

# THE PSYCHOLOGY EPIDEMIC AND ITS CURE<sup>1</sup>

John F. MacArthur, Jr.  
President  
Professor of Pastoral Ministries  
The Master's Seminary

*The church's right to counsel from the Bible has been reconfirmed in court rulings of recent times. Yet in many instances the church has surrendered that right and responsibility because of the "professionalization" of the counseling ministry among Christians. This is tragic because the behavioral sciences are not, as is commonly believed, scientific. Neither have they proven effective in changing the human heart. "Christian psychology," with its claim of a secret knowledge about dealing with people, has made deep inroads into the church, but it is no more than a duplication of its secular counterpart with Scripture references occasionally interspersed. A reliance on Christ, the "Wonderful Counsellor," and God's sufficient Word as dispensed by spiritually gifted Christians to one another is the church's only solution in meeting the spiritual needs of its people.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1980, Grace Community Church became the object of a lawsuit charging that the pastors on staff were negligent for trying to help a suicidal young member of the church by giving him biblical truth. It was the first clergy malpractice case ever heard in the American court system. The secular media had a field day as the case dragged on for years. Some nationally aired tabloid-type programs even alleged that the church had encouraged the young man to kill himself, teaching him that suicide was a sure way to heaven. Of course, that was not true. He knew from Scripture that suicide is wrong. We urged him to let the Word of God lead him to intimate knowledge and appropriation of the resources available in the One who wanted to heal his troubled mind. Tragically, he refused our counsel and took his life.

---

<sup>1</sup>This essay is adapted from Chapter 3 of John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Waco, TX: Word, 1991) 55-77.

One of the key issues the case raised was the question of whether churches should have the legal right to use the Bible in counseling troubled people. Many would argue that giving someone advice from Scripture is a simplistic approach to counseling. The Bible may be fine as an encouragement to the average person, they say, but people who have *real* problems need the help of a psychological expert.

Therefore, this lawsuit contended, church counselors are required to refer seriously depressed and suicidal people to the mental-health professionals. To attempt to counsel these troubled people from the Bible amounts to irresponsibility and negligence for which church counselors should be held morally and legally culpable.

The truth that came out in court received little or no coverage on the network news. Testimony showed that this young man *was* under the care of professional psychiatrists. In addition to the biblical direction he received from the pastoral staff, he had sought psychiatric treatment. Moreover, the staff had seen to it that he was examined by several medical doctors to rule out organic or chemical causes for his depression. He was receiving every kind of therapy available, but he chose to end his life anyway. We did all we could to help him; he rejected our counsel and turned his back on his spiritual sufficiency in Christ.

Not only did the courts view the issue as a First Amendment right of religious freedom into which government should not intrude, but all three times Grace Church won the case, the judges also expressed the opinion that the church had *not* failed in its responsibility to give him proper care. Their judgment was that the staff had more than fulfilled their legal and moral obligations by trying to help this young man who had sought our counsel. Eventually the case was appealed all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The High Court refused to hear it, thereby letting stand the California State Supreme Court's ruling, which vindicated the church. Most important of all, the case affirmed every church's constitutional right to counsel from the Bible, establishing a legal precedent to keep secular courts from encroaching on the area of counseling in the church.

## THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE COUNSELING MINISTRY

Unfortunately, the privilege of counseling people with biblical truth may be in jeopardy anyway, not because of any legal barrier imposed from outside the church, but because of the attitude toward Scripture within the church. During the trial, a number of "experts" gave testimony. Most surprising were the so-called Christian psychologists and psychiatrists who testified that the Bible alone is not sufficient to meet people's deepest personal and emotional needs. These men were arguing before a secular court that God's Word is not an adequate resource for counseling people about spiritual problems! What is truly appalling is the number of evangelicals who are willing to take the word of such "professionals" on this subject.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past decade a host of evangelical psychological clinics have sprung up. Though almost all of them claim to offer biblical counsel, most merely dispense secular psychology disguised in spiritual terminology.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they are removing the counseling ministry from its proper arena in the church body and conditioning Christians to think of themselves as incompetent to counsel. Many pastors, feeling inadequate and perhaps afraid of possible malpractice litigation, are perfectly willing to let "professionals" take over what used to be seen as a vital pastoral responsibility.<sup>4</sup> Too many have bought the lie that a crucial realm of wisdom exists outside Scripture and one's relationship to Jesus Christ, and that some idea or technique

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Martin and Deidre Bobgan, *PsychoHeresy* (Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate, 1987) 53-54. The Bobgans list eight evidences of the "psychologizing of the church."

<sup>3</sup>Nearly all recent counseling books for ministers, even conservative ones, are written from the Freudian perspective in the sense that they rest largely upon the presuppositions of the Freudian ethic of non-responsibility" (Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970] 17-18). Adam's extraordinarily accurate analysis of the state of counseling in evangelicalism is now more than twenty years old, but is more apropos than ever. He has given the church an indispensable corrective to several trends that are eating away at the church's spiritual vitality. Christian leaders would do well to heed his still-timely admonition.

<sup>4</sup>Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) x-xi.

from that extrabiblical realm holds the real key to helping people with their deep problems.<sup>5</sup>

True psychology (i.e. "the study of the soul") can be done only by Christians, since only Christians have the resources for understanding and transforming the soul. The secular discipline of psychology is based on godless assumptions<sup>6</sup> and evolutionary foundations and is capable of dealing with people only superficially and only on the temporal level. The Puritans, long before the arrival of godless psychology, identified their ministry with people as "soul work."

Scripture is the manual for all "soul work" and is so comprehensive in the diagnosis and treatment of every spiritual matter that, energized by the Holy Spirit in the believer, it leads to making one like Jesus Christ. This is the process of biblical sanctification.

It is reasonable for people to seek medical help for a broken leg, dysfunctional kidney, tooth cavity, or other physical malady. It is also sensible for those who are alcoholic, drug addicted, learning disabled, or traumatized by rape, incest, or severe battering to seek help in trying to cope with their trauma.

Certain techniques of human psychology can serve to lessen trauma or dependency and modify behavior in Christians or non-Christians equally. There may also be certain types of emotional illnesses where root causes are organic and where medication might be

---

<sup>5</sup>E.g. Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Waco, TX: Word, 1980) 19. Collins believes the Bible "does not claim to be nor is it meant to be God's sole revelation about people-helping." He writes, "During the past century, God has permitted psychologists to develop careful research tools for studying human behavior and professional journals for sharing their findings. Perhaps hundreds of thousands of people have come for help and professional counselors have learned what makes people tick and how they can change."

<sup>6</sup>Cf. the comments of a psychological counselor cited in Bobgan, *PsychoHeresy* 5-6.: "At the present time there is no acceptable Christian psychology that is markedly different from non-Christian psychology. It is difficult to imply that we function in a manner that is fundamentally distinct from our non-Christian colleagues."

needed to stabilize an otherwise dangerous person. Such problems are relatively rare, however, and should not be used as examples to justify the indiscriminate use of secular psychological techniques for essentially spiritual problems. Dealing with the psychological and emotional issues of life in such ways is *not* sanctification.

"Christian psychology" as the expression is used today is an oxymoron. The word *psychology* no longer speaks of studying the soul. Instead it describes a diverse menagerie of therapies and theories that are fundamentally humanistic. The presuppositions and most of the doctrine of psychology cannot be successfully integrated with Christian truth.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the infusion of psychology into the teaching of the church has blurred the line between behavior modification and sanctification.

The path to wholeness is the path of spiritual sanctification. It is foolish to exchange the Wonderful Counselor, the spring of living water, for the sensual wisdom of earth and the stagnant water of behaviorism. The Lord Jesus reacted in a perfect and holy way to every temptation, trial, and trauma in life—the most severe ones that any human life could ever suffer. It should be clear that perfect victory over all life's troubles must be the result of being like Christ. No "soul worker" can lift another above the level of spiritual maturity he is on. So the supreme qualification for psychologists would be Christlikeness.

If one is a truly Christian psychologist, he must do soul work in the realm of the deep things of the Word and the Spirit and not be following around in the shallows of behavior modification. Why should a believer choose to do behavior modification when he has the tools for spiritual transformation? This would be like a surgeon wreaking havoc with a butter knife instead of using a scalpel. The most skilled counselor is the one who most carefully, prayerfully, and faithfully applies the divine spiritual resources to the process of sanctification, shaping another into the image of Jesus Christ.

The stampede to embrace the doctrines of secular psychology

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 5-6.

may be the most serious threat to the life of the church today. These doctrines are a mass of human ideas that Satan has placed in the church as though they were powerful life-changing truths from God. Most psychologists epitomize neo-gnosticism, claiming to have secret knowledge for solving people's real problems. Some of them even claim to perform a therapeutic technique they call "Christian counseling" when, in reality, they are using secular theory with biblical references tacked on to treat spiritual problems.<sup>8</sup>

The result is that pastors, biblical scholars, teachers of Scripture, and caring believers using the Word of God are disdained as naive, simplistic, and altogether inadequate counselors.<sup>9</sup> Bible reading and prayer are commonly belittled as "pat answers," incomplete solutions

---

<sup>8</sup>E.g. Frank B. Minirth, *Christian Psychiatry* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1977) 186. Minirth advises counselors to "interject Scripture" with caution: "Proper timing and readiness are important. Once the counselee knows the counselor really cares, Scripture can usually be shared without any offense. The Scripture must meet the specific need of the individual, and a few verses are preferable to many."

<sup>9</sup>E.g. Larry Crabb recounts an anecdote where he challenged a friend committed to the utter sufficiency of Scripture to suggest how he would counsel an anorexic girl. Crabb writes, "It is difficult to come up with a biblical answer to a question that the Bible never seems to consider. My friend therefore changed the question from the one I (as well as the girl's parents) was asking to one that, in his mind, we *should* have been asking. . . ."

"Two passages in the Bible (1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 2 Cor. 6:16) tell us that we are the temple of God; one passage indicates that our bodies are themselves temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). My friend turned to those verses and explained that anorexia can be understood as rebellion against our responsibility to care for the Spirit's temple. This so-called biblical counseling will focus on developing in the anorexic a respect for her body and exhorting her to treat her body accordingly. At best, the results of such counseling will be external conformity. The counselee will not be freed by truth to enter more deeply into loving relationship with God or others.

"When we limit the questions we are allowed to ask to those that the Bible specifically answers, the result will often be a nonthinking and simplistic understanding of life and its problems . . ." (Larry Crabb, *Understanding People* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987] 57-58).

for persons struggling with depression or anxiety.<sup>10</sup> Scripture, the Holy Spirit, Christ, prayer, and grace are the traditional solutions Christian counselors have pointed people to. But the average Christian today has come to believe that none of them *really* offers the cure for people's woes.<sup>11</sup>

### HOW SCIENTIFIC ARE THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES?

Psychology is not a uniform body of scientific knowledge, like thermodynamics or organic chemistry. It rather refers to a complex menagerie of ideas and theories, many of which are contradictory. Psychology has not proven itself capable of dealing effectively with the human mind and with mental and emotional processes. Thus it can hardly be regarded as a science.

Many will object to classifying psychology as a pseudoscience,<sup>12</sup> but that is exactly what it is—the most recent of several human inventions designed to explain, diagnose, and treat behavioral problems without dealing with moral and spiritual issues. Little more than a century ago, the debate was over a different kind of "behavioral science" called phrenology. Phrenology held that personality characteristics were determined by the shape of someone's skull. The phrenologists' diagrams were maps of the head with specific areas labeled, showing which zone of the brain determined a particular emotion or characteristic. A phrenologist would feel people's skulls,

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>11</sup>Crabb believes the church "promote[s] superficial adjustments while psychotherapists, with or without biblical foundations, . . . do a better job than the church of restoring troubled people to more effective functioning" (ibid., 129). Later he adds, "Secularists sometimes seem to have a corner on honestly facing the disturbing complexity of life while Christians recite clichés that push away real questions of the heart. As a result, nonbelievers often help people with emotional problems more effectively than Christians" (ibid., 211).

<sup>12</sup>Most advocates of psychology assume rather than argue that psychology is truly scientific (cf. Collins, *Christian Counseling* 19).

diagnosing their problems by the location of bumps on their heads.<sup>13</sup>

If you think behavioral science has advanced greatly since then, ask yourself how reasonable it is to surround an adult in the fetal position with pillows so he can get back in touch with his prenatal anxieties.<sup>14</sup> Given the choice, someone poking around on one's head sounds preferable.

Modern psychologists use hundreds of counseling models and techniques based on a myriad of conflicting theories, so it is impossible to speak of psychotherapy as though it were a unified and consistent science.<sup>15</sup> However, the following views, popularized by psychology, have filtered down into the church from the assorted stuff in the psychological tank and are having a profound and disturbing effect on its approach to helping people:

- < Human nature is basically good.
- < People have the answers to their problems inside them.
- < The key to understanding and correcting a person's attitudes and actions lies somewhere in his past.
- < Individuals' problems are the results of what someone else has done to them.
- < Human problems can be purely psychological in nature`unrelated to any spiritual or physical condition.
- < Deep-seated problems can be solved only by professional counselors using therapy.

---

<sup>13</sup>Leo Steiner wrote, "Where will psychoanalysis be even 25 years from now? . . . I predict it will take its place along with phrenology and mesmerism" (Leo Steiner, "Are Psychoanalysis and Religious Counseling Compatible?" (paper read to the Society for Scientific Study of Religion, Harvard University, Nov 1958, cited by Adams, *Competent* 18-19). Obviously Steiner's prediction failed to materialize, but his characterization of psychoanalysis was right on target.

<sup>14</sup>Primal therapy was popularized by Arthur Janov, *The Primal Scream* (New York: Dell, 1970). Daniel Casriel, *A Scream Away from Happiness* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972), expanded on Janov's ideas and formulated a group scream therapy, where group members hold hands and shriek at each other to work out their problems.

<sup>15</sup>Sigmund Koch, "Psychology Cannot Be a Coherent Science," *Psychology Today* (Sept 1969) 66.



< Scripture, prayer, and the Holy Spirit are inadequate and simplistic resources for solving certain types of problems.

Ironically, even before the church became so infatuated with "behavioral science," those who know it best were beginning to question whether psychotherapy is a science at all. Eleven years ago, *Time* magazine ran a cover story called "Psychiatry on the Couch." It said,

On every front, psychiatry seems to be on the defensive. . . . Many psychiatrists want to abandon treatment of ordinary, everyday neurotics ("the worried well") to psychologists and the amateur Pop therapists. After all, does it take a hard-won M.D. degree . . . to chat sympathetically and tell a patient you're-much-too-hard-on-yourself? And if psychiatry is a medical treatment, why can its practitioners not provide measurable scientific results like those obtained by other doctors?

Psychiatrists themselves acknowledge that their profession often smacks of modern alchemy`full of jargon, obfuscation and mystification, but precious little real knowledge. . . .

As always, psychiatrists are their own severest critics. Thomas Szasz, long the most outspoken gadfly of his profession, insisted that there is really no such thing as mental illness, only normal problems of living. E. Fuller Torrey, another antipsychiatry psychiatrist, is willing to concede that there are a few brain diseases, like schizophrenia, but says they can be treated with only a handful of drugs that could be administered by general practioners or internists. . . . By contrast, the Scottish psychiatrist and poet R. D. Laing is sure that schizophrenia is real`and that it is good for you. Explains Laing: it is a kind of psychedelic epiphany, far superior to normal experience.

Even mainline practitioners are uncertain that psychiatry can tell the insane from the sane.<sup>16</sup>

The article went on to chronicle the failures of psychiatry, noting that "of all patients, one-third are eventually `cured,' one-third are helped somewhat, and one-third are not helped at all."<sup>17</sup> But, as the article

---

<sup>16</sup>"Psychiatry on the Couch," *Time* (Apr 2, 1979) 74.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

further stated,

The trouble is that most therapies, including some outlandish ones, also claim some improvement for two-thirds of their patients. Critics argue that many patients go into analysis after a traumatic experience, such as divorce or a loved one's death, and are bound to do better anyway when the shock wears off. One study shows improvement for people merely on a waiting list for psychoanalytic treatment; presumably the simple decision to seek treatment is helpful.<sup>18</sup>

The article concludes with a pessimistic forecast by Ross Baldessarini, a psychiatrist and biochemist at the Mailman Research Center. He told *Time*, "We are not going to find the causes and cures of mental illness in the foreseeable future."<sup>19</sup>

Several years later, a conference in Phoenix, Arizona, brought together the world's leading experts on psychotherapy for what was billed as the largest meeting ever on the subject. The conference, called "The Evolution of Psychotherapy," drew 7,000 mental-health experts from all over the world. It was the largest such gathering in history, billed by its organizer as the Woodstock of psychotherapy. Out of it came several stunning revelations.

The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, quoted Laing, who "said that he couldn't think of any fundamental insight into human relations that has resulted from a century of psychotherapy. 'I don't think we've gone beyond Socrates, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, or even Flaubert by the age of 15,' he said."<sup>20</sup> He added,

"I don't think psychiatry is a science at all. It's not like chemistry or physics where we build up a body of knowledge and progress."

He said that in his current personal struggle with depression, humming a favorite tune to himself (he favors one called "Keep Right on to the End of the

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>20</sup>Ann Japenga, "Great Minds on the Mind Assemble for Conference," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 18, 1985) 5:1.

Road") sometimes is of greater help than anything psychotherapy offers.<sup>21</sup>

*Time* magazine, reporting on the conference, noted that in a panel discussion on schizophrenia, three out of four "experts" said there is no such disease.<sup>22</sup>

R. D. Laing, the favorite shrink of student rebels in the '60s, retains his romantic opinion of schizophrenics as brave victims who are defying a cruel culture. He suggested that many people are diagnosed as schizophrenic simply because they sleep during the day and stay awake at night. Schizophrenia did not exist until the word was invented, he said. . . . At a later panel, a woman in the audience asked Laing how he would deal with schizophrenics. Laing bobbed and weaved for 27 minutes and finally offered the only treatment possible for people he does not view as sick: "I treat them exactly the same way I treat anybody else. I conduct myself by the ordinary rules of courtesy and politeness."<sup>23</sup>

One clear truth emerged in the conference: among therapists there is little agreement. There is no unified "science" of psychotherapy, only a cacophony of clashing theories and therapies. Dr. Joseph Wolpe, a leading pioneer of behavioral therapy, characterized the Phoenix conference as "a babel of conflicting voices."<sup>24</sup>

Indeed it was. One specialist, Jay Haley, described what he called his "shaggy dog" technique. He evidently means his technique is like a fluffy animal that appears to be fat until it gets wet; there appears to be more substance than really exists. This is his approach to therapy:

Get the patient to make an absolute commitment to change, then guarantee a cure but do not tell the patient what it is for several weeks. "Once you postpone, you never lose them as patients," he said. "They have to find out what the cure is." One bulimic who ate in binges and threw up five to 25 times a day was told she would be cured if she gave the therapist a penny the first time

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>22</sup>"A Therapist in Every Corner," *Time* (Dec 23, 1985) 59.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Japenga, "Great Minds" 16.

she vomited and doubled the sum each time she threw up. Says Haley: "They quickly figure out that it doubles so fast that they can owe the therapist hundreds of thousands of dollars in a few days, so they stop."<sup>25</sup>

Jeffrey Zeig, organizer of the conference, said as many as a hundred different theories may exist in the United States alone. Most of them, he said, are "doomed to fizzle."<sup>26</sup>

Not only do psychologists sell supposed cures for a high price, but they also invent diseases for which the cures are needed. Their marketing strategy has been effective. Invent problems or difficulties, harp on them until people think they are hopelessly afflicted, then peddle a remedy. Some of the supposed problems are pathetically trite. Self-image, looks, co-dependency, emotional abuse, mid-life crisis, unfulfilled expectations today's "infirmities" were once seen more accurately as the pains of selfishness. Egocentricity has become a major market strategy for psychotherapists. By fostering people's natural tendency toward self-indulgence, psychology has sold itself to an eager public. The church has witlessly jumped on the bandwagon.

Psychology is no more a science than the atheistic evolutionary theory upon which it is based. Like theistic evolution, Christian psychology is an attempt to harmonize two inherently contradictory systems of thought. Modern psychology and the Bible cannot be blended without serious compromise to or utter abandonment of the principle of Scripture's sufficiency.

Though it has become a profitable business, psychotherapy cannot solve anyone's spiritual problems. At best it can occasionally use human insight to superficially modify behavior. It succeeds or fails for Christians and non-Christians equally because it is only a temporal adjustment a sort of mental chiropractic. Even experts admit it cannot change the human heart.

## THE FAILURE OF "CHRISTIAN" PSYCHOLOGY

---

<sup>25</sup>"Every Corner" 59.

<sup>26</sup>Japenga, "Great Minds" 16.

Meanwhile, however, the attitude within the church is to accept psychotherapy more than ever. If the Christian media serve as a barometer of the whole church, a dramatic shift is taking place. Christian radio, for instance, once a bastion of Bible teaching and Christian music, is overrun with talk shows, pop psychology, and phone-in psychotherapy. Preaching the Bible is pass. Psychologists and radio counselors are the new heroes of evangelicalism. Christian radio is the major advertising tool that has made psychology extremely lucrative.

The church is thereby ingesting heavy doses of dogma from psychology, adopting secular "wisdom" and attempting to sanctify it by calling it Christian, thereby redefining evangelicalism's most fundamental values. "Mental and emotional health" is a new buzzword. It is not a biblical concept, though many seem to equate it with spiritual wholeness. Sin is called sickness, so people think it requires therapy, not repentance. Habitual sin is called addictive or compulsive behavior, and many surmise its solution is medical care rather than moral correction.<sup>27</sup>

Human therapies are embraced most eagerly by the spiritually weak, those who are shallow or ignorant of biblical truth and who are unwilling to accept the path of suffering that leads to spiritual maturity and deeper communion with God. The unfortunate effect is that these people remain immature, held back by a self-imposed dependence on some pseudo-Christian method or psycho-quackery that actually stifles real growth.

The more secular psychology influences the church, the further people move from a biblical perspective on problems and solutions. One-on-one therapists are replacing the Word, God's chief means of grace (1 Cor 1:21; Heb 4:12). The counsel these professionals dispense is often spiritually disastrous. Not long ago I listened aghast as a Christian psychologist on live radio counseled a caller to express anger

---

<sup>27</sup>Adams responds skillfully to this kind of thinking, citing O. Hobart Mowrer, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion* (Adams, *Competent* xvi-xvii).

at his therapist by making an obscene gesture at him. "Go ahead!" he told the caller. "It's an honest expression of your feelings. Don't try to keep your anger inside."

"What about my friends?" the caller asked. "Should I react that way to all of them when I'm angry?"

"Why, sure!" this counselor said. "You can do it to anyone, whenever you feel like it. Except those who you think won't understand they won't be good therapists for you." This is a paraphrase of the conversation, the broadcast of which is recorded on tape. Actually, the counselor suggested something much more explicit, but it is inappropriate to put it in print.

That same week, I heard another popular Christian broadcast that offers live counseling to callers nationwide. A woman called and said she has had a problem with compulsive fornication for years. She said she goes to bed with "anyone and everyone" and feels powerless to change her behavior.

The counselor suggested that her conduct is her way of striking back, a result of wounds inflicted by her passive father and overbearing mother. "There's no simple road to recovery," this radio therapist told her. "Your problem won't go away immediately it's an addiction, and these things require extended counseling. You will need years of therapy to overcome your need for illicit sex." It was then suggested that the caller find a church that would be tolerant while she worked her way out of the "painful wounds" that were "making" her fornicate.

What kind of advice is that? First, the counselor in effect gave the woman permission to defer obedience to a clear command of Scripture, "Flee immorality" (1 Cor 6:18; cf. also 1 Thess 4:3). Second, he blamed her parents and justified her vengeance toward them. Third, he seemed to suggest she could taper off gradually from her sin under therapy, of course.

Furthermore, he gave his nationwide audience the clear message that he has no real confidence in the Holy Spirit's power to transform a person's heart and behavior immediately. Worse, he

encouraged churches to tolerate a person's sexual sin until therapy begins to work.

The profound simplicity of Gal 5:16 is in contrast to both radio counselors' advice: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Is it possible that years of therapy could bring people to the point of walking by the Spirit? Certainly not if the therapist is someone who recommends obscene gestures, delayed repentance, and churches tolerant of chronic immorality! No biblical justification for such counsel exists. In fact, it flatly contradicts God's Word. The apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian church to turn an adulterer over to Satan, putting him out of the church fellowship (1 Corinthians 5).

Thanks is due to God for men and women in the church who depend on the Bible when counseling others, for godly counselors who urge troubled people to pray and who point them to Scripture, to God, and to the fullness of His resources to meet every need. There is no quarrel with those who use either common sense or social sciences as a helpful observer's platform to look at human conduct and develop tools to assist people in getting some external controls on their behavior. This may be useful as a first step for providing a real spiritual cure for them. But a wise counselor realizes that all behavioral therapy stops on the surface, far short of solutions to actual needs of the soul which can be resolved only in Christ.

On the other hand, those who exalt psychology above Scripture, intercession, and the perfect sufficiency of God should not be tolerated. People who mix psychology with divine resources and sell the mixture as a spiritual elixir should not be encouraged. Their methodology amounts to a tacit admission that what God has given in Christ is not adequate to meet the deepest needs of troubled lives.

God Himself does not think very highly of counselors who claim to represent Him, but rely instead on human wisdom. Job 12:17-20 says,

He makes counselors walk barefoot [a sign of humiliation],  
He makes fools of judges.

He loosens the bond of kings,  
And binds their loins with a girdle.  
He makes priests walk barefoot,  
And overthrows the secure ones.  
He deprives the trusted ones of speech,  
And takes away the discernment of the elders.

God's wisdom is so vastly superior to man's that the greatest human counselors are made into a spectacle. Vv. 24-25 of Job 12 add,

He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people,  
And makes them wander in a pathless waste.  
They grope in darkness with no light,  
And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.

If anyone had to endure the folly of well-intentioned human counselors, it was Job. Their irrelevant, useless advice was as much a grief to him as the satanic afflictions he suffered.

The depth to which "sanctified" psychotherapy can sink is quite profound. A local newspaper recently featured an article about a thirty-four-bed clinic that has opened in Southern California to treat "Christian sex addicts."<sup>28</sup> (The article does not explain the reasons for beds in this kind of clinic.) According to the account, the clinic is affiliated with a large and well-known Protestant church in the area. Its staff comprises specialists described as "real pioneers in the area [of sexual addiction]. These are all legitimate, licensed psychotherapists who happen to have a strong Christian orientation to therapy," according to the director.<sup>29</sup>

Does their "Christian" orientation happen to be solid enough to allow these psychotherapists to admit that lasciviousness is sin? Evidently not. Interviews with several of them were in the article. They consistently used the terms *illness*, *problem*, *conflict*, *compulsive*

---

<sup>28</sup>Nicole Brodeur, "Center Aids Christian Sex Addicts," *Orange County Register* (Feb 13 1989) 1.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



*behavior, treatment, and therapy.* Words with moral overtones were carefully avoided. Sin and repentance were never mentioned.

Worse than this, these so-called experts scoffed at the power of God's Word to transform a heart and break the bondage of sexual sin. The article quoted the center's program director as he explained why he believes his treatment center specifically for Christians is essential: "There are some groups of Christians who believe the Bible is all you need."<sup>30</sup>

That statement is the echo of neo-gnosticism. Belittling those who believe the Bible is sufficient, these latter-day "clouds without water" (Jude 12) insist that they are privy to a higher, more sophisticated secret knowledge that holds the real answer to what troubles the human soul. Christians must not be intimidated by their false claims. No higher knowledge, no hidden truth, nothing besides the all-sufficient resources that are in Christ exists that can change the human heart.

Any counselor who wants to honor God and be effective must see the goal of his efforts as leading a person to the sufficiency of Christ. The view that man is capable of solving his own problems, or that people can help one another by "therapy" or other merely human means, denies the doctrine of human depravity and man's need for God. It replaces the Spirit's transforming power with impotent human wisdom.

### WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

It is significant that one of the biblical names of Christ is Wonderful Counselor (Isa 9:6). He is the highest and ultimate One to whom Christians may turn for counsel, and His Word is the well from which they may draw divine wisdom. What could be more wonderful than that? In fact, one of the most glorious aspects of Christ's perfect sufficiency is the wonderful counsel and great wisdom He supplies in times of despair, confusion, fear, anxiety, and sorrow. He is the

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

quintessential Counselor.

That is not to denigrate the importance of Christians counseling each other. A crucial need exists for biblically sound counseling ministries within the body of Christ. The important role of those who are spiritually gifted to offer encouragement, discernment, comfort, advice, compassion, and help to others is unquestionable. The truth is that one of the very problems leading to the current plague of bad counsel is the failure of churches to do as well as they could have in enabling people with those kinds of gifts to minister effectively. The complexities of the contemporary scene make it more difficult than ever to take the time necessary to listen well, serve others through compassionate personal involvement, and otherwise provide the close fellowship necessary for the church body to enjoy spiritual health and vitality.

Churches have looked to psychology to fill the gap, but it has not worked. Professional psychologists are not a substitute for spiritually gifted people, and the counsel psychology offers cannot replace biblical wisdom and divine power. Moreover, psychology tends to make people dependent on a therapist, whereas people with spiritual gifts always turn people back to an all-sufficient Savior and His all-sufficient Word.

King David was a person who occasionally sought advice from human counselors, but he always turned to God for answers in the end. As many of the psalms reveal, he was especially dependent on God alone when he struggled with personal problems or emotions. When hit with depression or inner turmoil, he turned to God and wrestled in prayer. When the problem was his own sin, he was repentant, broken, and contrite. He prayed, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me;/ Test my mind and my heart" (Ps 26:2). The spiritually mature always turn to God for help in times of anxiety, distress, confusion, or unrest in the soul, and they are assured of wise counsel and deliverance.

The reason for this assured deliverance is that every need of the human soul is ultimately spiritual. Such a thing as a "psychological problem" unrelated to spiritual or physical causes is nonexistent. God

supplies divine resources sufficient to satisfy completely all the spiritual needs. David understood that. His writings reflect the depth of human experience, emotion, and spiritual insight of one who had fully experienced the extremities of life. He knew the exhilaration of going from shepherd to king. He wrote of everything from absolute triumph to bitter discouragement. He wrestled with pain so deep he could hardly bear to live. His own son Absalom tried to kill him and was then killed. He suffered from horrible guilt because of immorality and murder. His children brought him constant grief. He struggled to understand both the nature of God and his own heart. Of God he said, "Great is the Lord" (Ps 145:3), while of himself he said, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / And cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51:2). He told God what he felt and cried out for relief, though he admitted God had every right to punish him.

At the end of some of David's psalms he looked out a window of hope, and sometimes he did not. But David always went to God because he understood God's sovereignty and his own depravity.

Christians of this day and time, following David's example, should rest assured that their all-sufficient Savior alone has the answers to their needs and the power to apply those answers. They should stand convinced that those answers are to be found in the truth about God revealed in His Word, which is itself absolutely sufficient. The sufficient God has revealed Himself in His sufficient Word.