us." It could equally be said that they boil up around us. There is always some object at hand for us to put our faith in.

I know I lose it and react like the wounded and proud animal I once was."

Wally's father was not static either. In his later years he mellowed considerably. Wally's Christian faith and his father's evolution into a gentler man combined to bring a fair measure of kindness and forgiveness into the relationship. It became peaceable but never warm. Idols have a history, a "shelf life."¹⁸ *Vanity Fair* evolves. A demanding father became a less demanding father who eventually promulgated a friendlier idol: he wanted to bask in the warmth of "family" and retirement. Our hearts also evolve. A youth with a compulsion to please became a young man who half wanted to please and half rebelled. The young man became a middle-aged man driven and haunted by some of the same patterns of contradictory compulsions, even after his earthly father's death. Wally both lusts after the approval and respect of people and yet rebels and isolates himself in his pride.

Multiple Idols

We become infested with idols. The idolatrous patterns in Wally's relationship with his father manifest in other relationships. Wally has had ongoing problems with authority figures in school, the military, work, and the church. He has had the same sorts of problems with his wife, friends, and even his children. Naturally, he brings this same pattern into the counseling relationship, with all the challenges that creates for building trust and a working relationship. He continues to manifest a typical stew of associated problems: a slavish desire to be approved, a deep suspicion that he won't be approved, a stubborn independency.

We have attended in some detail to the way in which his father's demandingness constituted an idol system which staked out a claim in Wally's affections. We will give less detail to other influences, though each might be explored in equal detail. His mother's passivity in the face of conflict set a model for him which still frequently colors his relationship to Ellen. The "bourgeois values" of his high school peer culture—dating, athletics, scoring sexually, looks, clothes, money, "cool"—also marked him out as a failure and fueled both his rebellion and his sense of shameful inadequacy. He bought the bourgeois values and failed against them. He rebelled against those values and bought the alternative values of the drug culture, in which he succeeded. He rebelled against both straights and druggies and isolated himself as a world of one, which sometimes worked and sometimes failed. All these things happened, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes successively.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Dick Keyes of L'Abri Fellowship for this felicitous phrase.

Even the counterculture values of his "radical Christian" subculture can be understood in part as an idolatrous narrowing of the Christian life in reaction to the opposite idolatrous equation of Christianity with the American Dream. Certain biblical goods are magnified to the exclusion of other biblical goods. In various ways Wally continues to play out a three-fold theme. First, he typically rebels against certain dominant "successful people" cultures. Second, he finds his validity in the affirmation of a "down-and-out" subculture. Third, all the while he acts in idiosyncratic pride to create his own culture-of-one in which he plays king, and his opinions on anything from the dinner to eschatology are self-evident truth.

"Who can understand the heart of man?!" And who can understand the world that negotiates with that heart?! Wally and the myriad forces which impinge on him elude exhaustive, rational analysis. Yet we can describe enough of what goes on in his complex heart and complex world to minister helpfully to him. And the Wally we meet today is only today's Wally, not the Wally of some prior point in his personal history. Biblical counsel, the mind of Christ about Wally's life, can be given. Wisdom, the nourishing and honeyed tongue, can make satisfying and convicting sense of things, and Wally can learn to live, think, and act with such wisdom.

Many other idol systems and sub-systems impinge on Wally. Some are the same players Bunyan described in his *Vanity Fair*: cultural attitudes, values, fears, and opportunities which circle around money, sex, food, power, success, or comfort. Certain gentle-faced idols—the mass media, professional sports, and the alcohol industry—woo him with temporary compensations and false, escapist saviors from the pressures generated by his slavery to the harsh, terrifying idols which enslave and whip him along at other times: "I must perform. I must prove myself. Everyone I respect must like me. What if I fail?"

Some of the other idol systems which daily impact on Wally are found within the marital system and the family system. Ellen's and the children's values and desires provoke and persuade Wally in various ways. If Ellen worries about money, if the children get swept up with complaining when they do not get what they want, if Ellen nags Wally with expectations of moralistic behavioral change, Wally is variously worried, angry, compliant, depressed, defensive, full of denial, or whatever else, depending on how he interfaces with the particular micro-society that is constraining him.¹⁹

This way of exploring "What rules me?" is "socio-

¹⁹ Where do we begin in counseling? Are there hierarchies of influence or "key" influential relationships to tackle? There

logical." False gods are highly catching! With good reason both Old and New Testaments abound with warnings against participating in pagan cultures and associating with idolaters, fools, false teachers, angry people, and the like. Our enemies not only hurt us, they also tempt us to be like them. False voices are not figments which the individual soul hallucinates. "World" complements "flesh" to constitute monolithic evil: the manufacture of idols instead of worship of the true God.

If we would help people have eyes and ears for God, we must know well which alternative gods clamor for their attention. These forces and shaping influences neither determine nor excuse our sins. But they do nurture, channel, and exacerbate our sinfulness in particular directions. They are often atmospheric, invisible, unconscious influences. Conscious repentance begins to thrive where I see both my own distortions and the distortions impinging upon me from others. Both tempt me, and I must battle both.

Scripture is sensitive to sociological forces without compromising human responsibility. But, of course, idols are also "in here" in our hearts, determining the course of our lives. In the discussion above, Wally's heart response to his environment—idols of the heart—continually intruded. The two are impossible to disentangle absolutely. But in the next section I will look in greater detail at the more psychological dimension of idolatry.

Idols of the Heart: the Psychology of Idolatry

At the simplest level Wally both imbibed the idols to which he was exposed and creatively fabricated his own. He has variously succeeded, failed, or rebelled against various value systems. But in each case he nurtures and serves numerous unbiblical values. His life implicitly validates many lies. His heart is deeply

may well be. In particular, is Wally's relationship with his parents the key to effective counseling? Not necessarily, although psychodynamic psychology is strongly biased towards parent-child relationships. The Bible is not similarly biased (either for or against looking at relationships with parents).

I do not believe that in this case, as presented, Wally's relationships with his father and mother are the most important ones to tackle now in counseling. Theoretically, we could tackle any troubled relationship in Wally's life, and we would end up grappling with generically similar issues, the same idols and sins. My instincts in counseling would be to tackle vignettes involving Wally and Ellen or his children. That is where most of the hot patterns are being played out. His relationship with his father could come up as could other significant relationships where there are live issues. But for Wally to grow and be renewed, to repent intelligently, to be transformed both in heart and behavior, he does not necessarily need to look at the parental relationship.

divided between the true God and idols. Is he a Christian? Yes. But the ongoing work of renewal must engage him genuinely over the particular patterns of idolatry that functionally substitute for faith in Christ. There has been a measure of genuine fruit in his life. But there has been a measure of bending the true God to the agenda of the flesh.

Idols are rarely solitary. Our lives become infested with them. Wally is psychologically controlled by a lush variety of false gods. For example, he typically oscillates between "pride" and the "fear of man."²⁰ Pride or "playing god" generates one set of sins: anger, manipulation, compulsions to control people and circumstances, a "Type A personality," rebellion against parents and the bourgeois. The fear of man or "making others into god" generates another set: self-consciousness, fears, depression, failure, anxiety, withdrawal, a gnawing sense of inferiority, chameleon behavior. They work hand in hand to produce his "perfectionism," both in its anxious and its demanding aspects: "My performance in your eyes. Your performance in my eyes."

Many other gods wait in the wings, playing occasional bit parts in the drama of Wally's life. At times Wally's god is a lust for escapist comfort from the pressure cooker he creates. Alcohol abuse, TV watching, video games and pornography provide fleeting escape. At times he is owned by a desire to "help" people. He becomes obsessed with his ministry, angry at any who hinder it, prone to become messianic (and even adulterous), justifying any doubtful actions on his part by reference to the supreme value of "my ministry." Of course, this is only a sampler. Any of scores of particular lesser gods can appear in the temple of his heart depending on traffic conditions, the weather, how his wife treats him, how his children do in school, etc.

The real Wally is irreducibly complex! Even as I portray Wally in broad strokes, it is clear that his life emerges from an ever-shifting mosaic of false loyalties. This noted, are there hierarchies of idols or prepotent idols of unusual significance in Wally's case? Yes, there are. Wally's life may well play out typical, oft-repeated themes. He is a "type" in a loose sense, though he can never be reduced to a rigid diagnostic type because of the myriads of fluid idols which constrain him. Certain idols strike me as predominant in Wally. "Pride" (I play god) and "fear of man" (I install you as god) are crucial. One finds variations on the themes of "I want my way" and "How do I perform in your eyes?" endlessly re-

²⁰ And "there is no temptation which is not common to all men" (1 Corinthians 10:13). This pride/fear of man oscillation is run-of-the-mill human nature. It plays itself out in an endless variety of forms.

peated in Wally's life. Demand and fear take turns in the spotlight. Other typically dominant idols—sexual pleasure, money, etc.—certainly have their say in Wally's life but have a more low-grade, nagging quality, which in a different counselee might be greatly intensified.

It is striking how biblical categories—the idol motif, in this case—stay close to the concrete details of life and do not speculate abstract typologies. The bedrock similarities between people tend to be brought into view. In our psychologized culture we are used to definitive analyses of Wally and others according to a typology. He is a type-A person. He is a Pleaser. He is a Controller. He is a combination of melancholic and choleric temperaments. He is a typical ACOA or member of a dysfunctional family. His root sin is anger. His problem is low self-esteem. In DSM-III categories he is a..., and so forth. Such statements tend to pass for significant knowledge. In fact, they are not explanations for anything but are simply ways of describing common clusters of symptoms.

Root Idols?

Given the prevalence of this mode of typing people, it might be expected that we could say something like, "His root idol is...." But the data on idolatry does not generally support such reductionistic understandings of the human heart.²¹ At best we can make the softer claim, "His most characteristic idol is...usually...but at other times..." For purely heuristic purposes it may be useful to notice that one person is particularly attuned to the intimacy idols, another to avoidance idols, another to power idols, another to comfort idols, another to pleasure idols, another to religiosity idols, and so forth. A person's style of sin—"characteristic flesh" in Richard Lovelace's graphic term²²—may tend to cluster habitually around particular predominant idols.

But sin is creative as well as habitual! We should not forget that the reductionism the Bible consistently offers is not a typology that distinguishes people from each other but is a summary comment that highlights our commonalities: all have turned aside from God, "each to his own way," "doing what was right in his own eyes."²³

²¹ Of course, at specific points in time *specific* idols will need to be named and faced. Wise biblical counseling grapples with specifics. Jesus faces the rich, young ruler with his mammon worship. The parable of the sower faces people with their unbelief, their social conformity, their preoccupying riches, pleasure, and cares (all of which can be rephrased as expressions of the idol motif). In the Old Testament Elijah directly confronts Baal worship. For example, Wally will need to deal with his drive to perform in people's eyes as the issue unfolds in counseling.

²² Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of the Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1979), page 110.

Under this master categorization the temple teems with potential shapes for idols and false gods. The rampant and proliferating desires (plural) of the flesh contend with the Spirit and clamor for our faith and obedience. Typologies are pseudo-explanations. They are descriptive, not analytical, though as conceptual tools for various psychologies and psychotherapies they pretend to explanatory power. At best, typologies describe "syndromes," patterns of fruit and life experience that commonly occur together.²⁴ Current typologies are not helpful for exposing the real issues in the lives of real people. At best they are redundant of good description and intimate knowledge of a particular individual. At worst, they are bearers of misleading conceptual freight, for they duck the idolatry issues.

How do we explain the fact that all of us are not exactly like Wally though we share the same generic set of idolatrous tendencies?: the numerous forms of pride and the fear of man; obsession with sensual pleasures; preoccupation with money; tendencies towards self-trust regarding our opinions, agendas, abilities; the creation of false views of God based on our life experience and desires; desire to be intrinsically righteous, worthy, and esteemable; and the like. Jay Adams has perceptively commented on the commonality inhering within individual styles of sin:

Sin, then, in all of its dimensions, clearly is the problem with which the Christian counselor must grapple. It is the secondary dimensions—the variations on the common themes—that make counseling so difficult. While all men are born sinners and engage in the same sinful practices and dodges, each develops his own styles of sinning. The styles (combinations of sins and dodges) are peculiar to each individual; but beneath them are the common themes. It is the counselor's work to discover these commonalities beneath the individualities.²⁵

'Neighborhoods' in Vanity Fair

How do individual styles develop? Certainly particular "neighborhoods" in Vanity Fair can empower different idols. It doesn't surprise us that Wally's demanding and unpleasable father can be correlated with a particular form of the "fear of man" as a significant idol in Wally's heart. Yet because of the continual interplay

²³ Isaiah 53:6 and Judges 21:25.

²⁴ The word "syndrome" ought to be stripped of its clinical pretensions to significant explanatory power. It is purely descriptive. It literally means, "things that tend to all run along together."

²⁵ Jay Adams, *Christian Counselor's Manual* (U.S.A.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), Page 124f.

of idol-making heart with idol-offering milieu, another child might grow up with very accepting parents, and the "fear of man" would be similarly empowered as a lust never to be rejected or fail. Our idols both covet what we do not have and hold on for dear life to what we do have.

Many of the nuances of our idolatries are socially shaped by the opportunities and values that surround us. For example, it is unsurprising that more people will become homosexuals (or adulterers, or pornographers, or whatever) in a culture that makes certain forms of sexual sin available, legitimate, or normal. For example,

*For all our differences,
the Bible speaks to every one of us.*

Wally grew up in a family moderately obsessed with academic and professional achievement. His next door neighbor might have grown up in a family obsessed with escapist pleasure, and he might have been nurtured to live for "Miller Time" and televised sports. The generic idols in every heart may bear different fruit in different people. For example, Baal is no threat to produce "religious" forms of idolatry today, but Mormonism is such a threat.

Much of the variation among us is simply empowered by the "accidents" of life experience: tragedies or smooth sailing, handicaps or health, riches or poverty, New York City or Iowa or Uganda, a high school or a graduate school education, first-born or eighth-born, male or female, born in 1500 B.C. or 1720 or 1920 or 1960, and the like. Much individual variation is due to hereditary and temperamental differences: kinds of intelligence, physical coordination and capabilities, variation in talents and abilities, metabolic and hormonal differences, and so forth. In the last analysis, idiosyncratic choice from among the opportunities and options one encounters accounts for the nearly infinite range for individuality within the "commonalities" that biblical categories discern in us.

The diagnostic categories which pierce to the commonalities are categories such as "idolatry versus faith," which we are using here. These alone can embrace *both* the fluidities and relative stabilities of Wally's world, flesh, and devil—and can embrace the true God who has saved Wally. They apply to *every* person in a way which is simple, but never simplistic, accounting for all the complexities. For all our differences, the Bible speaks to every one of us.

OTHER DIAGNOSTIC PERSPECTIVES AND THE GOSPEL: MULTIPERSPECTIVAL INTERPRETATION

As we have indicated, Wally's mass of behaviors, attitudes, cognitions, value judgments, emotions, influences, *et al.* can be understood right down to the details utilizing the biblical notion of idolatry. The disorder in Wally's life is produced by the interplay between particular idols of his heart and particular idols of his social environment. Sins occur at the confluence of disoriented heart motives and disoriented socio-cultural systems of all sizes. The intention of this essay has been to explore some of the dense connections between flesh and world. But there are other ways of approaching these things which are important to recognize.

Notably absent has been attention to the equally dense connecting links between the Devil and both world and flesh in the production of Wally's dysfunctional and sinful living. "Who rules me?" invites awareness of spiritual powers. Idols and demons go hand in hand in literal worship of false gods. Not surprisingly, the functional lordship of Satan is equally evident in the more subtle idolatries that enslave Wally. Does this mean that Wally is "demon-possessed" and the treatment of choice is exorcism? Decidedly not. But wherever we are problematically afraid or angry—to isolate two particular bad fruits—we are being formed into Satan's image rather than Christ's. The same modalities that fight world and flesh also fight the Devil. Intelligent faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is ultimately the answer. But awareness of the spiritual warfare occurring emphasizes the fact that Christian counseling is a ministry of prayer.²⁶ Awareness of spiritual warfare also helps shake us out of the behavioral science mindset which tempts us to think about people psycho-socially, rather than with respect to God.

The Dark Lord's stratagems are all intended to establish his lordship over people. Satan methodically disintegrates Wally's relationships, leads him into gross sins, deceives his mind into highly distorted and selective perceptions, accuses him into despair, discourages him, ties his life into knots in every imaginable way, fans normal desires into inordinate and addictive desires and "needs," and the like. This article has primarily attended to "world and flesh." "Devil" completes the monolithic triad of biblical perspectives on the motivation of problem behavior.

²⁶ Acts 6:4 is a classic text defining ministry in terms of both truth and prayer. Ephesians 6:10-20 is a classic text on the mode of warfare: faith in all its elements and ways of expression defeats demonic powers. James 3:13-4:12 adds the note that repentance is crucial to the defeat of Satan.

Also notably absent has been detailed attention to the somatic influences on Wally. His problems are exacerbated by allergies, overtiredness, a diet with too much "junk food," sexual frustration and a sedentary lifestyle. Close attention to patterns of irritability, marital tension, sexual lust, and depression would consistently reveal a plausible somatic component. The fact that monitoring caffeine and sugar intake, and getting more regular rest, sexual intercourse, and exercise moderates Wally's symptoms also points to somatic influences. Somatic factors, at minimum, influence the "quantity" of Wally's problems, though they do not create the "quality" of his problems. A tense irritability can flare into rage and cursing. A case of "the blues" can spiral into bleak despair. A tendency to ogle women can break out into purchasing *Penthouse*. Wally's body variously exacerbates or moderates the intensity of his sins. It does not create new kinds of sins.

The Role of the Will

Also notably absent has been a discussion of the degree to which Wally's behavior is willed and, hence, immediately controllable. As was stressed earlier, paying biblical attention to motives of heart and world is no ploy for cutting the force out of the Bible's view of human responsibility. Wally chooses, even when he plunges down well-worn ruts where a fork in the road seems experientially nonexistent. Wally has made headway in self-discipline at various times in his life. He knows what is wrong and what is right. He is able to describe many times when he "bull-headedly chose wrong." He can also tell of many times when he acted out of conscious faith in Christ to choose right.

Recognizing choice does not negate the power of world, flesh, and Devil. The more Wally grows to know himself and his environment, the more he consciously knows and experiences that he has *always* been making choices. One of the purposes of working with the idol motif (or with its more culturally accessible equivalents: the idolatrous desires, hopes, fears, expectations and goals which own people) is to expand the arena in which Wally is aware of the choices he has been making implicitly. Sanctification expands the arena of conscious choice and biblical self-control.

Also notably absent has been a discussion of the providence of God in bringing intense, transforming experiences. Wally's conversion "dropped out of the sky" and gave him months of freedom from sins, joy in Christ, and growing love for people. He has had other "high times" as a Christian: times of greater vision, love, and liberty produced by a good sermon, at a retreat, or by some inexplicable opening of his heart to God in a moment of daily life.

But changes in Wally's life—whether the product of victories in conscious spiritual warfare, of physiological alterations, of volitional commitment or of mountaintop experiences—seemingly "happen" at random. These four paradigms often provide the stuff with which Wally thinks about problems and change in his life. Wally has little sense of confidence that his life is moving in the direction of consistent, intelligent, desirable, whole-souled change. His life in general seems to be an unhappy chaos, with occasional and temporary moments of symptomatic relief. One of the goals of this essay is to describe several elements which can make change more consistent, internalized, self-conscious and genuinely transformative. In my experience the Wallys, both inside and outside the church, tend to be very blind to the things that move them. It is a curious but not uncommon phenomenon that a biblically literate person like Wally has no effective grasp on the idols of his own heart and the temptations of the particular Vanity Fair which surrounds him.²⁷ Wally is all action, impulse, and emotion. He knows relatively little about what God sees going on in his heart and his world. The question, "What is God's agenda in my life?" can often be answered with some confidence when I start to grasp the themes which play out in my life.

My analysis has been predominantly "psycho-social" (covenantally psycho-social). A full biblical analysis of Wally's problems would be a "psycho-social-spiritual-somatic-volitional-experiential" analysis.²⁸ To understand the exact weight of each variable is, obviously, to quest after something which is—from a human point of view, the intentions of social scientists notwithstanding!—ultimately elusive. But the Bible's answer is always powerfully applicable: turning from idols to the living God, renewal of mind and heart in the truth, activities captured in shorthand by the phrase "repentance and faith."

The Lordship Question

There is some utility to teasing out these two strands of human motivation, while never forgetting that we are focusing only on several perspectives within a unified

²⁷The Bible indicates the reason for this by frequently describing our inordinate desires as "deceptive." Satan is the arch-deceiver. We tend to conform to the atmospheric deceptions of our socio-cultural milieu. Our idols are so plausible and instinctive that a person can even describe them, without really seeing them as the crucial problem in his or her life.

²⁸There are doubtless any number of other ways of slicing the pie of human motivation. See Tim Keller's "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling" (*The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, 9:3 (1988), pages 11-44) for a stimulating portrayal of the multiperspectival subtlety of a previous generation of Christian counselors.

whole. The two I have concentrated on in this article—the heart and the social milieu—without question receive the bulk of the Bible's attention. But the question of human motivation is ultimately the multiperspectival question of lordship, of faith in idols and false gods in tension with vital faith in the true God. This can be looked at through numerous lenses:

- Lordship through the lens of our hearts: The grace-filled, "strait and narrow" will of the Spirit *versus* the rampant, idolatrous desires of my flesh.
- Lordship through the lens of social influences: Social shaping by the Kingdom of God and the body of Christ *versus* imbibing the models and values of the

*The Gospel is better
than unconditional love.*

kingdoms of our world (various micro-kingdoms of marital and family systems; on up through progressively larger kingdoms of peer relations; of neighborhood, school, and work place cultures; of ethnic group, socio-economic class, nationality, etc.).

- Lordship through the lens of spiritual masters: The good King Jesus *versus* the tyrant Satan.
- Lordship through the lens of somatic influences: living through bodily pains and frustrations in the hope of the resurrection *versus* immediate service to and preoccupation with my belly's and body's pains, pleasures, deprivations, and wants.
- Lordship through the lens of volitional choices: Conscious faith in God's promises and obedience to God's will *versus* believing and choosing according to my spontaneous will, desires, and opinions, "the way that seems right to a man."
- Lordship through the lens of experiential providence: Learning to rejoice in God amid blessings and to repent and trust God amid sufferings *versus* growing presumptuous, proud, or self-satisfied when things go our way and depressed, angry, or afraid when life is painful, frustrating, or unsure. Though this article has commented particularly on the interplay between the first two lenses, my intent throughout has been to expand our view of Wally, not to constrict it. Within the biblical conceptual framework we can bring into view all of Wally and his world. The notion of behavior as *ruled* lets us hold together seeming paradoxes. Wally is fully responsible for what he does. Wally's inner life is full of kinks, distortions, and blind compulsions. Wally is continually being conditioned from without, tempted, tried, and deceived. Wally is also a Christian. The Spirit

and the Word can work powerfully both to reorient him from the inside and to set him free from the control of what impinges on him.

Idolatry and the Ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

In this article my attention has been heavily weighted towards the issue of diagnosis: How do we biblically understand people? But biblical diagnosis bridges immediately into biblical treatment. The understanding of people presented here enables the message of the Gospel to apply relevantly to the problems of troubled people.

One of the major challenges facing Christian counselors is how to apply the Gospel of the love of God incisively. There are many faulty, distorted, or inadequate ways to go about this. The Gospel is easily truncated and weakened when idols of the heart and Vanity Fair are unperceived or misperceived. But if we accurately comprehend the interweaving of responsible behavior, deceptive inner motives, and powerful external forces, then the riches of Christ become immediately relevant to people. What was once "head knowledge" and "dry doctrine" becomes filled with wisdom, relevancy, appeal, hope, delight, and life. People see that the Gospel is far richer than a ticket to heaven and rote forgiveness for oft-repeated behavioral sins.

How many Wallys—and Ellens—are stuck with a vague guilt over seemingly unshakable, destructive patterns? But when Wally sees his heart's true need and his need for deliverance from enslaving powers—that be, he then sees how exactly he really needs Christ. Christ powerfully meets people who are aware of their real need for help.²⁹ We Christian counselors, both in our own lives and in our counseling, frequently do not get the Gospel straight, pointed, and applicable. I will consider two broad tendencies among Christians who seek to help their fellows: psychologizing and moralizing.

Christian counselors with a psychologizing drift typically have a genuine interest in the motivation that underlies problem behavior. Psychologically-oriented Christians attempt to deal with both the internal and external forces that prompt and structure behavior. The heart issues are typically misread, however. "Need" categories tend to replace biblical categories—idolatry, desires of the flesh, fear of man, etc.—which relate the heart immediately to God. Also, environmental issues such as a history of abuse, poor role models, and dys-

²⁹ Hebrews 4:12-16; Matthew 5:3-6; Luke 11:1-13; Matthew 11:28-30; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; indeed, the entire Bible! Christ's forte is our acknowledged need in the face of compulsions from within and pressures from without.

functional family patterns tend to be given more deterministic status than they have in the biblical view.

These views of inner and outer motivation fit hand-in-glove as an explanation for behavioral and emotional problems. "You feel horrible and act badly because your needs aren't met because your family didn't meet them." The logic of therapy coheres with the logic of the diagnosis: "I accept you, and God really accepts you. Your needs can be met, and you can start to change how you feel and act." Behavioral responsibility is muted, and the process of change becomes more a matter of need-meeting than conscious repentance/*metanoia* and renewal of mind unto Christ.

What is the Gospel?

What happens to the Gospel when idolatry themes are not grasped? "God loves you" typically becomes a tool to meet a need for self-esteem in people who feel like failures. The particular content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—"grace for sinners and deliverance for the sinned-against"—is down-played or even twisted into "unconditional acceptance for the victims of others' lack of acceptance." Where "the Gospel" is shared, it comes across something like this: "God accepts *you* just as *you* are. God has unconditional love for you." That is not the biblical Gospel, however. God's love is not Rogerian unconditional positive regard writ large. A need theory of motivation—rather than an idolatry theory—bends the Gospel solution into "another gospel" which is essentially false.

The Gospel is better than unconditional love. The Gospel says, "God accepts *you* just as *Christ* is. God has 'contraconditional' love for you." Christ bears the curse you deserve. Christ is fully pleasing to the Father and gives you His own perfect goodness. Christ reigns in power, making you the Father's child and coming close to you to begin to change what is unacceptable to God about you. God never accepts me "as I am." He accepts me "as I am in Jesus Christ." The center of gravity is different. The true Gospel does not allow God's love to be sucked into the vortex of the soul's lust for acceptability and worth in and of itself. Rather, it radically decenters people—what the Bible calls "fear of the Lord" and "faith"—to look outside themselves.

Christian counselors with a psychologizing drift typically are very concerned with ministering God's love to people who view God as the latest and greatest critic whom they can never please. But their failure to conceptualize people's problems in the terms this article has been exploring inevitably creates a tendency towards teaching a Liberal Gospel. The cross becomes simply a demonstration that God loves me. It loses its force as the substitutionary atonement by the perfect

Lamb in my place, who invites my repentance for heart-pervading sin. "The wound of my people is healed lightly."³⁰

Christian counselors with moralistic tendencies face a different sort of problem. Where there is a moralizing drift to Christian counseling, Christ's forgiveness is typically applied simply to behavioral sins. The content of the Gospel is usually more orthodox than the content of the psychologized Gospel, but the scope of applica-

*Christian counseling is counseling
which exposes our motives—our hearts
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possible answer.*

tion may be truncated. Those with psychologizing tendencies at least notice our inner complexities and outer sufferings, though they distort both systematically. In some ways the moralizing tendency represents an inadequate grip on the kinds of "bad news" this article has been exploring.

Moralistic Christianity does not usually evidence much interest in the pressures and sufferings of our social milieu. Counselors fear that such interest would necessarily feed those varieties of blame-shifting and accusation which spring up so readily in our hearts. Human responsibility would be compromised. But they do not see that understanding the evil that happens to me—the Vanity Fair that is swirling around my life—is a crucial part of my widening and deepening appreciation of Christ. Attendance to the forces that have pressured and shaped me—and are shaping me—for ill allows me to respond intelligently, responsibly, and mercifully. As psalm after psalm demonstrates, our sufferings are the context in which we experience the love of God, both to comfort us and to change us. We are comforted in our afflictions as we learn of God's promises and power. We are changed in our afflictions as we learn to take refuge in God rather than in vain idols.

Moralizers are also weak on the inward side of motivation. Heart motives may be attended to in part via an awareness of "self" or "flesh." But the solution is typically construed in all-or-nothing terms. Conversion, "Let go and let God," and "total yieldedness" attempt to deal with motive problems through a single

³⁰ Jeremiah 8:11 (cf. 23:16f).

act of first-blessing or second-blessing housecleaning. The Gospel is for the beginning of the Christian life or a dramatic act of consecration. There is little sense of the patient *process* of inner renewal which someone like Wally—and each of us!—needs. Jesus says to take up our cross *daily*, dying to the false gods we fabricate, and learning to walk in fellowship with Him who is full of grace to help us. Receptivity to God's love—"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want"—is the absolutely necessary prerequisite for any sort of active obedience to God.³¹

I have looked at two common truncations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Both evidence an inadequate grasp of the deviance of our hearts and our corresponding vulnerability to external influences. People are idol-makers, idol-buyers and idol-sellers.³² We wander through a busy town filled with other idol-makers, idol-

³¹ Active love is the fruit of receptive faith. Psalm 23—like many portions of Scripture—is a pure promise to be drunk in. Other passages detail the transition from gift to gratitude, from root to fruit, from abiding to fruit-bearing, from faith to works (Galatians 5 and 1 John 4:7-5:12 are two of the most sustained expositions). Performance-oriented people like Wally, idol-driven people, rarely drink and eat of the life-giving bread of heaven.

³² We have not mentioned how Wally's distorted system of interpretation and valuation affects—is "sold" to—his children, wife, friends, and parents. There is obviously a feedback loop of mutual effects, a vicious circle.

Conversely, as Wally is able to change both heart and behavior, he will create a gracious circle of positive effects in his family and church. We have emphasized the negative side of social shaping, but faith is just as catching as idolatry.

buyers, and idol-sellers. We variously buy and sell, woo, agree, intimidate, manipulate, borrow, impose, attack, or flee. But there is a bigger Gospel. At the gates of Vanity Fair, Christian met a man who entreated him and his companion:

Let the Kingdom be always before you; and believe steadfastly concerning things that are invisible. Let nothing that is on this side of the other world get within you; and, above all, look well to your own hearts, and to the lusts thereof, for they are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Set your faces like a flint; you have all power in heaven and earth on your side.³³

Christian passed through Vanity Fair bloodied but purer in heart. He remembered, amid hard combat with world, flesh, and Devil, the Celestial City which was his destination, and the Lord Jesus who beckoned him to life.

The biblical Gospel delivers from both personal sin and situational tyrannies. The biblical notion of inner idolatries allows people to see their need for Christ as a merciful savior from large sins of both heart and behavior. The notion of socio-cultural-familial-ethnic idolatries allows people to see Christ as a powerful deliverer from false masters and false value systems which we tend to absorb automatically. *Christ-ian* counseling is counseling which exposes our motives—our hearts and our world—in such a way that the authentic Gospel is the only possible answer.

³³ Bunyan, *ibid.*, page 83.