

Chapter Two: Integration or Biblical Counseling?

The debate over how we should counsel in the church is often heated and passionate because proponents on both sides genuinely care about people who are hurting. One side believes the most effective way to help people is by integrating principles from secular psychotherapy with principle from the Bible (the Integration approach). The other side calls for using the Bible alone¹ (the *Nouthetic*² or Biblical Counseling approach).

This is an extremely important debate. 1 Corinthians 1 condemns the use of human wisdom in spiritual matters. Integrationists would argue that the use of psychology in counseling is not the sort of thing Paul had in mind when he spoke of human wisdom. Are they right? If not, the consequences are dire to say the least. Paul goes so far as to say that if we mix human wisdom in with the gospel it will actually empty the cross of its power!

1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

The debate over the use of psychology centers mostly on two basic questions:

- 1) Are all psychological problems spiritual issues?
- 2) Is human wisdom useful for solving spiritual problems?

Are all psychological problems spiritual issues?

Three categories or two?

Integrationists tend to draw distinctions between psychological/mental problems and spiritual issues. For a medical problem, go to a doctor. For a spiritual problem, go to a pastor. And for a psychological problem, go to a psychologist or psychiatrist. A person trained only in the Bible, they insist, is no more qualified to address a psychological problem as he is to perform surgery. The Bible is sufficient in the areas it addresses – spiritual areas, but it gives no instruction on how to remove a gall bladder or cure an anorexic. Biblical counselors are simply in over their heads when counseling severe psychological problems.

This distinction between psychological issues and spiritual issues is widely accepted in our culture, but could it be that it's a distinction without a difference? Is there really such a thing as a psychological problem that is neither physical nor spiritual? Are there emotional or behavioral or mental issues that

¹ That is not to say that the biblical counselor is opposed to the use of common sense or all human reason. On the contrary, those elements of psychology can be quite helpful. If a person has a problem with overeating, and common sense says that it may help if he busies himself with enjoyable projects during the times of day he is normally tempted to overeat, that kind of common sense can be a great help.

² This term comes from the Greek word *noutheteo*, which means "to admonish, instruct, or warn."

Scripture does not address?

How one answers those questions depends on his understanding of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Both sides of the counseling debate agree in general terms that the Bible is sufficient. The question, though, is, "Sufficient for what?" All agree that it is sufficient in the areas it addresses, but does it address psychological issues? Clearly Scripture is not sufficient for rebuilding a carburetor or performing a tonsillectomy, because it does not address auto mechanics or modern medicine. Can the same be said about psychological problems?

Sufficient for what?

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

A person armed only with the Bible would be partially equipped at best if he were diagnosing and treating cancer. But anything that calls for spiritual teaching, sins that need rebuke, moral problems that need to be corrected, and anything that is a part of training in righteousness – for all of that a person armed only with Scripture is "fully equipped," even without any knowledge of psychology.

The term *work* is a broad one. "Every good work" encompasses every good task ... every good deed ... every good endeavor ... any and every activity that is good. Without question this term would include overcoming any sin. Breaking free from an addiction, overcoming wrong behaviors, gaining self-control, finding joy, peace, or hope, making wise decisions – all the things for which people seek counsel – these are all included in the phrase "every good work."

The phrase "thoroughly equipped" speaks of one who is ideally suited to a task. The only time the Christian can stumble or fail in a good work is if there is a deficiency either in his knowledge of Scripture or in putting what Scripture says into practice. Failure is never due to Scripture being insufficient, nor is it due to failure to learn some psychological theory. Scripture alone—by itself, without any supplement—can make us ideally suited for every good work.

Had Paul stopped at this point the statement would be astonishing enough, but lest the reader still entertain doubt about how thoroughly equipped the one with Scripture really is Paul adds one more term. In addition to being perfectly suited for every good work the person equipped with Scripture is "complete,"³ which is an intensified form of the word "thoroughly"⁴ and is in the most emphatic grammatical form possible:⁵ "having been made complete." Paul chooses a strong word, uses it twice, puts it in the strongest tense and modifies with the word *every*. What else could God have done to make this statement more absolute?

The word translated "thoroughly"⁶ is actually an adjective rather than an adverb: It means *able to meet all demands, qualified, fully ready, perfectly fit, proficient*. It describes a person perfectly suited for a task, and it appears at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. The entire passage focuses on the concept of being utterly and completely sufficient.

It is essential to recognize that this term applies to everyone—including those with no training in psychology. To the degree you are proficient in handling God's Word you are well equipped and ideally suited for any and every spiritually good activity. The Word of God is utterly sufficient for any person with any conceivable spiritual need in every culture in every context in all times.

Are psychological problems addressed in Scripture?

One major argument of the Integrationists is that the Bible is not sufficient to address twenty-first Century psychological "diseases" because they were not known back in Bible times and are therefore not addressed in Scripture. But they were known in Bible times. The only part that is modern is the Freudian lingo that casts emotional and spiritual problems in medical-sounding jargon. The reason it is

³ *exartismenos*

⁴ William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary vol.46 Pastoral Epistles*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2000, p.571

⁵ Perfect, passive participle

⁶ Greek *artios*

so often assumed that psychological problems are not addressed in Scripture is they have been re-labeled by the world with psychological jargon that sounds clinical and therefore beyond the reach of an untrained counselor. This jargon has had a dramatic impact on the way most people think about psychological problems. Terms like “psychosis” and “neurosis” make emotional problems sound like diseases, and as a result most people believe the problems that have technical labels are very much like medical maladies. Just as a doctor can use sophisticated equipment to diagnose a tumor, so the psychologist can discern mental “diseases” that an untrained layman would have no way of diagnosing or treating.

But the psychologist has no sophisticated diagnostic equipment. There is no machine that can scan a person’s soul to discover a disorder. The only way the “experts” can discover if a person is depressed is if that person tells them he feels depressed. The soul is invisible, and so the counselor is 100% dependent upon the reports of the counselee to discover what is going on inside. And two thousand years ago people behaved in just as many problematic ways as today and reported the same kinds of feelings that counselees report today.

Does the Bible address behavior and feelings? Absolutely. The only thing that is different is the terminology; today there are novel theories and new labels for age-old problems. And the new, scientific-sounding terminology does not shed any new light on the problems. Quite the opposite. As I will show in chapter four modern psychological jargon tends to obscure the nature of the problems of the soul. But when the jargon is set aside in favor of Biblical terminology the fog clears away. Does God’s Word address the issue of depression? It does not use the term “depression,” but are there not a great number of passages that speak of discouragement, sorrow, joy, and hope? What psychological problem isn’t addressed in Scripture? God’s Word speaks about emotional distress, errant behavior, bizarre behavior, selfish behavior, fear, sorrow, weakness, rejection, obsession, attitudes, moods, the thought life, self-control, enslaving sins, deception and every other issue related to problems that have been labeled “psychological.” Once the Biblical counselor has applied God’s Word to a person’s suffering, or wrong thoughts, attitudes, affections, inclinations, decisions, or behavior, and a medical doctor has addressed the issue of physical problems, what is left for a psychologist to do?

Some integrationists have accused Biblical counselors of being shallow – applying simplistic, trite, clichéd solutions to deep and serious problems. But in some cases this attitude is due to the shallowness of the integrationist’s knowledge of Scripture. Ask the average counselor, “What does the Bible say about fear?” and usually the best he can say is something like, “We shouldn’t live in fear. We should trust God.” Or maybe he can quote a Bible verse with the word “fear” in it. If someone can quote twelve verses with the word “fear” in them, we tend to think he has a deep knowledge of Scripture when in reality his understanding of each of the twelve verses may be quite shallow. If a person is crippled with fear, simply telling him “Fear not” will not help much. What is needed is specific information about how to eliminate the fear, and steps he can take to gain control over his thought life. If all the Bible did were supply basic commands about what is good and bad but offered no instruction about how to change the heart, it would be shallow, and we would have to depend on human wisdom to figure out how to make changes.

It is no surprise that integrationists and many other Christians would think this way about Scripture because so much of the preaching of God’s Word perpetuates the idea. A pastor preaches on a verse that says “fear not,” then reverts to human wisdom for all the practical “how to” instruction. This practice tacitly teaches people to think of the Bible as a mostly unhelpful book of platitudes that does little more than state the obvious (how much insight does it take to tell a fearful person, “fear not”?). To use the Bible, then, to address serious, life-threatening problems seems irresponsible and simple-minded.

It is my goal in the pages ahead to demonstrate that Scripture does indeed have detailed instruction on both the ideals and the “how-to’s.”⁷

⁷ The technical term that theologians have given to this study is “Practical Theology.”

What about physiological causes?

What about problems that have a physical component? Suppose a person's sorrow or anger or bad mood is related to hormones or chemicals in the brain? Does this negate the sufficiency of Scripture to address those problems? Not at all. The connections between the soul and the body are incredibly complex, and our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are influenced by countless factors including physical ones. The sufficiency of Scripture, however, is not restricted by causes. Our bodies have an effect on our feelings, and our feelings have an effect on our bodies. Just as higher or lower levels of various hormones or chemicals can affect feelings, so feelings can affect chemicals. However if the solution for hormone-induced anger or sadness were different from the solution for other kinds of anger or sadness, surely the Lord would have given some indication of that in His Word. Speaking in blanket terms, as Scripture does, about fear or weakness or joy or anger would be reckless if different varieties called for different solutions.

The truth is, only God knows the role chemicals play in human emotions. Theories about chemicals in the brain are not the hard science they are made out to be. There is no way to test the brain for high or low levels of various chemicals during various mood changes. And even if there were, there would be no way to know if the chemical change caused the mood change, or the mood change caused the chemical change, or some other factor caused both. God made us as complex beings with complex connections between the material part of us and the immaterial part. Thankfully, knowledge of how it all works is not necessary. All we need is to follow the guidance our Maker gave us in His Word.

Is the Biblical counselor, armed only with Scripture, in over his head when it comes to serious psychological problems? Not at all. It is the psychiatrist/psychologist who is in over his head. Imagine a computer that develops a software problem. The psychiatrist or psychologist is like a repair man who attempts to correct the problem by opening up the computer and moving wires around, applying electrical surges at various points, etc. The Biblical counselor is like the repair man who simply looks at the repair manual and presses the buttons it says to press for that problem. The first approach will do more harm than good – even in the case of an especially brilliant repairman. The second approach requires only that the repairman be able to read and follow instructions. God has given us clear instructions for dealing with the problems we face, and it is reckless to ignore those instructions in favor of tinkering around in the soul via human wisdom. The human mind and soul is infinitely more complex than any computer, which is why psychology, for the most part, has not worked in solving even the most basic problems for which people seek counsel.

Psychotherapy Hasn't Worked

Psychologists are remarkable people. I have great respect for those who are willing to devote themselves to listening to people and helping them with their problems. The problems for which people seek counsel are often very serious, and to subject oneself to that kind of sorrow on a regular basis requires unusual compassion. Most psychologists, no doubt, are wonderfully kindhearted people. I believe, however, that the principles taught by secular psychology have caused considerable harm.

The doctrines of modern psychology have convinced our culture that our spiritual problems are really nothing but mental or emotional problems. Our anger, lust, lack of forgiveness, pride, foolishness, selfishness, irresponsibility, lack of self discipline, immaturity, gossip, lying, worry, fear ... the various sins of the human heart are really not sins at all. Since our problems are mental rather than spiritual, the solutions also are presumed to be mental. The philosophies that form the foundation of psychological dogma simply ignore the spiritual world altogether. And what the Bible describes as "the heart" does not even exist; there is only the brain. Spiritual problems are no longer issues of sin and righteousness; rather, they are merely brain malfunctions caused by the interplay of past experience and the subconscious mind. In that system, fixing problems such as anger, lust, or selfishness is like fixing a rough running engine. Find an expert who knows how to adjust the timing or repair some faulty connection and you will be good as new.

The primary false religion of our culture is scientism—the belief that only scientific truth is really true. A culture that worships at the shrine of the test tube is uneasy with any spiritual reality, and so

there is great eagerness to explain the human mind naturalistically. When Freud applied medical-sounding terminology to his theories about issues of the soul, it made them seem scientific, which makes them sound true in the ears of those who regard science as the standard of reality. Ironically, this has resulted in the general acceptance of the ideas without any testing – the very antithesis of true science.

When the philosophies of psychology *are* tested scientifically the results are far from impressive. Studies have repeatedly shown that the recovery rate for people with psychological problems is higher for those who do *not* receive psychotherapy than it is for those who *do*.⁸

This should come as no surprise. Theories based on a humanistic, naturalistic, godless view of spiritual things will lead to a system devoid of spiritual truth, a system that cannot possibly solve spiritual problems.

What *is* surprising and shocking is the unchecked enthusiasm with which the church has embraced such secular, psychological theories. Christians in great numbers have embraced psychology with both arms. The majority of degrees awarded by Colorado Christian University were degrees in psychology. Denver Seminary, Talbot Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Liberty University, Moody Bible Institute, Fuller Theological Seminary, Dallas Seminary—all are convinced the Bible must be integrated with secular psychological theory. And as a result, most Christian counselors are Integrationists.

If psychology worked at all, the church today would be more righteous, well adjusted, self-controlled, godly, and mentally healthy than at any time in history. Ours is certainly the most psychologized generation ever. But are there fewer people today with various types of disorders or forms of depression than ever before? Quite the opposite. The legacy of modern psychology has been the destruction of one of the most valuable protective gifts God has given us – the conscience.

Destruction of the conscience

Another purpose behind the clinical-sounding lingo for emotional or behavioral problems is to obscure the guilt associated with various sins. Most Christians understand that it is wrong to grumble and complain. But when grumbling is described with the world's terminology ("venting"), it suddenly sounds acceptable. It is not uncommon to hear a person say, "I just need to vent a little bit," but that person would never dream of saying, "I just stopped by to grumble and complain." The term "venting" is calculated to communicate something about the nature of the behavior. Distress is pictured as some kind of exhaust building up in the heart that simply needs to be released. Who could be faulted for that?

When Scripture speaks of lacking self-control or being controlled by the flesh, that terminology points to the sinfulness of the character flaw. But the world's term for the same problem ("compulsive") is morally neutral. If a behavior is compulsive, the person is being compelled. What shame is there in being compelled? Worry and fretting sound like sins, but how could it be wrong to be "stressed"? If too much weight is placed on a bridge and it becomes stressed, that is not the bridge's fault. All cowards are consigned to hell in Revelation 21:8, but the same behavior described as "insecurity" suddenly loses all culpability. Someone may have the sin of discontent, and you ask, "How are you doing?" "Well, I'm *coping*." Discontent is sin, but coping actually sounds noble. Enslaving oneself to a sin sounds bad, but who could be blamed for catching a disease called "addiction"?

Instead of fornicating, people "live together." What could be better than things like living and togetherness? Instead of prideful, arrogant self-centered hard heartedness against God, they are "independent" and "self-reliant." Instead of being idolatrous, they say they are "eclectic" in their religious belief. Rather than lacking conviction they are "open-minded." The sins of pride and self-love are referred to as "healthy self-esteem." People become bitter, angry, resentful, or self-pitying and it is all recast under the morally innocent term "emotionally wounded." Why repent over being wounded? Soldiers receive a purple heart for getting wounded!

⁸ Dr. Ed Bulkley has documented many of these studies in chapter 3 of his book *Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1993.

Instead of “won’t” we say “can’t.” (I *can’t* forgive, I *can’t* love my spouse, I *can’t* resist this sin...) Instead of sin or hard-heartedness we say we have “emotional issues.” Instead of covetousness or greed we talk about our emotional “needs.” Instead of cowardliness we say “insecurity.” Fear of man is “co-dependence.” Selfish demands are “rights,” and sinful responses to the violation of those rights are simply “defense mechanisms.” Instead of prideful self-absorption we have an “inferiority complex.”

Some other examples:

- “sickness” or “disease” instead of *sin*
- “alcoholic” instead of *drunk*
- “emotional problems” in place of various sins
- “subconsciously” instead of *ignorantly*
- “in denial” instead of *unrepentant* or *hard hearted*
- “rapid cycling” instead of *double-mindedness*

The fact that these terms carry no negative stigma is no accident. The new terminology is designed to remove the guilt. This destroys the conscience and prevents the crucial first step toward recovery – repentance.

Sigmund Freud was an atheist whose goal was to provide mankind with an alternative to religious faith by taking the matters of the soul and couching them in terms that make them sound like merely a mental issue. So sin and righteousness no longer exist – just psychosis or mental health. It is difficult to calculate how dramatically psychological theories have influenced how we interpret human behavior. Unproven and improvable (and un-falsifiable) theories have been adopted wholesale by our legal system, our education system, our literature – even by the medical community. They have shaped the ethics of our culture and our entire approach to addressing human problems. With the exception of Darwin, one is hard pressed to find any individual more successful in his goal of bringing about the secularization of our culture.

That is not to suggest that all secular psychologists or integrationist counselors have the goal of secularizing the culture. In many cases these terms are embraced simply to avoid having to sound judgmental or risk the counselee falling into discouragement or anger because of being made culpable for some of his problems. It can be a great encouragement for the counselee, however, to know that his problem is indeed addressed in Scripture, and there is a glorious solution. Yes, it is painful to realize there is moral blame. However that pain is like the pain of getting an honest diagnosis from a doctor who also has the medicine to cure the disease. Better to experience the distress of learning about the severity of a curable disease than to remain blissfully ignorant and refuse the medicine.

2. Is human wisdom useful for spiritual problems?

The answer to our first question is an emphatic, “Yes - the Bible does indeed address “psychological” issues. The second basic question in this debate between Biblical vs. Integrationist counseling has to do with the role of human wisdom. The Integrationist argues that while spiritual growth comes *mainly* through Scripture, it can also come from other sources. It might come through special revelation (the Bible) or it might come through natural revelation (that which God reveals through the creation). Psychology, it is argued, falls into the category of natural revelation. All truth is God’s truth, and so whether it comes through natural revelation or special revelation, either way it is revelation from God. It is through scientific investigation that mankind has discovered how to repair lungs and livers and brains—why not minds and hearts and souls? Christian psychologist Gary Collins articulates this point:

Surely there are times, many times, when a sensitive, psychologically trained, committed Christian counselor can help people through psychological techniques and with psychological insights that God has allowed us to discover, but that he has not chosen to reveal in the Bible The Word of God never claims to have all the

answers to all of life's problems.⁹

Natural revelation and Human Wisdom

It is true that natural revelation is from God and must not be ignored. However there is also such a thing as human wisdom, which is roundly condemned in Scripture when applied to spiritual matters.

1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Human wisdom is never to be integrated with God's Word. Adding human wisdom to Scripture does not augment it, but rather empties the cross of its power! Clearly that must be avoided at all cost.

What is the difference, then, between human wisdom, which must be avoided; and natural revelation, which must be heeded?

Psychology is not natural revelation

Not everything discovered through human investigation rises to the level of natural revelation. The doctrine of natural revelation is drawn mainly from Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:18-21. These texts reveal two important principles about natural revelation. For a piece of information to qualify as natural revelation it must 1) be universally known, 2) be essential for salvation, and 3) be taught in Scripture.

Universally known

General revelation is obvious and universally understood (but suppressed) by all people in all times in all places.

Romans 1:19-20 what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. **20** For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. ... they knew God ...

Psalm 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Natural revelation, then, is God's communication of truth about Himself to all persons at all times and in all places.¹⁰

Essential for salvation

The other unique factor in natural revelation is that the rejection of it results in damnation.

Romans 1:18-28 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness ... God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind

Unbelievers are damned because they reject what God has revealed in natural revelation.

Not unique

A third observation about natural revelation is that everything that is revealed through the creation is also stated in Scripture. The doctrines that are specifically mentioned in the passages on natural

⁹ Gary R. Collins, *Can You Trust Psychology?*, Dower's Grove: Intersity Press, 1988, 96-7.

¹⁰ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998, 178.

H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, 21.

Bruce Demarest, Walter A. Elwell ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001, 1019.

revelation are:

- God's divine nature
- God's eternal power
- The glory of God
- The work of His hands

Each of these doctrines is taught explicitly in the Bible. There is nothing that nature reveals about God that cannot also be found in Scripture. If the Bible is available, then, it is a much better source of information about God than nature alone.

There is a great amount of information that can be obtained through human investigation that, while helpful, does not fall into the category of natural revelation because it is not universally known, not essential for salvation, and not taught in Scripture. It is evident to all people everywhere that God exists and that he is the powerful, glorious Creator, and when that revelation is rejected, a person is under condemnation, as the Bible clearly says. But the doctrines of psychology fall short of being in the category of natural revelation on all three points. Theories about selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors are not immediately obvious to all people at all times, and no one will be consigned to hell for rejecting Rogerian counseling techniques or Dialectical Behavior Therapy. And, as Gary Collins admits, the principles of psychology are not found on the pages of the Bible.

Inadequate for healing the soul

Psychology, then, is not in the category of natural revelation because it is not universally known nor essential for salvation. And even if it were natural revelation, even then it would not be adequate for addressing the problems of the human soul.

Psalms 19 has been called “the psalm of the two books,” because the first half addresses natural revelation (“**The heavens declare the glory of God...**”), and the second half speaks of special revelation (“**The Law of the Lord is perfect...**”).

Does natural revelation point to the glory of God? Yes, but that's all it can do. The rest of the psalm is a contrast. Only God's Word in Scripture has the power to transform the human soul. All the promises in that psalm that have to do with benefits to the soul come in the second section, not the first. Scripture, not nature, revives, renews, and restores the soul; it makes the simpleminded wise; it brings joy to the heart and light to the eyes; and it is sweeter than honey (vv. 7-11). God's Word has a healing, restoring, life-giving effect on the soul. It gives wisdom and guidance. It is essential for the very daily sustenance of the believer. It functions for us spiritually like food and drink function for the physical body.¹¹ It is through the Scriptures that a man can keep his way pure, avoid sin, walk in freedom, be comforted in suffering, recover from apostasy, survive affliction, be preserved in life, and gain greater insight than his teachers.¹²

Integrationists will often claim that “All truth is God's truth,” whether it be discovered from Scripture or from human investigation. Is all truth God's truth? Perhaps, but not all truth is God's *Word*. There is a vast difference between the word of man and the Word of God—even when both are true. The mere fact that something is true rather than false does not mean it has the same power to feed, nourish, strengthen, and sanctify the soul that God's Word has.

The information we receive about God through the creation is much less specific than the information in Scripture. One can gaze at the stars and know there is a powerful God, but nothing in the stars will explain the doctrine of imputed righteousness through faith, or how to overcome the flesh by walking in the Spirit. Nature shows us general truths; Scripture teaches us specifics in detail. The Bible is superior to natural revelation because it supplies us with propositional truth about God rather than mere implications. Examination of the trees and rivers and stars *imply* certain basic truths about God, but Scripture gives us direct statements. There is a greater chance of error in interpreting implied messages from a tree than explicit statements in a Bible verse – especially when dealing with the

¹¹ Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 32:47, 1 Peter 2:2.

¹² Psalm 119:9, 11, 45, 50, 52, 67, 92, 93, 99.

complexities of human feelings, thoughts, and behavior.

Integrationists, however, reverse this. They would characterize the counsel of God's Word as being general and the wisdom of psychology as being specific. The Bible gives the general principle, such as "Avoid fear of man," and then psychology takes it from there and reveals the specifics of how to accomplish that in practical terms. This approach actually places psychology above Scripture in the sense that it is more detailed and specific, whereas natural revelation is actually much more general and less specific than Scripture.

The doctrines of psychology, then, are not natural revelation, and even if they were they would not be useful in counseling because natural revelation does not address the needs of the soul.

If the wisdom gathered from psychological studies is not natural revelation, what is it? The biblical term for it is "human wisdom."

Human Wisdom

Useless for spiritual matters

Can human investigation and reasoning discover true things? Yes. And those things can be helpful for temporal applications, but when applied to spiritual things human wisdom is not commended in Scripture:

1 Corinthians 1:19,21 "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ... For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Paul points out that human wisdom is not even sufficient to know God in the first place (v. 21). For that reason, he made every effort, in his preaching, to avoid mixing God's Word with human wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2:17 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit is power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

Those who argue for integration have often failed to take into consideration Scripture's very strong words against human wisdom when applied to spiritual matters. The integration of human wisdom with the gospel when applied to spiritual matters does not enhance the effectiveness of the gospel. In fact, it *empties* the gospel of its power (1 Cor.1:17).

The pursuit of human wisdom is the pursuit of that which God has promised to frustrate and destroy (1 Cor.1:19). Far from adding to the effectiveness of Scripture, human wisdom is not even sufficient to enable a person to know God relationally at all (1 Cor.1:21).

Paul goes on to point out that God's Word cannot be obtained through human investigation (1 Cor.2:11). Human wisdom, when applied to building a car, brain surgery, rocket science, or some form of manipulating matter is very valuable; but when applied to a spiritual reality is worse than worthless. It serves as a contamination, not an improvement to Scripture. It leads to self-imposed worship, false humility, and harsh treatment of the body,¹³ is hollow and deceptive taking one captive,¹⁴ and leads to bitter envy, selfishness, disorder, and every evil practice.¹⁵ There is absolutely no need for human wisdom in spiritual matters. Every spiritual truth that it is possible for us to know is in the Bible.

The only wisdom we preach is the wisdom revealed in the Gospel. No matter how smart a person may be, it is impossible to figure out what is on the mind of God through human reasoning—or even

¹³ Col.2:23.

¹⁴ Col.2:8.

¹⁵ Jas.3:14-16.

through natural revelation. The only way to know the thoughts of God is through Scripture.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 ... no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

The theories of psychology, like all human wisdom, are comprised of both truth and error. Truth mixed with error can be worse than pure error. The Bible is not only the most specific source of truth about spiritual things, but it is the *only* source of truth that is without error. The only way to know a spiritual truth *for sure* is if it is taught in the Bible.

The Role of Legitimate Psychology

Is there any legitimate place for psychology? Should we even bother studying human behavior at all? Yes. Scripture calls us to apply wisdom, and one element of wisdom is observing life and drawing conclusions about the way things tend to go. There is nothing wrong with psychologists making helpful observations about tendencies in human behavior. For example, if a researcher or psychologist or observant parent discovers that newborns often stop crying when wrapped tightly in a blanket, that is helpful information that is not in the Bible. To the degree that psychology restricts itself to making helpful observations about human behavior it can be a legitimate part of the pursuit of wisdom.

Schools of psychotherapy, however, have gone far beyond the mere observation of tendencies in human behavior and have developed systems and theories that contradict biblical principles. And it is to these that the biblical counselor objects. Both sides embrace common sense. The division arises over the tendency of integrationists to accept secular, worldly, psychological philosophies or systems that reason beyond what Scripture says about spiritual truths.

What is the role, then, of common sense and human reasoning and observations of typical behavior in counseling? Those aspects of human reasoning can be useful in the application of Biblical principles, as long as several important guidelines are observed.

Suppose a man finds that he is so self-absorbed when he gets home from work that he tends to ignore his family, and a counselor suggests that he use the stop light down the street from his house as a memory cue to remind him to think of principles from Scripture about selfless love, so he is reminded about it just before arriving home from work each day. Or he suggests taping a Bible verse about humility on the dashboard of his car. There is nothing in the Bible about stoplights or dashboards, and so both suggestions are human reasoning. Such counseling is not necessarily a sinful reliance on human wisdom, however. Human reasoning in counseling is useful when all of the following guidelines are followed:

- 1) It must be simple enough to test
- 2) It must not violate Scripture
- 3) It must not be based on unbiblical assumptions
- 4) It must have the goal of applying some specific Biblical principle
- 5) It must not be elevated to the level of Scripture
- 6) It must not be the source of our hope or confidence.

The idea of placing a Bible verse on the dashboard fits each of those principles in the following ways:

- 1) It can easily be tested. Unlike the complex theories of psychology, it's very easy for this man to give it a try and see if it helps. If it doesn't, he can drop it and move on to something else.
- 2 & 3) Placing a Bible verse on the dashboard does not violate any Scriptural principle, nor is it based on worldly assumptions.
- 4) An essential component of putting the Word into practice is finding a way to *remember* the Biblical truth (James 1:25). And this is an effort to apply that Biblical principle. The solution did not come from human wisdom. It came from James 1:25. The human reasoning is simply an effort to apply that biblical solution.
- 5) The suggestion is not elevated to the level of Scripture. If the man thinks it is a bad idea, the Biblical counselor does not accuse him of sin or look down on him in any way.

- 6) The counselor makes it clear to him that this idea carries in it no transforming power. By itself it has no ability to generate love or any other virtue in his heart, and it has no power to keep him from sin. If it is used as a method of applying a biblical principle it is good. But if not, it is worthless.

When should we refer?

When should a layperson refer someone to a professional psychologist? *Never*. In fact, the more severe a person's problem, the more damage you cause if you put him in the hands of anyone who gives worldly advice or who tries to address spiritual problems with human wisdom. The deeper and more difficult the problem, the more desperately the person is in need of God's Word—and the greater the harm that can result from relying on human wisdom. If you have a Bible and you know how to interpret and apply it, you hold in your hand that person's greatest hope for recovery.

There may be times when you need to refer someone to a medical doctor (see chapter 3) or to one who has more biblical knowledge than you, but there is never a time when you will help someone by putting him in the hands of one who uses human wisdom to solve spiritual problems. As God's children we are forbidden from going to the world for spiritual counsel. The first sentence of the first Psalm tells us, "**Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.**" We are not to sit, stand, or walk in the counsel of unbelievers. Why would we seek guidance from people who, according to Scripture, are spiritually blind and do not even know God?

Counseling the "deep" issues

Most integrationists are convinced that the Bible is fine for small, superficial, shallow, easy problems; but big, deep, difficult problems should be referred to the psychological professionals. This tendency stems from one of the most fundamental doctrines of psychotherapy – Freud's theory of the unconscious. Perhaps the most extensive impact Freud's teaching has had on modern psychology is the almost universal acceptance of the idea that behaviors are dictated by the unconscious (or subconscious) – an area of one's mind that is for the most part accessible only to the trained psychotherapist. Thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences are said to be repressed – pushed out of the conscious mind, and shoved into a part of one's being that is deep beneath the surface, but that controls thoughts, behavior, and feelings.

While very few psychotherapists in our day call themselves "Freudian," and there are about as many different approaches to psychotherapy as there are therapists, the one belief almost all of them have in common is the theory of the unconscious. Even those with no training in psychology at all are often familiar with the concept of a "Freudian slip" (a slip of the tongue that is thought to reveal a person's true, repressed beliefs).

Perhaps one reason for the popularity of belief in the doctrine of the unconscious is the fact that it is not falsifiable. It violates the first principle in the list above - there is no way to test it. If the unconscious explains everything a person says and does, then no scientific test could possibly disprove the existence of the unconscious. And more importantly, no idea put forth by an expert can be questioned. If the counselee has no access to her own unconscious, but the expert therapist does, the counselee must accept what the expert says. If he tells her she was abused as a child but does not remember it because the memory was repressed, she has no basis for disputing his claim. Whether the abuse happened or not, the counselor can never be shown to be wrong. The appeal of such a system is obvious. Not only can the counselor never be proved wrong, but the counselee is *utterly* dependent on the experts.

There is nothing unbiblical about the idea that there are varying levels of consciousness or awareness. Clearly we attend to some things more than others. The idea that our problems are so deep that our own conscious mind has no access to them, however, is decidedly unbiblical – as is the theory that thoughts, actions, and feelings are controlled by repressed thoughts and experiences from one's past.

It is possible to have a belief or attitude without consciously thinking about it all the time. For example, a person may have a resentful attitude toward someone without realizing it. But if it is brought to the person's attention, if that attitude (or any other sin) is truly there, the person will be able to see it. There is no such thing as a problem in the unconscious mind that one has no way of perceiving. No problem goes any deeper than the heart—and *the individual has access to his own heart*.

Confidence in God's Word

A wise counselor will not only have enough confidence in God's Word to rely on it alone for wisdom, but will also strive to infuse that confidence into the heart of the counselee. Many people believe they cannot overcome their problem. They may have been led to believe that certain sinful behaviors or attitudes are part of their "condition," and the resulting pessimism can cause a kind of reverse placebo effect. The person can become so convinced that the problem is too deep for Scripture that his heart is not receptive to what Scripture offers. It is crucial, then, for the counselor to continually reassure the person that he or she always has the power to do what God calls us to do, no matter what the circumstances.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

There is no problem so severe that it can override this promise. The Christian is never in a position where he *has* to sin. God's Word offers real hope for all spiritual problems!

The sad reality is many Christians place more confidence in the psychiatrist's degree and training than in the Word of God. They assume the psychiatric experts must be correct, and the Bible must be critiqued in light of their theories. Such an attitude is not only a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture, but it will lead to nothing but confusion since there is no consensus among the psychologists. There are some three hundred different schools of psychotherapy and counseling in the United States alone. And most psychologists do not follow any of them—they mix and match ideas from the various schools. It is folly to lift the world's chaos of confused theorizing above God's holy Word.

Psalms 119 provides us with a dramatic picture of what spiritual growth looks like. Consider the profound implications for the biblical counselor regarding the sufficiency of Scripture:

- Verses 9-16 are about the cleansing, purifying effect of God's Word. It purges sin from the heart.
- Verses 25-32 are about the renewing effect of Scripture. It preserves life (v. 25), renews thinking (vv. 26-27), renews strength (v. 28) and restores us to the right path (vv. 29-32).
- Verses 41-48 are about the empowering effects of Scripture. It enables us to stand against those who oppose us (v. 42), it gives hope (v. 43), it enables us to walk in freedom (v. 45) and to speak without shame even before kings (v. 46).
- Verses 49-56 are about the hope that comes from Scripture. It enables the child of God to endure suffering. It brings comfort, encouragement, and joy in hard times.
- Verses 97-104 are about the wisdom that comes from God's Word. It makes the believer wiser than his teachers—wiser than people who have more experience, training, and education.
- Verses 105-12 are about the direction that comes from God's Word. It is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. It protects us from the snare and shows us the right way to take.
- Verses 121-28 and 153-60 are about the deliverance that comes from God's Word. It brings deliverance from trouble and, ultimately, salvation.

If you have ever read Psalm 119, you know that this overview doesn't scratch the surface of what it has to say about God's Word. It's the longest chapter in the entire Bible (176 verses) and every verse is about the power of God's Word. After receiving all that this psalm describes, what more could the soul possibly need?

Chapter Summary

Scripture requires every Christian to counsel, so you must decide between Integration or Biblical Counseling.

- Psychology has not worked.
- Scripture is sufficient.
- Natural revelation and human wisdom cannot sanctify or restore the soul.

Key passages:

1 Corinthians 1:18

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Psalm 119

Psalm 19

Review questions:

1. Why is Biblical Counseling better than Integration?
2. What is your response to the following Integrationist argument?
“Just as the Bible does not teach us how to repair a carburetor or treat diabetes, so it does not teach us how to repair mental disorders.”