

Concerning a Biblical Approach to Counseling

On the face of it, Scripture is about counseling. By word and deed, the Redeemer God engages people to change them. To pick but one example, Paul's letter to the Ephesians offers a concise synopsis of the contents and methods of "curing souls." Christ's ambassador dissects the human condition according to the mind of the Searcher of hearts, and he extols the one true and comprehensive solution found in the living Lord whom we were made to know and love. In times of spiritual vitality, the church of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit's creation by that Word of truth, has let the Scripture define both counsel (the content) and counseling (the activity), both counselor and counselee (the persons involved in the process). The church has listened to the Comforter's definition of both trouble and comfort.

But the late twentieth century is a time of crisis and conflict in counseling. Over the past hundred years in the West, a massive redefinition of the ideas, practices, and institutions of "pastoral care" has taken place. The cure of souls has become significantly secularized by the modern psychologies and the psychotherapeutic professions. Many brilliant thinkers, skilled practitioners, and powerful institutions have arisen to claim the power to cure souls by pointedly excluding the Bible's teaching. For example, Sigmund Freud once described his own work this way: "The words, 'secular pastoral worker,' might well serve as a general formula for describing the function which the analyst, whether he is a doctor or a layman, has to perform in his relation to the

public. "¹ Carl Jung, Freud's most famous disciple--and the most famous heretic from Freudian orthodoxy--further elaborated: "Patients force the psychotherapist into the role of a priest and expect and demand of him that he shall free them from their distress. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which, strictly speaking, belong to the theologian."² Psychotherapists are "secular priests" by the open admission of the more self-conscious among them.³ Perhaps more pointedly, as a Christian looks at the phenomena of twentieth century psychotherapeutics, the therapists are secular prophet-theologians, who redefine human nature and the meaning of life, excising God. They are secular priest-pastors, who shepherd the human soul to find refuge in itself in a universe barren of the living, self-revealing, redeeming God. They are secular king-elders, who administer the secular institutions of the modern cure of souls.

How has the church responded to this redefinition of the ideas, practices, and institutions of "pastoral care" that has taken place around us? The approach to helping souls live in faith, love, joy, peace and every other wisdom has largely changed from the use of Scripture's ideas, methods, and institutions to the use of almost everything except what Scripture actually teaches and models. What should be done to recover the centrality of Scripture for helping people to grow up into the image Christ? How will we help people find meaning and sustenance in suffering? How will we help people live

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, translated and edited by James Strachey, New York: W. W. Norton, 1927 (translated 1959), p. 93. By "layman" Freud means a medical layman, someone who is not a physician. Freud recognized that psychotherapy was not strictly a medical activity. Many of Freud's followers, commentators, and critics have subsequently stated unambiguously that psychotherapy is a fundamentally a "moral" or "spiritual" activity. That is, it fundamentally deals with belief, behavior, conscience, value, identity, meaning, and worldview.

² Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, translated by W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1933, p. 241.

³ Perry London, *The Modes and Morals of Psychotherapy*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, chapter 7.

in faith and love rather than in sin? How can face-to-face "helping" relationships be reconfigured to serve as instruments of the only enduring wisdom?

To recover the centrality of Scripture for the cure of souls demands two things: *conviction* backed up with *content*. The conviction? Scripture is about understanding and helping people; the scope of Scripture's sufficiency includes those face-to-face relationships that our culture labels "counseling" or "psychotherapy." The content? The problems, needs, and struggles of real people--right down to the details--must be rationally explained by the categories with which the Bible teaches us to understand human life. Those problems must be addressed and redressed using the gracious and powerful truths and the effective means which the Bible teaches us to use.

Conviction alone simply waves a flag, and, eventually, degrades into sloganeering. But convictions demonstrated in action, convictions shown to be penetrating, comprehensive, and subtle, will edify the teachable and even persuade the skeptical. The church needs persuading that the conviction is true, and a key ingredient in such persuasion will be to parade the riches of Scripture for curing souls. The matters confessed in the pages that follow need the adornment of humble and efficacious ministry to shine with all their glory. The goals of this paper are of necessity more modest. It intends to provide a statement of guiding convictions more than a detailed unfolding of contents. It cannot begin to communicate the countless positive details of the Bible's view of counseling. But it is at least a beginning, an articulation of those convictions that must be worked thoroughly into our faith and practice. The first section of Affirmations and Denials (A&D) treats the sufficiency of Scripture. Unless God lies, we have the goods for developing systematic biblical counseling. Any such system must

provide four further particulars. First, it must make a penetrating and comprehensive analysis of the human condition: see A&D II, III, and IV. Second, it must bring to bear an effective solution, equally penetrating and comprehensive: see A&D V and VI. Third, it must teach a wise pastoral methodology that engages the variety of persons and problems appropriately: see A&D VII and VIII. Finally, it must offer a standpoint from which to interact with other systems of counseling: enabling us to discern the intellectual effects of sin operating in such systems, enabling us to learn even from enemies of Christ while not losing Christian distinctives, and enabling us to call those who believe and practice other models to repent: see A&D IX and X. If Scripture does offer these things, it is sufficient. In the discussion that follows I will not give each section an equal amount of discussion. A&D I, IX, and X receive more thorough attention. This is not because these sections are more important - indeed, the entire sequence of A&Ds forms an organic whole. But in my subjective judgment of the current state of affairs in the church, these seemed particularly worthy of more extended discussion.

I. True knowledge about people and about counseling practice

We Affirm that the Bible, as God's self-revelation in relation to his creatures, also truly reveals human nature. Valid self-knowledge and knowledge of others can only be found by understanding every aspect of human existence - perception, thought, emotion, behavior, memory, attitude, belief, interpersonal relations, diverse aspects of social and physical experience, etc. - vis-À-vis God and His Word. The Bible is sufficient for understanding personal and situational problems.

We Deny that any other source of knowledge is authoritative for the task of explaining people.

We Affirm that the Bible is sufficient to provide a systematic approach to counseling. The Bible provides and models both counsel and counseling, teaching us to do likewise, with the intention of changing and sustaining people. Scripture reveals the mind of Christ about the task of curing souls,

and the biblical approach is distinctive conceptually, methodologically, and institutionally. By both precept and example, the Bible is a sufficient guide for both the public and private aspects of curing souls.

We Deny that any other source of knowledge is authoritative to equip us for the task of counseling people.

We Deny that the Bible intends to serve as an encyclopedia containing all facts about people and the diversity of problems in living. There is no avoiding the challenging and unending task of applying and adapting biblical teaching to the diversity of human needs and problems. We must study and engage real people, the "human documents," both as individuals and as social groups. We must study, engage, and profit from the cultural products - the sciences, the humanities, the arts, etc. - that attempt to describe and make sense of human life.

What is a genuinely biblical view of the problems of the human soul and the procedures of ministering transforming grace? Does Scripture give us the materials and call to construct something that might fairly be called "systematic biblical counseling." I believe that we do have the goods for a coherent and comprehensive practical theology of face-to-face ministry. One characteristic of our times is that far more people believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for preaching or public teaching than believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for the tasks of counseling, discipleship, child-rearing, and so forth. In effect, Scripture is apparently adequate for addressing crowds but inadequate for addressing individuals. But Scripture presents itself as pertinent to individuals as well as to groups. What it teaches and illustrates is relevant to both public and private ministry. God's Word is dense with explanations, with instructions, with illustrations, with implications for face-to-face conversation.

In many places the Holy Spirit reflects on the sufficiency of the treasure that he has created through his prophets and apostles. For example, in one classic passage Scripture proclaims itself as that which makes us "wise unto salvation," a comprehensive

description of human life transformed from all that ails us (2 Timothy 3:15-17). This same passage goes on to speak of the Spirit's words as purposing to teach us. Both the utter simplicity and unsearchable complexity of Scripture enlighten us about God, about ourselves, about good and evil, true and false, grace and judgment; about the world that surrounds us with its many forms of suffering and beguilement, with its opportunities to shed light into darkness. Through such teaching, riveted to particular people in particular situations, God exposes in specific detail what is wrong with human life. No deeper, truer, or better analysis of the human condition can be concocted. God's words then reconstruct and transform what they define as defective. He speaks, as he acts, to straighten out wrongs through the corrective power of grace. To promote any solution but God's is to offer opiates to the masses, the stuff of dreams, not the stuff of real answers for real problems. And this God continues to speak, performing his wisdom-renewing work in an ongoing process. The net result? We begin to live like Jesus Christ himself. Through Scripture, the Spirit progressively accomplishes our renewal into the image of him who is wisdom incarnate, so that we become equipped for every good work. Second Timothy 3, reflecting on the inexhaustible riches of wisdom revealed in the Scriptures, makes a case for the sufficiency of the Word to cure souls.

To put Scripture first is another way of saying that God is at the center of counseling. God is the sovereign king, judge, and savior. He is active, speaking, merciful, commanding, powerful. The Lord Jesus Christ, is the central focus of counseling and the exemplar of the Wonderful Counselor. The Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit are foundational to all significant and lasting life change. The Word of God is about counseling, giving both understanding of people and methods of

ministering to people. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and wisdom is the only worthy goal of counseling. The Bible is authoritative, relevant, and comprehensively sufficient for counseling. God has spoken truly to every basic issue of human nature and to the problems in living. His Word establishes the goal of counseling, how to change, the role of the counselor, counseling methods, and so forth. Christians have the only authoritative source for counseling wisdom: the Holy Spirit speaking in His Word.

Commitment to God generates extensive epistemological consequences. First, other sources of knowledge must be submitted to the authority of Scripture. The sciences, personal experience, literature, movies, medicine, and so forth will often be useful. But they may never play a constitutive role in forming our counseling system. Second, there is a "conflict of counsel" built into human life. Genesis 3, Psalm 1, and Jeremiah 23 are paradigmatic. Counsel that contradicts God's counsel has existed almost from the beginning, challenging God's counsel, building from other presuppositions and towards other goals. Such false counsel must be noted and opposed. In particular, in our time and place, various secular psychologies have intruded into the domain of biblical truth and practice. Secular theories and therapies substitute for biblical wisdom, and deceive people both inside and outside the church. The false claimants to authority must be exposed and opposed.

Third, the Scriptures provide both the eyeglasses (interpretive categories that are true) and a vast number of concrete examples, but the Bible never pretends to provide all the examples. And neither Scripture nor Christian experience gives us warrant to think that we will arrive at perfected wisdom this side of God's presence. God demands

that we put on our eyeglasses and think hard, well, and biblically about people. He demands the humility of learners, the willingness to be refined. For example, ponder the implications of Galatians 5:19-21. Paul lists 15 representative examples of those works which the flesh's desires produce. He brackets that list with two phrases that remind us to put on biblical glasses, to look around, and to notice 115 (or 1015!) other examples: "The works of the flesh are obvious. and the like." Or consider I Timothy 6:10: what are the countless specific forms of sin that a craving for money produces? Consider also James 3:16: What countless variations and permutations of chaos and sin arise when people are self-absorbed in pride and demandingness? Consider the repeated summary phrase, "lusts of the flesh." What particular desires have become inordinate cravings in the particular people we minister to? Scripture gives us numerous examples, but the variations are endless. Give people boring food and they will grumble because they crave tasty food (Numbers 11:5); allow people to become thirsty they will grumble because they crave juicy foods (Numbers 20:5). The sufficiency of Scripture challenges us to hard thinking and close observation of both individuals and cultures. It challenges us to learn from the observations made by others. But the comprehensive model is revealed up front by God himself. He intends his Word to give the rule of faith and practice for counseling.

The sufficiency of Scripture for counseling ministry does not allow us to relax or to constrict into the mentality that views the Bible as an encyclopedia accessed by a concordance. The scope of biblical sufficiency includes the call to hard thought about details about which there is not a proof text - the "obvious," "and the like," and "every

evil practice." We are called to trace how the common themes of biblical truth underlie the idiosyncrasies of individuals and cultures.

II. Human dependency on and responsibility to God

We Affirm that human beings are created fundamentally responsible before God for their ways of believing and living. The way of life practiced by both individuals and groups comes "out of the heart". Human beings are active agents and pervasively religious: the details of thought, behavior, and emotion arise from faith either placed in God or misplaced in false gods. The Bible's approach to counseling addresses problems that God defines as inescapably "social." Individuals exist in relationship to God and neighbor willy nilly, with a dual call to love. Sin severs those relationships, and grace restores them. The human psyche registers events occurring in thoroughly social, God-centered reality.

We Deny that some form of determinism neuters human moral accountability to God. Physiological constraints, sociocultural conditioning, experiences of traumatic or unrelenting suffering, the attacks of demonic agencies, etc., affect human life in many ways, but such material and efficient causes are not final causes of any sin. Human beings are not basically passive, defined by a state of neediness, disease, or victimhood.

We Deny that human beings are psychological *per se*, and repudiate notions of the encapsulated psyche, the autonomous self, the isolated individual. We deny that human beings are psycho-social *per se*, where the social milieu is defined without reference to God. We deny that human beings are physiological *per se*, as if problems in living, in faith and practice, could be reduced to a biological substrate. The totality of human existence - psychological, behavioral, social, physiological is created by God, sustained by God, and occurs vis-A-vis God.

Human beings have been created inescapably dependent on God and inescapably accountable to God. We live before God's face as responsible, moral actors. This view of human existence is fundamental to the Christian view of counseling. This is not to deny the many extraneous factors that impinge on and color moral responsibility. God has created us as physiological beings with diverse abilities and disabilities; he has embedded each of us in' a web of social relations generating quite different patterns of

enculturation and social experience; and he has endowed each of us with a complex psyche with various aptitudes and ineptitudes. In addition, in a fallen world people face situational difficulties of many sorts the world, the devil, God's curse, "trials and temptations." But the variables of endowment and situation do not fundamentally cause problems in living. They occur within the sovereignty of God. They provide the context in which hearts are revealed, and, for believers in the Redeemer, they provide the context in which faith and obedience are purified through the battle between the Spirit and the flesh. Influential aspects of one's life situation are significant for counseling, but not ultimately causative of sin.

III. The image of God

We Affirm that the Bible defines the ideal for human functioning. That one ideal is portrayed in numerous ways: to be renewed in the image of God, to walk as Jesus Christ walked, to live by faith, to obey the law of God, to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, to glorify God, to be wise, to be holy as God is holy.

We Deny that any other standard and goal is true: e.g., self-actualization, social adjustment, emotional equilibrium, stoic or Hindu apathy, self-discovery, ecstatic experience, insight into intrapsychic or social dynamics, autonomy, a sense of self-worth, etc.

The Bible's view of counseling defines a distinctive ideal for how a human being is made to live: to believe and live as Jesus believed and lived. This ideal tells us what we ought to be by nature, defines what is wrong with us by sin's perversion, and points to what we can become by grace. The image of Christ is a familiar item in Christian profession, but its implications are often ignored when it comes to counseling.

IV. Sin and misery

We Affirm that the Bible defines what is fundamentally and pervasively wrong with people. Our problem is sin, and the attendant misery arising from God's curse on sin, Satan's malice, and the sins of others against us. The law of God, as summarized in the two great commandments to love God and neighbor, provides the most penetrating and the final diagnostic categories. Failure to love God takes the form of love for other gods: explicitly religious false gods, self, pleasure, human approval, material goods, power, etc. Failure to love neighbor takes countless forms, the sins of both commission and omission. The varied hardships of life in a cursed world occur within the context of God's immediate sovereignty, and serve purposes of purifying faith, hope, and love in God's children.

We Deny that any other diagnostic system is valid, universal, or penetrating. For example, theories that exalt differences of temperament, that point to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual syndromes and disorders, or that claim to identify nonphysiological psychiatric disease provide only culture-bound descriptions of certain kinds of people. They simply relabel the observed symptoms with technical terminology. They are ultimately shallow, culturally relative, and deceptive.

Evil, in all its dimensions, is the primary problem counselors deal with. This paragraph will give the barest sketch of the Bible's wondrously rich teaching on what is wrong with human life. Sin operates both internally (affecting motive, belief, thought, identity, conscience, memory, etc.) and externally (manifesting in words and deeds). Both the sins we do and the sins done against us fall within the purview of counseling. The consequences of personal sin and of Adam's sin play out in the details of life lived. Biblical counseling, like all ministry, aims to undo the works of the evil one, to bring aid to sufferers of the evils of life, to convert evildoers into those zealous for good deeds. Sin is both innovative and habitual, both deceptive and brazen. Much of the difficulty of counseling consists in bringing specific sin to awareness, and breaking its hold through the comforts of the gospel. Much of the difficulty of counseling consists in sustaining sufferers in hope through the comforts of the gospel. The core problem in believers is

remnant sin; the core problem in unbelievers is reigning sin. The problems in living that necessitate counseling are not matters of unmet psychological needs, indwelling demons of sin, poor socialization, inborn temperament, genetic predisposition, or anything else that removes attention from the responsible human being who inhabits a world of trials.

V. The Gospel of Jesus Christ

We Affirm that the Bible gives the solution for what troubles humankind: the redemptive good news of Jesus Christ in all its facets and phases. The grace and love of God in Christ is the *sine qua non* of genuine change.

We Deny that any other solution or therapy - psychological, psychotherapeutic, medical, philosophical, political, semi-religious, or religious - actually addresses and cures souls. Many things may alleviate emotional symptoms or may produce alteration of behavior in a more socially acceptable or less immediately self-destructive direction without actually changing the heart. Symptomatic relief and restoration of the social fabric may be gifts of common grace on occasion (and are byproducts of the cure of souls), but these cannot be the primary goals of Christian counseling ministry.

The manifold good news of Jesus Christ is the answer. Christ meets man's greatest needs: forgiveness for sins, power to change into Christ's image, deliverance from suffering and death. The orthodox gospel of Jesus Christ is the comprehensive answer to the pervasive problem. Christ deals with sin: the punishment, the guilt, the power, the deception, and the misery of sin. Jesus Christ was crucified for sinners; He reigns over hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit; He will return to complete the redemption of His people from their sins and sufferings. These core truths must infuse the counseling process.

Revised gospels alter or ignore Christ. He is either made the servant of the emotional and psychological "needs" of human beings or is made relatively irrelevant.

Wherever sin is not seen as the specific problem, the Redeemer of sinners and sufferers will not be seen as the specific solution. Most false teachings originate from unsound views about the corruption of human nature. Wrong views of a disease inevitably bring with them wrong views of the remedy. Wrong views of the corrupt nature of human beings always carry with them wrong views of the great cure for that corruption: Jesus Christ.

VI. Conversion and Progressive Sanctification

We Affirm that the growth process that counseling must aim for is conversion followed by progressive sanctification, the recreation of true humanity in the image of Jesus both individually and corporately. The manner of life characterized by the "flesh" is put off and replaced by the manner of life ruled by the Spirit. Such a process is lifelong and progressive.

We Deny that there is any instantaneous secret of perfection into the image of Jesus Christ.

We Deny that the processes of self-actualization, individuation, self-fulfillment, the meeting of supposed psychological needs, etc. describe what counseling should aim for.

The change process towards which counseling must aim is progressive sanctification. There are many ways of "changing" people. Biblical counseling aims for nothing less than transformation into the image of Jesus Christ amid the rough and tumble of daily life. Change is not instantaneous, but progresses throughout life. A progressive sanctification view of change has many implications. For example, the process of change is only metaphorically, not actually, "healing." The metaphor is meant to capture the process of sanctification: ongoing repentance, renewal of mind unto biblical truth, and the putting on of new obedience in the power of the Spirit.

VII. The church of Jesus Christ

We Affirm that the Spirit and the Word cooperate to create the church of Christ as the institutional locus for progressive sanctification. The church is commissioned by God to the task of curing souls. Scripture places its primary emphasis on the local church, teaching both the counseling role of church officers as well as the responsibility of every member to counsel other members.

We Deny that secular mental health professions have the right to allocate sectors human sin and suffering as their particular prerogative. Attempts to assert cultural authority and to secure exclusive legal status for such things as "marriage and family" practice, "addictions" counselors, "abuse counseling," and so forth -indeed, the very words "counseling" and "counselor" have become objects of increasing legislative and legal debate - must be viewed as direct threats to the calling of the church of Jesus Christ.

We Deny that the institutional forms of particular fallen cultures provide an adequate framework for counseling ministry: professional medical practice, the mental health professions, shamans, etc.

We Deny that "parachurch" forms of counseling ministry are inherently sinful, but such institutional forms must watch and work carefully in order that they supplement, support, and encourage the ministries of local churches rather than supplanting those ministries.

We Affirm that personal ministry - "counseling" - is of a piece with public ministry (worship, preaching, teaching, sacraments, modeling), with self-counseling (meditation, devotional life, quiet time, journaling), with diaconal ministries of mercy, and with church discipline. The differences between the various aspects of ministry are matters of application, not of basic intellectual structure and interventive intention.

We Deny that the activity termed "psychotherapy" in some modern cultures is an activity that can be conducted separate from the overall ministry of the Word conceptually, methodologically, and institutionally.

Counseling is not essentially different from any other aspect of Christ's redemptive ministry. This truth alone would check many faulty conceptions, practices, and institutional arrangements. Counseling is simply the personalized ministry of the Word of God, tailored to the particular situations and problems of individuals and small groups. Counseling is fundamentally a pastoral activity and ought to be church-based. It

ought to be regulated under the authority of God's appointed under-shepherds. Biblical counseling is intimately connected to other aspects of the pastoral task: teaching, preaching, prayer, church discipline, use of gifts, missions, worship, evangelism, and so forth. For example, the differences between preaching and counseling are not conceptual and fundamental; they are differences of methodology and application. The same truths are applied in diverse ways. The Scriptures should play the same role with respect to counseling that they play with respect to preaching. Scripture gives the contours and design in rich details. One might say God's revelation provides the engineering studies, the architectural drawings, and the building materials. Diversities in gifts, talent, insight, personality, education, culture, social and historical location, and so forth will affect many of the details of counseling practice, just as they affect the details of preaching. But Scripture is the wellspring, defining counseling as an activity anchored in the ministries of the body of Christ.

VIII. The Scope Of Counseling Ministry

We Affirm that the Scripture, and the counseling approach God enjoins, treats all of human life. The Bible's counseling, on which we must seek to model our own counseling, speaks to the gamut of problems in living. Scripture comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable, turning people from foolishness to wisdom in every area: e.g., learning to conciliate and to build constructive relationships in family, church, workplace, and neighborhood; attitudes and practices regarding finances and material possessions; responding to physical health or illness, to wealth or poverty, to success or failure, to acceptance or rejection; self- and other deception; addictive behaviors; the gamut of emotions, whether dysphoric (e.g., anger, depression, anxiety, fear, guilt) or euphoric (e.g., love, happiness, joy, gratitude, confidence); decision-making; the response to suffering and bereavement; and so forth.

We Deny that there is a narrow sphere of "religious" or "spiritual" beliefs, activities, emotions, and institutions, separated from the other spheres of daily life. The framework of ultimate meaning and values given in Scripture works

out into the details of life lived. Explicitly religious practices, such as prayer and worship, are not only discrete activities, but are also meant to function as a dimension of the rest of life.

We Deny that there is a realm of human life sectored off as the unique province of the discipline of psychology and of the practice of psychotherapy professions. There is no realm of "psychological, emotional, and relational problems" not under the purview of Scripture and biblical counseling. The subject matter of counseling is precisely that of the Bible.

Scripture is about what counseling is about: people, the details of life lived and experienced, the problems in living, changing what is wrong and encouraging what is right. The Bible's relevance and sufficiency for the cure of souls is immediate and practical. This is more than abstract theory, more than affirming that "counseling must proceed within the general boundaries of a Christian world-view." That sentiment is easy to pay lip service to, service that doesn't translate into much detail, guidance, or useful information. In the counseling discipline, Scripture gives much more than the sketchy outline of a world-view. It overflows with relevant detail. Paul wrote to the Colossians--and the Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, and the rest--to change lives in particular ways. Jesus talked to his disciples to change their motives, actions, words, attitudes, beliefs, and priorities. The same with the prophets, Moses, David, and Solomon. History and prophecy, law and gospel, epistle and meditation, psalm and proverb have a purpose: to counsel, teach, sustain, reprove, encourage, enlighten, challenge. God doesn't talk and act to fill up pages. He says and does, and has His messengers say and do, in order transform the way we live: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Scripture is given--and applied by the Holy Spirit to hearts--to change people fundamentally, pervasively,

specifically. Robust, biblical Christianity speaks a better and truer word to the problems of living.

Many professedly conservative Protestants do not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for the cure of souls. Typically, "spiritual" matters are split off from "psychological, emotional, relational" matters. "Spiritual" matters include such things as commitment to God, prayer, ethics, doctrine, evangelism, assurance of salvation, religious experience, the devil, church involvement, and a mystical leading of the Spirit. Other matters - suffering, socialization dynamics, family relationships, unpleasant emotions, interpersonal reconciliation, enslavement to sinful habits, patient and probing conversation, self-deception, analysis of motives and beliefs that operate at a less than self-conscious level, knowledgeable concern for another's well-being, and so forth - are relegated to extra-biblical authorities. Scripture is not seen to offer the fundamental categories for interpreting and redressing human experience. Instead, wise and effective counseling is seen to emerge from grafting secular psychological systems into Christianity. In practice, the engrafted secularism usually predominates over an impoverished and impotent Scripture.

IX. Common grace and the intellectual effects of sin

We Affirm that numerous disciplines can contribute to an increase in our knowledge of people and about how to help them: psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, literature, philosophy, economics, linguistics, political science, music, communications, theater, medicine, cartooning, comparative religions, organizational management, art, etc. God has endowed human beings with great powers of observation, interpretation, and conscience that sin distorts but cannot efface.

We Deny that any of these disciplines can align a system of faith and practice for counseling. They cannot provide the constitutive ingredients.

They are not necessary, though they may often be useful auxiliaries when appropriated through the lens of biblical presuppositions.

We Affirm that secular disciplines are fundamentally and presuppositionally distorted by their commitment to secularity. The systematic attempt to exclude God from the world he made, interprets, sustains, searches, controls, judges, and saves introduces pervasive errors.

We Deny that secular disciplines are wholly benighted by the pervasive intellectual effects of sin. The operations of God's common grace can cause unbelievers to be relatively observant, caring, and insightful. They can at times be provocative to the church, forcing us to study afresh where we have been ignorant or in error. They can often be informative, providing detailed illustrations of biblical truth in action. Common grace and the intellectual effects of sin always work simultaneously. This means that the benefits secular knowledge offers are always to a degree unwitting, contrary to the intentions of the thinker or practitioner, contrary to the logic of the system of thought that excludes the true and living God. Christians must always reinterpret, according to our presuppositions, what secularists see, care about, theorize, and do.

We Affirm that secular personality theories are essentially false theologies, competing with biblical truth. Similarly, secular psychotherapies are essentially false forms of the cure of souls, competing with biblical ministry. To recognize elements of relative truth and goodness in such systems, and to acknowledge that God sometimes brings about a degree of good through them, is not to obscure the basic distortion introduced by secularity.

We Deny that the psychologies (particularly the more ambitious and popular psychologies, those claiming to offer comprehensive explanations and genuine cures for the human condition) should be viewed as "objective science". Because secular psychology attempts to explain and fix people secularly, it is committed to misinterpret and mishandle what ails fallen humanity. The fragmentation of the field of psychology bears further eloquent testimony to the truth that the psychologies do not live up to the popular image and ideology of "science." Competing theories proliferate; as skepticism about the possibility of a grand unified theory of human nature becomes increasingly widespread, the field shatters into microtheories, rather than crystallizing into a unified theory; self-conscious theoretical and methodological eclecticism is the end result of a century of psychological endeavor; competition for power and status increasingly occupies professional energies. These Babel-like results are consequences of secularity's attempt to excise God from its understanding of people.

If Scripture teaches us God's own positive approach to counseling, how should biblical Christians interact with secular psychology--or with any other set of distorted observations, interpretations and practices? In the first place, truth generates a penetrating criticism of counterfeits and lies. But commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture does not hermetically seal the mind to all further input or interaction. Far from it. Such commitment is a standpoint on the world, not a blindfold to the world. God's point of view places a paradigm shift, a radical reinterpretation, on what worldly people think they see. C.S. Lewis put it charmingly: "We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday, not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact it's too bright to see!), but because by it we can see everything else." God's Word gives light to the entire field of counseling.

The psychotherapeutic schools and professions instinctively attempt to hijack biblical faith and ministry. But this is not to say that Christians should ignore or dismiss the various secular psychologies, or that God does not use fundamentally misguided efforts for his glory and for sharpening his church. Secular people--whether psychologists or anything else can be perceptive observers, caring practitioners, and brilliant thinkers. But when we look at psychology we take seriously the pervasiveness of secular presuppositions and the malignancy of secular intentions: secularists, by definition, have a warped brilliance and misguided kindness. To use an old expression of their own, they have "neurotic insights," observations that are at once dazzling but distorted, perceptive but blinkered, sensitive but self-serving. They systematically excise God when they look at people - but at the same time, they can not escape actually living in God's world where everything they see pressures them to

acknowledge God's point of view. Because all of human life can only be understood with-respect-to-God, *coram Deo*, they commit themselves to systematic error, and yet they can't efface the truth that erupts everywhere. Any utility secular psychology may have must be carefully qualified. must also say that the utility of psychology must be subordinate to three more fundamental tasks that permeate these Affirmations and

Denials:

[1] to articulate positive biblical truth in the counseling field;

[2] to discern the antithesis between secularism and biblical truth;

[3] to convert psychologized people in a psychologized culture.

What positive role should secular psychology play in a Christian model of counseling? It should play no role in constituting our model of counseling. But, carefully reinterpreted, secular observations will play an illustrational role, providing examples and details that illustrate the biblical model and fill out our knowledge. Often Scripture gives us generalized truths. For example, fathers are exhorted not to provoke children to anger and not to dishearten them. What are specific ways parents irritate and discourage their children? How might parents conciliate, buoy, and win affection from their children? That opens up a wide field for psychological and social psychological observation and commentary. Secular knowledge could -and often does - also play a provocative role. Non-Christians can challenge us to develop our understanding and practice in areas we may never have thought about or may have neglected. Wrong

interpretations of Scripture can be challenged. For example, comparative anthropology or sociology might study child-rearing practices across lines of culture, sub-culture, and class. Such studies might make provocative observations that helpfully rattle our enculturated assumptions about what it looks like to obey Proverbs, Ephesians 6:4, and Colossians 3:21. Fresh, appropriate applications of Scripture might result. These illustrational and provocative roles of psychology are no different from the way wise biblical counselors utilize every other source of extra-biblical knowledge. Here are a few examples of distorted, extra-biblical knowledge that the eyeglasses of Scripture equip us to utilize by reinterpreting constructively:

*The observations of any person who is not thinking biblically may be simultaneously informative, stimulating, and wrong. Christians conversing with and ministering to people continually reinterpret the data they hear, extending and deepening the reach of biblical categories with fresh details. This reinterpetive labor is at the heart of counseling: renewing minds to understand the world God's way. It is also at the heart of the counselor's growth in becoming case-wise and mature. Counselees say, feel, believe and do an unsearchable variety of things that wise counselors learn to interpret biblically;

- Literature - from Shakespeare's plays to Agatha Christie's mysteries -portray greed, pride, fear, lust and many other motives in action. Fiction of any kind is not to be read as epistemologically authoritative. But if biblical categories control, such literature extends the

range of our application of Scripture and forces us to think about things or notice things we might not have attended to previously;

- The daily newspaper and the television often wallow in mammon worship, power politics, popularity seeking, and gossip about sin. Biblical preachers and counselors may quote newspapers or TV shows not because these are authoritative, but because their stories and opinions illustrate biblical truth in some way, and may make us stop and think about things we've never considered;

- Medical research into the dynamics and prevalence of "psychosomatic" phenomena can often be informative. We don't buy their categories, but can appreciate--and reinterpret--their descriptions as illustrations of "spiritual-physiological" relationships.

- Sociology, history, archeology, comparative anthropology, philosophy, etc. all may contribute to the whole package of what gets said and done in a counseling conversation. As with psychology, the consistent Christian refuses to accept these as norm-setting disciplines. Such studies of human life--when explicitly based on biblical presuppositions or when consistently reinterpreted through the lens of biblical presuppositions--may be of use in describing a given people at some point in time;

- Self-knowledge of our own sins and temptations, and how the grace of God fleshes out in real life, is perhaps the single largest source of extra-biblical information, stories, observations, and conceptualizations. Our personal application of I Corinthians 10:12-13 and 2 Corinthians 1:4 does not create truth,

but illustrates, amplifies, and personalizes truth. It makes us more useful to God in helping others. None of these sources adds anything fundamental to the biblical model of human nature and counseling. Each of those sources illustrates, unwittingly or wittingly, a biblical model of people in lush detail: "Now *there's* an aspect of anger I've never seen before." Each may provoke me to think biblically about something I haven't previously considered: "How will tackle *that* problem, or help *that* person?" Debunk psychologists of their pretensions to expert knowledge, to "science," and they have the same twisted and blinkered perceptiveness of any other group of sinners. They may do empirical legwork that Christians do not have to repeat. They unwittingly and energetically fulfill the "cultural mandate" even while they oppose the God who has made and equipped human beings for that task. They may challenge our shortcomings and ignorance - for Christians, too, tend to become twisted and blinkered. They may describe typical people whom we meet in counseling or other ministry. But we must reinterpret what they see according to biblical truth. This reinterpretive labor--whether in the counseling office, in our closet, or in our reading--is a logical extension of grasping the pervasive antithesis between biblical truth and human error. What are psychologists--and counselees, novelists, M.D.s and others-- really looking at?

Christians face a twofold challenge: to hold faithfully to the categories of biblical truth and to grow case-wise about diverse human beings. Scripture alone makes us systematically wise into the commonalities of human life. That wisdom then matures

and becomes case-wise through practice in applying Scripture to our own lives, to counselees, to the things we read. Every wise counselor engages in lifelong empirical researches, informally if not formally. In this process, psychologists, sociologists, historians, counselees, the non-Christians who live next door, *USA Today*, our own ongoing repentance, and Agatha Christie may all contribute to our grasp of the variations and permutations on the common themes.

Christians who fail to think through carefully the nature of biblical epistemology run a gauntlet of dangers. On the one hand, we can act as if Scripture were exhaustive, rather than comprehensive; as if Scripture were an encyclopedic catalogue of all significant facts, rather than God's revelation of the crucial facts, richly illustrated, that yield a world view sufficient to interpret whatever other facts we encounter; as if Scripture were the whole bag of marbles rather than the eyeglasses through which we interpret all marbles; as if our current grasp of Scripture and people was triumphant and final. On the other hand we can act as if Scripture were inadequate and insufficient; as if Scripture did not give us enough of the blueprints and building materials necessary to construct counseling ministry; as if other sources of knowledge and professional expertise ought to constitute or even supplant biblical insight when it comes to face-to-face, constructive conversation with real people in real life.

X. Evangelism of a psychologized society

We Affirm that robust, presuppositionally consistent, biblical counseling will be a powerful evangelistic and apologetic force in the modern Western world. Our culture suffers under the domination of the "therapeutic" ethos, with its relentless logic of human autonomy, self-affirmation, and self-help. The church's ability to mount an intellectual, moral, and practical offensive into the culture will be in significant part a test of the fidelity and adequacy of our

counseling model. The most important interaction between the church and the modern psychologies will be for the former to call the latter to thorough-going, intelligent repentance from the errors of secularity in both misconstruing and mistreating the human dilemma.

We Deny that the most important part of the church's interaction with the modern psychologies is to discover what can be learned from them.

Our goal must not simply be to stake out turf against encroachers; we must also aim to win psychologized people to God's glory. The counseling field is ripe for powerful evangelism. Such evangelism addresses not only the individual's moral life and religious commitments; it also addresses the intellectual and professional outworking of those morals and commitments. Theory and therapy are theology; there are conceptual and practical effects of sin; there are conceptual and practical effects of renewal by the Word and Spirit. Since Scripture is about what counseling is about, it makes sense that the cure of souls will be a major cultural and religious battlefield of the 21st century, a place where God will greatly glorify Himself by changing lives.

The goal of biblically reinterpreting human experience--whether described by a counselee or a psychologist--is not fundamentally "look how much we can learn from them. Of course, through biblical eyes, you'll learn something from anything, even if what you learn is simply how error works. But the real goal is the ministry of the Word that converts the soul. In our culture, that soul is often a psychologized soul. Psychology is to our society as Islam is to Morocco. Let's wield the evangelistic sword effectively.