

THE JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL SOUL CARE

Advancing Scholarship *for the*
Biblical Care of Souls *within* Higher Education

Articles by
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Published by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

www.biblicalcounseling.com

5401 North Oak Trafficway
Kansas City, Missouri
64118, USA.

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Paperback ISBN: 978-1-967495-09-2
ISSN: 3069-3578

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This journal provides a means for advancing scholarship within higher education in the historical, instructional, and practical areas of biblical soul care in an academic forum. We aim to facilitate profitable interaction among scholars through articles, critical book reviews, and reader responses. We stand on the shoulders of generations of men and women whose commitment to the Word of God and care of souls has laid the groundwork for a resurgence of biblical soul care. The *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* reflects our dedication to the sufficient Word of God and its ability to speak into the complexities of human nature and experience.

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Editorial

BIBLICAL COUNSELING TRENDS: Common Grace, the Body, and Special Revelation

Dr. Greg E. Gifford¹

First of all, welcome to the Fall 2023 volume of *The Journal for Biblical Soul Care (JBSC)*! In the Lord's kindness, the *JBSC* has now crossed the five-year threshold of publication. In 2017, I surveyed the landscape of biblical counseling and found that there were no areas of academic conversation for biblical counseling. The Biblical Counseling Coalition (BCC) was the closest area for iron-sharpening-iron conversations, at a closed-door retreat held once per year. However, even the BCC did not publish a journal from their conversations. Furthermore, the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*—the trendsetter in biblical counseling literature—had taken a practitioner turn and focused mostly on methodology. This was the prompting I needed to help initiate the *JBSC*.

The *JBSC* has a way to go, which must be admitted. We have found authors, partnered with ACBC, acquired an editorial staff, and published continuously for five years, yes, but we have yet to receive one response to the academic articles published. This should not be—especially amongst a biblical counseling landscape that is changing so rapidly. I acknowledge that to craft a response takes significant amounts of time, but also a level of critical thought and engagement. Many biblical counseling leaders are limited in their ability to write, but I wonder is there not any disagreement?

At this point in biblical counseling history, we are seeing tribes develop,

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tribes that are rallying around sufficiency of Scripture, general and special revelation, common grace, the role of the body, and a few other doctrinal issues. “I’m of Paul, I’m of Apollos,” we could say. For example, one perspective among biblical counselors would propose that biblical counseling must reject all secular observational data, while another perspective would look for “common grace” good in the secular findings of unbelievers. The latter is an example of biblical counselors that are claiming to be more “holistic.” The holistic biblical counselor is one tribe forming amongst us.

Another rallying point is that of the role of specified knowledge when counseling. This tribe rallies around terms like “trauma informed” or “addictions specialist” when looking for a biblical counselor. Some see the sufficiency of Scripture on the chopping block or, the argument goes, that if we overly specialize biblical counseling then do we really believe it is the Bible that is sufficient? Or do we *need* specialty training and badging plus the Bible? Specialized knowledge is another tribe forming amongst us.

Due to the developing tribes, I have a question to the tribes of our time: *will the biblical counseling movement identify astute theologians who are the gatekeepers of doctrinal fidelity and allow for experienced practitioners to work with those theologians?* Let me explain.

I live in between two worlds myself. I teach at an elite institution in biblical counseling, yet I also pastor in a local church. I hear academic colleagues tell me of what the Bible says, to which I agree with no doubt, but also wonder if they have ever counseled. Or how long has it been since they were in the trenches of a difficult counseling case? Garrison (or academic) life is clean-and-tidy, but the front lines of counseling are not. While we would never deviate to pragmatic, “whatever works” counseling, there are obvious times when an academic does not seemingly know what it is like in the real trenches of counseling. A complex divorce counseling case benefits from wise experience to navigate. My concern is the practitioner may dismiss the necessity of doctrinal experts and believe that their practice is what matters most. A “snobbery” that says, “You do not know what it is like in the counseling room.” The troubles of our current climate are that we can tend to have astute theologians tell us what is, yet the theologian lacks significant counseling experience. Or, conversely,

astute practitioners teach on biblical counseling topics, but they themselves seem to lack significant theological training. Does experience change the Bible? No. It does, however, help you to learn what is biblically appropriate for the counseling situation—whether this person is fainthearted or unruly, for instance (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Will the biblical counseling movement become expert counselors who submit to expert theologians? This is the question of our day.

The flashpoints of this tribalism are common grace, the role of the body, “trauma-informed counseling,” and other significant doctrines. Instead of certain organizations balking at compromise by others, I suggest we identify two categories in biblical counseling: theologian and practitioner. We need to ensure our practice is rightly built upon the theological method and sound exegesis. Yet, we need practitioners to help theologians understand what it is like in the trenches of counseling, which should allow the theologian to exposit *the right* passage for the situation. Without these, our movement will fracture to tribalism and lobbing accusations of doctrinal compromise or methodological ignorance. The time has come for a category of theological trainer and practitioner expert.

What does this have to do with the *JBSC*? This journal is committed to upstream conversations that will benefit downstream practice. It is my aim to guide us to the deeper conversations of what must be mentioned in garrison for the sake of biblical fidelity first, then faithful practice second. The authors of this edition are advancing the conversation in ways I think you will find meaningful. Logan Williams is going to make a case that a biblical counselor has particular responsibilities in escalating cases to church discipline. Not all cases lead to church discipline, but some do—and should. Francine Tan critiques Bessel van der Kolk’s perspective of the “traumatized body,” which has been a topic of no small discussion. Hannah Miller shows the contaminating effects of allowing sexual sin to permeate a local church, as found in 1 Corinthians 5. Lastly, Jonathan Holmes makes a case for spiritual maturity as a preventative step for sexual immorality, using 1 Corinthians 3-6.

Each of these articles advance a conversation within biblical counseling. As the reader, you must reckon with the views of van Der Kolk or understand

the importance of church discipline and instruction in sexual ethics for the local church. When does a counselor go to the elders? These are the upstream articles that will advance faithful practice downstream, which is the aim of the JBSC. For these reasons, I commend these articles to you.

Moreover, I commend to you a vision of the future of biblical counseling where faithful doctrine and faithful practice are united. We must engage in rigorous study of the Scripture so as to faithfully engage in rigorous counseling. Without the JBSC, or its equivalent, our movement will be greatly stunted. These academic conversations are a necessary place to sharpen what we know in God's sufficient word and what we do in the counseling room.

May God's kindness lead us to excellence in biblical counseling for His glory!

IF HE DOES NOT LISTEN:

Escalating Biblical Counseling to Church Discipline

Logan Williams¹

INTRODUCTION

Church discipline has largely departed from the modern American Protestant church. In a 2017 Lifeway Research study surveying 1,000 evangelical pastors from a variety of denominations, 55% of respondents indicated that “a member has not been formally disciplined since I came as pastor nor prior as far as I know.”² These trends are not particularly new; in 1983, Jay Adams lamented in an address that “Church discipline among American congregations almost does not exist.”³ Detractors from church discipline, whether actively attacking the practice or silently failing to practice it, question its value in the church today, its alignment with the various structures and methods of church growth, and its consistency with the mercy which is to be offered in Christ.⁴ Yet, these detractors miss out on the clearest reason for its application: “Jesus commanded it.”⁵

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² “Churches Rarely Reprimand Members, New Survey Shows,” *LifeWay Research* (blog), April 5, 2018, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/04/05/churches-rarely-reprimand-members-new-survey-shows/>. An additional 21% responded that it had been three or more years since the last case of discipline had happened.

³ Jay E Adams, “Discipling, Counseling and Church Discipline,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 7, no. 3 (1984): 15. The address here described was delivered to the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (now the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors).

⁴ John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, eds., *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (B&H Academic, 2012), chap. 6.

⁵ Hammett and Merkle, chap. 6. Adams: “All the reservations, objections, and hesitations that people have about discipline are irrelevant. Jesus does not leave the matter up to us; He tells us what to do.” Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member* (Zondervan, 2016), 48. Emphasis original.

Jay Adams identified an unshakable connection between biblical counseling and the renewed practice of church discipline: “Counseling and church discipline are inextricably intertwined; neither can be carried on effectively and biblically without the other.”⁶ Adams noted elsewhere that where one found church discipline, he was likely to find someone in the church participating in the revival of biblical counseling.⁷ Yet, pursuing church discipline correctly requires a right understanding of the people and situations wherein discipline should take place. This essay will argue that biblical counselors have a duty to escalate counseling cases through the process of church discipline. This duty is limited first by salvation/membership status of the counselee (the subject of counseling) and second, the details of the sin being counseled (the counseling situation). Furthermore, fulfilling this duty will also necessarily involve breaching strict confidentiality as the process of discipline is pursued.

In brief, the subjects of counseling who can be disciplined include members of local churches and must exclude non-members and unbelievers who cannot be the subjects of discipline, though they may both experience benefits from counseling and evangelism. The situations in which counseling will lead to discipline involve a church member in clear, ongoing, unrepentant sin and who refuses to engage in ongoing counseling care and correction. And finally, while Scripture does give direction regarding the concept of limited knowledge of transgressions, Scripture’s concept of confidentiality is substantially different than that of current professional and legal definitions, allowing for increased awareness of sin among others as necessary. To argue for these points, the paper will begin with a step-wise understanding of church discipline, followed by advancing the three points above, and will conclude with an illustrative case study.

A brief study of nomenclature will be helpful here before proceeding. In modern writing, the term church discipline is frequently used to describe the final step of the process of restorative and purgative discipline described by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-18.⁸ In this step, the unrepentant brother has

⁶Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 11.

⁷Adams, “Discipling, Counseling and Church Discipline,” 15-16.

⁸ As will be discussed later in the paper, this is not nearly a full description of the full process in view in Matthew 18:15-18 which includes a number of confrontations which may or may not end in repentance and restoration. Jay Adams’s *Handbook of Church Discipline* is an extremely

his sin presented before the congregation and upon final unrepentance is declared a “gentile and tax collector.”⁹ What makes this particular usage helpful, especially in cases of data gathering such as the Lifeway study above, is that the final phase is the only phase of the process which can be realistically measured. Records can be kept of church decisions to exclude someone from membership, and those records can clearly chart the progress of the practice.¹⁰ What makes this use of nomenclature unhelpful is that it ignores the fuller picture offered by Matthew 18.

A STEP-WISE UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A biblical understanding of church discipline demands a broader definition than the one currently used or measured. It demands a definition which includes the various elements listed in Matthew 18:15-18:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.¹¹

helpful resource for laying out the various elements of this process. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*. In this case, the common use of church discipline would only refer to step 5 of 5 in Adams’s paradigm.

⁹ Matthew 18:18. All Scripture quoted in the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ Gregory Wills, who wrote the historical chapter for the Hammett and Merkle book quoted above, also wrote an excellent book on this specific topic, tracking the use and eventual disuse of various modes of discipline in Baptists in the American south from the early-nineteenth through early-twentieth centuries. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003).

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5 also describes an aspect of church discipline where flagrant, well-known sin is moved immediately from awareness to expulsive discipline. This is an important aspect of discipline, but not one under review here as there is no particular room in this instance for a counselor to be involved in the process before the declaration of expulsion. This is not to say that a faithful counselor would or could not be involved after the declaration is made and in an effort to see restoration occur in the offender.

In the first confrontation, the one sinned against is tasked with addressing the sin and exposing it “for what it is.”¹² The call here is for repentance.¹³ Upon repentance, the process is complete, and full and total restoration can be expected. But if repentance is not secured or the offender refuses to hear from the offended, a further group of witnesses is included.¹⁴ While these witnesses may have visually witnessed the original offense, it is neither implied nor necessary that such be the case.¹⁵ The standing of these witnesses within

¹² Adams divides this passage and the process it creates into five steps: “1) Self-Discipline, 2) One-on-One, 3) One or Two Others, 4) The Church, 5) The World.” Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 30. In his chapter on “Self-Discipline,” Adams helpfully delineates a precursor to the more formal considerations of church discipline — self-discipline. In this step, the believer is conscious of his own sin and actively working to repent from it. This action taken on the part of the believer prevents the process from moving into the confrontation necessary in the remainder of the process. Self-discipline also carries throughout the process as the repentant believer must exercise such discipline over themselves even as they are confronted from the outside about their sin. Ted Kitchens also helpfully notes at this point: “Jesus desired self-discipline from His followers (Matt. 5:22-23; Mark 7:14-23), but when self-discipline fails, then the Christian community is responsible to exercise discipline lovingly.” Ted G Kitchens, “Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148, no. 590 (April 1991): 212. Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, chap. 5.

¹³ Repentance as a biblical notion consists of a turning of heart from sin to Christ which leads to a changed life. See Matthew 11:28-29, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:37-38, 3:19, 17:30, 20:21, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Hebrews 6:1. Repentance is not complete and final upon the first turning but must persist through ongoing life and striving. In this way, the confronted believer is called to forsake his sin and, with the encouragement and care of the body of Christ (e.g. Heb. 3:13), make efforts to mortify it (put it to death — Romans 8:13). See treatments such as *Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 70, John Owen’s three treatises on sin, helpfully collected in Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, Redesign edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). Additional Puritan works such as Thomas Watson, *Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988); Thomas Boston, *True Repentance: The Necessity of Repentance*, vol. VI, *The Whole Works of the Late Reverend Thomas Boston of Etrick* (GLH Publishing, 2015); “A Discourse of Mortification by Stephen Charnock,” accessed November 16, 2019, https://www.the-highway.com/mortification_Charnock.html. As well as modern works: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan Academic, 2009), chap. 35; Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986); Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin* (P&R Publishing, 1998).

¹⁴ The paper will further define this refusal, its extent and duration, as it addresses refusal within the counseling process below.

¹⁵ Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, chap. 5. If visual witnesses to the offense the only proper subject of this phase, the number who could participate in such an activity would be greatly diminished and the spirit of this command would certainly preclude the later activity of sharing with the entire church. That said, these witnesses ought to have a positive standing in the church and be known for their sobriety and fairness. It could be said here that an understood element underlying Matthew’s text is that there is a possibility that the witnesses would deduce that the claim made by the offended was not valid on Scriptural

the body is also not defined. It would be reasonable to believe that a wise and sober-minded church member would be well-suited to this task, but it would also be reasonable at this point for the offended to request the aid of a pastor or lay counselor in the church.

Upon refusal of this second group, the matter is to be brought to the church.¹⁶ As the church body is informed, they are challenged to confront the offending member and call him to repentance. At his refusal of “even the church,” he is declared by the church body to no longer be considered a believer in Jesus Christ. The church members’ actions toward this newly removed person must indicate deep concern and care for the lostness of his soul and an earnest plea for true faith in Christ that causes one to flee from sin.

Having laid out a basic paradigm for church discipline, this essay will focus on the application of counseling which leads to church discipline by first addressing the proper subjects of discipline and then the situations which will require exercise of discipline.

ASSESSING THE SUBJECTS FOR COUNSELING THAT LEADS TO DISCIPLINE

Operating frequently within the church or lay counseling centers, biblical counselors frequently encounter a wide variety of counselees. One of the foundational churches in the biblical counseling movement, Faith Church in Lafayette, IN, has built its counseling ministry in large part as an outreach to its community.¹⁷ This is a blessed opportunity and one that Faith Church

grounds. This would terminate the process and could even result in a call to the offended to repent from such accusations which were unfounded.

¹⁶ Adams here proposes a cautionary note: “I think it goes without saying that to tell it to the church is not to be done by a brother standing up in the middle of a worship service and declaring what has happened.” Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 68. Such a practice would “violate the principles of good order set forth in 1 Corinthians 14.” This would then require one of two approaches: either the believer waits to share his concern until a gathering is called of only the members of the church (some churches have such gatherings as a monthly member’s meeting) or, alternatively, the offended can bring the concern to the elders of the church who would then be tasked with arranging such a time as the church can be so gathered.

¹⁷ Bob Kellemen and Paul Tripp, *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care Through God’s People*, ed. Kevin Carson (Zondervan, 2015), chap. 19.

has seen great success in over time. However, practicing in such a setting creates a question as to the proper subject of counseling which leads to church discipline. Faith Church, and any church with a counseling ministry open to the public, will encounter three categories of counselees: 1) unbelievers, 2) members of the counseling church, and 3) Christians who fellowship with other churches.¹⁸

Unbeliever

When considering the practice of church discipline, the first category of counselee, namely unbelievers, can be quickly excluded. The biblical counselor who engages with a professed unbeliever has no need to press toward a formal process of church discipline with one who has self-identified as apart from Christ and His church. The unbeliever has not willingly submitted himself to the life and authority of the church. Said another way, removal from church life can only return one to their un-churched state. The church has nothing to take from an unbeliever, rather it holds out the offer of the Gospel. Thus a biblical counselor may (must) certainly instruct and evangelize a self-professed unbeliever, but the matter of church discipline is settled from the start. Unbelievers cannot be church disciplined.¹⁹

Member

Contrary to the unbeliever, the second category of counselee, the duly engaged member of the church, demands a different response. Membership in the church is the basis of pursuing church discipline. It is the believer's voluntary association with this particular expression of the body of Christ that identifies him as a candidate for discipline. The biblical counselor, operating within the local church, is under obligation to fulfill the duties of discipline when necessary with a member of the church.

¹⁸ It may be necessary in practice to add a fourth category: professing Christians who regularly fellowship with the counselor's church but have yet to make the commitment to membership. The decision may need to be made in those cases to contact whatever church the professing Christian previously fellowshiped with or, lacking such, to consider them an unbeliever due to their failure to fellowship with a church. The counselor may in practice direct them to pursue membership as a function of his counseling.

¹⁹ Consent and disclosure will be discussed further later in the paper. Regardless of whether the counselee is a potential subject for discipline, the church's intake documents should make abundantly clear the circumstances under which confidentiality would be breached.

Believing Non-Member

The third category of counselee, believing non-member, provides more difficulty. In this category, the counselor is meeting with someone who is a professed believer, but not a member at the church overseeing the counseling.²⁰ Either this happens because a local church has an established counseling ministry and someone has come in from the outside, or this could happen in settings such as an independent counseling center that operates apart from a local church.²¹ In either case, where sin is involved and church discipline may need to be pursued, the counselor has an obligation to involve and address the counselee's home church.²² This is an act of covenant respect to the leaders of the home church, and such a policy should be clearly in place when counselees from other churches are received in a counseling ministry.²³

²⁰ Adams helpfully addresses several situations which may arise: The counselee may come from an unfaithful church, one which denies the Scriptures and the Gospel, in which case the counselor will intentionally engage the counselee on these specific points to either challenge their profession of faith or to encourage them to re-understand the status of their home "church." The other situation, where the counselee comes from a faithful church, requires caution to preempt the possibility of "sheep stealing." Adams offers the caution that the pastor of the home church should be consulted and his consent secured before counseling is undertaken. If the primary reason for the counselee pursuing care outside of the home church is the inexperience of the home church pastor in such matters, a relationship of training can be created and edified through the home church pastor participating in the counseling process. Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 205–9.

²¹ Based on the transcendent commitment of believers to their local church, I would argue here that membership should be considered in-play even in a non-church counseling center. Therefore, a counseling center counselor would have the same obligations to pursue church discipline regardless of the setting of their counsel. If counselor A engages counselee B at a counseling center, he is still obligated to treat B as a fellow church member and pursue the simplest expression of the church discipline process outlined throughout this paper. The setting is not enough to warrant a shift in categories.

²² Robert Cheong discusses conflict among believers: "If you are not part of the same community, then each of you can either ask someone from your own community or approach a respected third party group whom you both trust and know will give wise counsel." Robert K. Cheong and Stephen Timmis, *God Redeeming His Bride* (Christian Focus Publications, 2013), chap. 8. Kindle Location 1849. While I would agree with his note here in reference to a general practice of believers addressing sin, the pseudo-authority invested in counselors would push me to ensure that the matter was brought directly to the pastoral leadership of the counselee's church.

²³ The analogy is crude, but this is the same respect that one parent would show while temporarily caring for another parent's child. The counselee's home church may even knowingly employ the wisdom of the other church's counselor, but this does not free the counselee from the home church's authority.

The biblical counselor must limit his attempts to escalate church discipline based on the membership status of the counselee.²⁴ By rightly limiting the pursuit of discipline to professing Christians, both the counselor and church are preserved from seeking to judge outsiders (1 Corinthians 5:12) and can focus their efforts on calling brothers back from sin and, when necessary, “purging the evil person from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:13).

ASSESSING THE SITUATIONS FOR COUNSELING THAT LEADS TO DISCIPLINE

What Sin is Worthy of Discipline

The aim of this paper is to identify and limit the subjects and situations a biblical counselor may encounter which would require escalating a counseling case to church discipline. As such the counselor would need to have some pre-existing understanding of which situations would require such escalation.²⁵ Ted Kitchens writes helpfully in *Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline* that historically churches have sought to create sin-lists from various passages and outworkings of those passages of Scripture. Rather than attempt such an exhaustive list, Kitchens creates four categories of sin described in Scripture: 1) Private and personal offenses that violate Christian love, 2) divisiveness and factions that destroy Christian unity, 3) moral and ethical deviations

²⁴ This is both an argument from and an argument for meaningful church membership as promoted by 9Marks Ministries. The church who either entirely abdicates the charge to account for its sheep or is haphazard in its application of doing so sets believers up to fail in their fight against sin. Adams noted in his title that discipline is in fact a “right and privilege of every church member.” For additional resources on 9Marks’s presentations on church membership see Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (B&H Academic, 2012); Mark Dever and Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.*, Revised and expanded edition. (Crossway Books, 2000); Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 1 edition (Crossway, 2012); Jonathan Leeman, *The Rule of Love: How the Local Church Should Reflect God’s Love and Authority*. (Crossway, 2018). As well as numerous articles and practical guides to membership and implementation at 9Marks.org.

²⁵ Biblical counselors encounter any number of issues in caring for church members and beyond: grief over loss, relationship struggles, career choices, doctrinal questions, identity issues, and many more. Certainly not all of these issues are directly connected to sinfulness on the part of the counselee and may simply be an expression of the care demonstrated in 1 Thessalonians 5:14: “...encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

that break Christian standards, and 4) teaching false doctrine.²⁶ Kitchens's effort is to provide a comprehensive rubric for evaluating possible sin areas without attempting to create a list which can quickly lose applicability.²⁷ Kitchens collates the various declarations against sin in the New Testament under these headings and argues that any sin outwardly practiced is worthy of confrontation as commanded by Christ.²⁸ "The New Testament teaches that no sin is tolerable to those whom Christ has redeemed. No Christian should be allowed to embrace unrepented sin and move in and out of the church at will."²⁹ This is not to say that seemingly minor sins should be elevated to the rapid-response indicated in 1 Corinthians 5, but rather that a believer who holds onto sin, sin of any kind, and refuses to repent is liable for discipline.³⁰

In light of the above, biblical counselors who seek to evaluate a case for possible escalation should look for clear biblical sin. Kitchens's categories could be helpful, but consistency demands that the leadership of the church establish

²⁶ Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," 211-12. The Puritan John Owen saw a similar categorization of issues in his chapter on Church Discipline. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, Chapter X, *On Excommunication*. in John Owen, *The Life and Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, n.d., vol. XVI, Pages 151-183. Stephen Yuille, surveying Owen, noted three categories: Moral, Doctrinal, and Behavioral. J Stephen Yuille, "John Owen and the Third Mark of the Church," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no. 1 (January 2010): 217-18. Owen's chapter on excommunication (Church discipline) is cited above.

²⁷ As Kitchens notes, in the past, the church has sought to compile extensive lists containing every possible sin eligible for discipline. The Scripture contains lists of sin such as 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, and yet it also contains broad statements that could render any number of actions or attitudes as sinful (e.g. Romans 14:23b: "for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin"). Therefore lists that seek to encapsulate every possible mode of sin are on the whole unhelpful. Historically, the lists not only included the sins but also the required restitution. Greg Wills helpfully describes the historical progression of discipline beginning with the church fathers. The notion of certain sins requiring more substantial restoration is clearly seen in Gregory of Nyssa who prescribed 27 years of penitence "for intentional murder and robbery, 18 for adultery, and nine for fornication, grave robbing, and apostasy that was coerced." Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, chaps. 5, Kindle Location 2769.

²⁸ Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," 212-13.

²⁹ Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," 213.

³⁰ Looking at John Owen's work in the 1600s offers a cautionary addendum to Kitchens's statement above. Owen cautions: "No excommunication is to be allowed in cases dubious and disputable, wherein right and wrong are not easily determinable unto all unprejudiced persons that know the will of God in such things; nor is it to be admitted when the matter of fact stands in need of testimony and is not proved by two witnesses at the least." John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, Chapter X, *On Excommunication*. in Owen, *The Life and Works of John Owen*, vol. XVI, Pages 151-183.

a paradigm for the church as a whole. Which sin areas will be considered for discipline? What evidence and witnesses will be required for each? Without such clarity from church leadership, the biblical counselor is set adrift.

If He Does Not Listen

Having established the necessity of pursuing discipline in the case of church members and provided a set of considerations for which sins necessitate discipline, the paper will now examine evidence of refusal which may lead a counselor to escalate to formal church discipline.

Jay Adams laid out the foundational concept of biblical counseling: “Nouthetic confrontation, in its biblical usage, aims at straightening out the individual by changing his patterns of behavior to conform to biblical standards.”³¹ Adams’s vision of biblical counseling clearly had much to do with the confrontation of sin in the counselee.³² For the biblical counselor then, addressing sin is a normal and natural part of the counseling process. Counselees come to address private sin which has proved troublesome (e.g., a teen struggling with pornography who requests the help of his youth pastor). Counselees come upon the finding out of their secret sin (e.g., the same teen whose parents found out). Sometimes counselees come to address an issue of sin between them.³³ In this way, the counselor may find himself engaged in the process of Matthew 18 church discipline at a variety of points: He may be assisting a believer in self-discipline, he may be confronting sin as the first party of Matthew 18:15, or he may be brought along as one of the witnesses of the “one or two others” of verse 16.³⁴

While these different scenarios may create a different application of Scriptural truth, the necessity to observe the pattern of Matthew 18 remains.

³¹ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 46.

³² Use of the word “sin” more than 400 times in *Competent to Counsel*, a book just over 260 pages, would indicate the same.

³³ The current standard for material relating to peacemaking is Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 3rd ed. (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2004).

³⁴ Adams’s understanding of “tell it to the church” begins with consulting the church elders who may then approach the accused before bringing it to the church. This could also be another point at which a counselor was employed (especially if the elders are well-versed in biblical care) to better address the sin area the accused is struggling with. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, 70.

The wise counselor then will look for the defining mark in a counselee which triggers escalation: “if he will not listen.” Assuming that the counselor is addressing a clear case of ongoing sin, readily described by a passage of Scripture or a widely accepted and reasonable application of a passage of Scripture, the counselor is mandated to escalate into the next phase of church discipline when the counselee refuses to listen.

One reasonable mark of refusal to listen would be the untimely termination of ongoing counseling by the counselee. A typical in-office biblical counselor will establish a course of care which may have a defined end date or specific markers of success which are set out early in the process.³⁵ The counselee will know he is under the care of the counselor, and the relationship will be defined as such. A self-professed believer, engaged in counseling, retains a measure of what might be called “listening-credibility” as long as he continues to meet with and engage the counselor.

Another possible element which could be brought to bear on the decision to escalate is the willingness of the counselee to complete the homework assigned by the counselor.³⁶ Adams argues for a temporary suspension of counseling in some cases where homework is not completed: “There may come a time when assignments are so often neglected, two, three, or four weeks in a row in spite of all attempts to understand why and to motivate the counselee, so that the counselor must dismiss the counselee until he is prepared to work.”³⁷ However, even the failure of the counselee to complete the work can be an informative aspect that assists the wise counselor in furthering his care. The counselor may find that the counselee has failed to understand the assignment – in which case training is in order, or they may have lost hope for change or succumbed to fear – in which case encouragement is needed.³⁸ If these hindrances and others

³⁵ One such model Robert Kellemen terms “Spiritual Treatment Planning.” Robert W. Kellemen and Brian Croft, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 212ff.

³⁶ Homework has a long history in the biblical counseling movement. Adams promoted it in many of his works including several chapters in Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Zondervan, 2010), chap. 27, 28, and 29. Various writers have also produced manuals to provide homework related to specific issues common to biblical counselors such as Wayne A. Mack, *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living: Personal and Interpersonal Problems*, First edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1979).

³⁷ Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 314.

³⁸ Ibid., 314–15.

such as practical concerns have been addressed, the counselor may need to consider if failure to comply with reasonable homework should be considered as evidence of a failure to listen, prompting escalation.

Failure to Listen vs. Failure to Repent

In the situations above, the counselee has effectively refused to listen to the counselor and therefore escalation is in order. Applied uncritically, a counselor could take the same approach to a counselee who receives counsel but still continues in sin. Such a counselor might assume that, once the convicting words regarding the sin have been spoken, any further falls into the same sin warrant escalation. However, in the counseling ministry, failure to repent may not necessarily equate to refusal to listen.

Some cautionary notes should be observed regarding an ongoing pattern of sin. Real striving, real progress, and intentionality should be present in the counselee, but to demand perfection, especially in areas of “pesky” sins, would seem to be beyond the realm of reasonable consideration for church discipline. Said another way, the counselor can look for direction rather than perfection. Matthew 18:15-18 directly precedes verses 21-22 where Peter asks just how many times the brother can sin and yet be forgiven. Jesus’s answer, whether translated 77 or 70 times 7, indicates an overabundance of forgiveness. One mark the wise counselor could look for is the eagerness and earnestness with which the counselee pursues restoration. Paul represents such eagerness in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 as evidence of “godly grief.”³⁹ Thus the wise counselor will seek to guide and instruct the one who stumbles toward fuller and fuller repentance, understanding that frequent forgiveness will be necessary as a counselee grows in Christlikeness.

³⁹ “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.” 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. I would argue here that while counselors cannot fully know the heart of the one confessing sin, this mark alone should carry much weight in helping the counselor determine the sincerity of the repentance being offered. That sincerity should be prioritized when considering escalation.

Patience in Escalation

One common thread throughout multiple authors addressing this topic is the necessity for patience to be carried out in the process of escalation. Each phase of the Matthew 18 process is to be given time and persistence. Adams writes humorously about an argument between brothers: “they are both huffing but one of them is puffing as well.”⁴⁰ When the offended brother returns to resolve the situation, he has resolved his huffing, but still perceives puffing on the part of the offender. Apparently neither huff nor puff are the proper settings for resolving conflict.

Robert Cheong helpfully presses towards such patience by laying the groundwork for a “redemptive plan” to be implemented in the rescue process.⁴¹ Such plans look for opportunities to share grace and celebrate those seeds of repentance which can be seen in the life of the straying believer. Perhaps the erring brother has yet to understand from Scripture where his sin is condemned. Perhaps, as is certainly increasingly common, he has been indoctrinated with a worldly diagnosis of mental illness which, in his mind, releases him from all sinful liability. Such things must be sought out and worked through before the process can reasonably move forward.

The wise counselor will seek to rightly limit and clarify the cases which are deemed worthy of escalation. These situations will be marked by clear, biblically documented sins, a refusal on the part of the counselee to listen, and a patient coming alongside by the counselor who looks for signs of repentance. Such a definition, adopted under the authority of the local church, will allow the counselor the freedom and confidence to address sin in a counselee with the full range of tools Christ intended.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND COUNSELING ESCALATION

Having discussed the marks of a case which warrants escalation, the paper now moves to a discussion of a necessary consequence of escalation: breach of confidentiality. One defining difference between the majority of practitioners

⁴⁰ Adams, “Discipling, Counseling and Church Discipline,” 22.

⁴¹ Cheong and Timmis, *God Redeeming His Bride*, chap. Chapter 9. Kindle Location 2020.

of biblical counseling and those who operate from an integrated approach in a licensed setting is the allegiance to professional codes established by secular organizations, such as the APA's code of ethics.⁴² Such codes may contain helpful applications of collected wisdom, and yet they cannot be utilized to undercut the authority of God's Word in the local church and the counseling task.

Writing in the *Journal of Pastoral Practice* (later the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*), Larry Spalink described a practice of strict confidentiality, rooted in Roman Catholic confessionalists, dating back to Augustine.⁴³ This confidentiality, Spalink argues, was built on a common sense assumption: if the one who receives the confession ever shares the content of the confession, no one will make use of confession again. Thus, the possibility of a confession which would later be repeated renders unlikely, if not impossible, any future confessions. The confidentiality created by this set of assumptions could be termed absolute confidentiality, and its implementation would utterly bar a biblical counselor from participating in church discipline.⁴⁴

Proponents of the integration of Christianity and modern psychology such as Clyde Narramore were adamant about the value of confidentiality in counseling, even stating that confidentiality was "the first and most important element in professional ethics."⁴⁵ This prizing of confidentiality can even extend to impeding the responsibility of the counselor in church discipline. Walter Becker, writing on the ethics of counselors in the church, advises against breaking confidentiality in the process of church discipline.⁴⁶ Thus

⁴² Available online at American Psychological Association, "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct," <https://www.apa.org>, June 1, 2003, <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>.

⁴³ Larry Spalink, "Confidentiality and Biblical Counseling: Warning: This Office Bugged By the Holy Spirit," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 3, no. 3 (1979): 57. Spalink notes that many U.S. states uphold such a protection against divulging confidential information revealed to a clergyman. *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁴ There is nuance between the practice of the Catholic priest and that put forward by the APA's ethics code. The Catholic priest is responsible to protect the "seal" of the confessional even if intent to commit crime is indicated. Counseling professionals are not even legally, better yet ethically, provided such all-encompassing restrictions. *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁵ Clyde M. Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling ; Professional Techniques for Pastors, Teachers*. (Zondervan Pub. House, 1960), 24. Also cited in Spalink, "Confidentiality and Biblical Counseling: Warning: This Office Bugged By the Holy Spirit," 56.

⁴⁶ Walter W Becker, "The Paraprofessional Counselor in the Church: Legal and Ethical Considerations," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 6, no. 2 (1987): 78–82. Quoted in

for the integrated practitioner, professional ethics can supercede biblical responsibilities. This must not be so.

Writing about Christian (integrated) counseling ethics, Randolph Sanders offers a helpful and cautionary case in point.⁴⁷ In the scenario, the counselee Brad is engaged in an affair and comes reluctantly seeking counsel from a therapist upon the pleading of his son. At the second meeting, without any consultation with Brad, Brad's pastor has been invited to the session and all the details of the affair have been shared with him.⁴⁸ Brad is caught unaware and unprepared for what he has walked into. The counselor had not informed Brad before the counseling that such disclosure was possible, neither had the counselor informed Brad during the meeting that disclosure would be necessary to fulfill Christian duty. Was there clear sin? Certainly. Was patience applied? None. Was Brad listening to the counselor? He was not given a chance. The counselor, in seeking maybe even to apply Matthew 18, has actually shortcut the process and made things much more difficult for an already sin-stricken situation. This application of the process of discipline fails several of the tests already described in this paper. The counselor has failed to rightly apply the kind of confidentiality that Scripture prescribes.

Positively, Scripture does demand a level of confidentiality, though without using that term. Frequently throughout the Proverbs the gossip or whisperer is seen as negative character who causes all manner of troubles.⁴⁹ Biblical counselors must avoid the sin of gossip and maintain confidences with utmost care. Moreover, confining the number of those knowledgeable about the situation is built into Matthew 18. At the beginning of the process only the offender and offended are aware of the offense. The presence of such an escalating number of those made aware clearly indicates that apart from escalation the number would remain small.

Randolph K. Sanders, *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Psychologists, Therapists and Pastors*, vol. Second edition, Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 383–84.

⁴⁷ Sanders, *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Psychologists, Therapists and Pastors*, Second edition: 34–36.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Proverbs 16:28, 18:8, 26:20, 26:22

So, biblical counselors can affirm an overall pattern of “counseling confidences” as Adams calls them.⁵⁰ It is also reasonable to argue that the counselor should explain the confidences which will be kept and which might need to be broken in certain cases. The counselor would do well to clearly articulate these in an intake document which would be explained clearly before the first session of care. Preserving confidence and informing counselees is the pattern put forth by the standards of conduct of organizations such as ACBC.⁵¹

Though Scripture does indeed limit the sharing of information, when it comes to addressing sin, Scripture also demands an increasingly expanded circle of knowledge. The biblical counselor cannot hide behind professional standards of confidentiality when biblical fidelity is at stake. On the one hand, the Bible clearly requires submission to governmental authorities (Romans 13), many of which have clear requirements for the reporting of abuse, especially in the case of minors. On the other hand, the authority of Christ, mediated through the local church demands following through with the requirements of “reporting” for the purpose of escalating the counseling conversation towards formal church discipline.

CASE STUDY

Steve and Susan had recently become more active in the ministries of the church.⁵² Not long after this newfound interest in ministry, church leadership was made aware that Steve had approached two female church members with inappropriate comments and sexually suggestive remarks. Church leadership received their concerns and responded immediately, sensitively investigating the claims and considering what additional resources were needed: counsel for the members who came forward, contacting law enforcement etc.⁵³ Steve

⁵⁰ Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 83. Quoted also in Spalink, “Confidentiality and Biblical Counseling: Warning: This Office Bugged By the Holy Spirit.”

⁵¹ “Standards of Conduct,” Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (blog), accessed July 30, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/certification/standards-of-conduct/>.

⁵² Names and situation modified to preserve confidentiality.

⁵³ Measures were put in place by the leadership to immediately bar Steve from any church activities for the safety of the women who had accused Steve. These measures were not taken as a declaration of Steve’s status in the faith or an indication that Steve could not return at a future

was contacted and asked to provide an explanation; he obliged. He assured the leadership that these were the only two women whom he had spoken to in this way, and that he was miserably sorry for the way he had acted.

Steve began meeting with the church's biblical counselor. Steve was cooperative with the counselor and met multiple times a week to engage in the process. However, as the counseling went on over a period of weeks, more victims came forward. From the initial counseling sessions, Steve was given frequent opportunities to name any other victims, and, yet, he continued to hide the truth. The counselor and church leadership pleaded with Steve to confess his sin fully rather than continuing to be outed as new victims came forward. He would not. Seeing Steve's continued resistance, church leadership made the decision to pursue formal church discipline, escalating the situation from the counseling room to the full meeting of the church membership.

CONCLUSION

Steve was the right subject for counseling which led to discipline. Steve's ongoing membership at the counselor's local church put him directly in the authority sphere of the church. He was in the right situation for counseling to escalate to discipline. Steve's repeated attempts to evade his counselor's questions and hide his sin demonstrated not only a refusal to repent but a refusal to engage in meaningful change. And while the information surrounding his situation was handled as discretely as possible throughout the counseling process, the scriptural mandate for pursuing church discipline eventually called for Steve's sin to be described to the church body.

This paper has sought to rightly limit counseling which escalates to church discipline by identifying the proper subjects and situations. The wise counselor, and the wise church who engages in intentional counseling ministry, will engage this topic thoroughly and clearly both to ensure biblical discipline is taking place and to limit the excesses of discipline practiced without discernment. The counseling task is one of restoration and care

point, but rather to create an opportunity for understanding the situation and protection for those who had made the accusations.

and though often viewed negatively and judgmentally, so too is the task of church discipline. The wise counselor will apply God's standards above man's standards and provide church members with the full measure of privilege which is theirs in Christ – including the privilege of church discipline rightly applied.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BESSEL VAN DER KOLK'S *THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE*

Francine Tan¹

WHAT COUNTS AS TRAUMA?

In 1987, Dutch psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk argued that “psychological trauma affects the entire human organism—body, mind, and brain,” even though he and his colleagues presented “reports that are anecdotal [and] there are almost no controlled studies” in their support for this hypothesis in *Psychological Trauma*.² In his recent best-seller *The Body Keeps the Score*, he continues to promote this same hypothesis that “the memory of trauma is encoded in the viscera, in heart-breaking and gut-wrenching emotions, in autoimmune disorders and skeletal/muscular problems” using three new branches of science: neuroscience, developmental psychopathology, and interpersonal neurobiology.³ However, his hypothesis 36 years ago is still just that—a hypothesis.

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² Bessel A. van der Kolk, ed., *Psychological Trauma* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1987), 78. Van der Kolk is a clinician, researcher, and teacher in the area of posttraumatic stress. His work integrates developmental, neurobiological, psychodynamic, and interpersonal aspects of the impact of trauma and its treatment. He is considered one of the leading voices on this topic with over 150 peer-reviewed journal articles as well as the author of *Psychological Trauma*, *Traumatic Stress*, and *The Body Keeps the Score*. He is the founder and medical director of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts. He is also a professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and director of the National Complex Trauma Treatment Network and the past President of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies.

³ Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 88. No evidence was discussed to support the mechanism of this claim and van der Kolk proceeds to expose the non-scientific basis of his claim, when he says, “Somatic symptoms for which no clear physical basis can be found in traumatized children and adults” (99).

Van der Kolk describes trauma as something “unbearable and intolerable,” and it includes both direct experiences of traumatic events and an incommunicable inner chaos in an individual’s mental state.⁴ The language of trauma permeates everyday speech and is present in everything from educational systems to public health policies.⁵ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “trauma” was first used to describe an acute physical wound in the field of medicine in the 17th century before the emergence of the effects of accidents (railway spine) and war trauma (soldier’s heart) in Anglo-Saxon literature in the mid-19th century.⁶ Today, trauma is

⁴Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 1. Van der Kolk does not provide a definition of trauma, he describes it in terms of signs and symptoms, but there is no clear definition of what it is. This book has been referenced nearly six thousand times within trauma literature as well as clinicians, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, policy makers and so on nationwide. It has become the Grand Unifying Theory that trauma is the root of all behavioral, interpersonal, health, and social problems.

⁵ The notion of trauma is expanded from the catastrophic events of adulthood to the everyday interactions and has essentially become the “lingua franca of suffering,” but the supposed prevalence and severity of individuals being diagnosed with PTSD are questionable. For example, by September 11, 2001, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) became a widely accepted cultural phenomenon that almost immediately after the towers fell, an estimated nine thousand trauma counselors flooded lower Manhattan in order to address what was expected to be a tidal wave of post-traumatic stress. The Federal Emergency Management Agency spent 155 million dollars to make psychological counseling available for the quarter of a million people who would need help dealing with their trauma, but to the shock of many, a mere three hundred people turned up. See Figure 1 on page 52 and David J. Morris, *The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).

⁶ When the industrial revolution was well under way and serious industrial accidents were becoming more frequent, that references to physical trauma started to appear in the middle of the 19th century. Physicians treating the survivors of those accidents occasionally noted odd behaviors or mysterious, unexplainable symptoms, but it was believed that such symptoms were due to an underlying physical cause, even if the physical cause had not yet been detected. A Danish physician, John Eric Erichsen called it “railway spine,” because rail travelers who had experienced even minor accidents were reporting to their doctors strange and oddly psychological symptoms, including memory difficulties, lack of appetite, nightmares, and anxiety. Erichsen explained that these patients were suffering from microlesions of the spine, which was causing emotional havoc in their lives, and it could be a striking coincidence, but liability insurance was created during the same period. Some of these survivors of “railway spine” made their way to neurologist Hermann Oppenheim’s office in Berlin. Oppenheim came to believe that these strange symptoms were due to more than physical trauma, and that they are attributed to an underlying psychological problem. In 1889, his book titled “The Traumatic Neuroses” became the first medical use of the term “trauma” to describe a purely psychological response. The literature on the development of trauma has always been a search to answer the question—is trauma physical or non-physical? Does trauma affect the brain or the mind or both? For an overview of the historical development of trauma, see Table 1 in Appendix (pp. 53-4), which demonstrates the parallel threads that influence contemporary

simultaneously believed to be a universal disorder based on neurobiological evidence as well as an amorphous and immeasurable diagnosis that is based on an individual's subjective experience, perception, and feelings.⁷ By using the validity of a truly traumatic experience for rape victims, prisoners of war, holocaust survivors and the like, this expansion of a catch-all definition of

traumatology. Cf. George A. Bonanno, *The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience Is Changing How We Think about PTSD*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2021); Carlos Blanco, "Epidemiology of PTSD," in *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. Dan J. Stein, Matthew J. Friedman, and Carlos Blanco (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011), 49–74, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119998471.ch2>; Patrick Bracken, Celia Petty, and Save the Children Fund, eds., *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (London New York: Free Association Books, 1998); Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, *War Neuroses, American Military Experience* (New York: Arno Press, 1979); Allan V. Horwitz, *PTSD: A Short History*, *Johns Hopkins Biographies of Disease* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

⁷ For more on the changing definitions of trauma, see the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is first defined in the third edition of the Diagnostic Statistic Manual (DSM-III) in 1980 as “a person who has experienced an event outside the range of usual human experiences” that results in intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions. In the span of three DSM editions from 1980 to 1994, the definition of PTSD went from direct experiences of a traumatic event to only having to hear about a severe misfortune befalling another person. As a result, the expanded definition of PTSD now includes vicarious traumatization, as demonstrated by Isaac Galatzer-Levy and Richard Bryant who used a binomial equation to elucidate possible symptom combinations in the DSM-V and concluded that there are 636,120 ways to be diagnosed with PTSD. In addition to DSM's official changing definitions, complex PTSD (C-PTSD) was proposed by psychiatrist Judith Herman in 1992 to include psychological trauma that is defined as “an affiliation of the powerless whereby the victim is rendered helpless by an overwhelming force,” and this “overwhelming force” includes problems in emotional regulation, self-image, and interpersonal conflicts. Although Herman and her supporters lobbied the DSM committee to formally recognize C-PTSD, the effort was rejected for lack of evidence. About fifteen years passed, and as the fifth edition of the DSM was being assembled, supporters repackaged C-PTSD as a childhood disorder, and once again, this effort was rejected for lack of evidence. Even though it has no scientific validity, C-PTSD has now become one of the most influential notions in the field to the extent that the majority of practicing clinicians and relevant national organizations recognize that C-PTSD is a real disorder. In Judith Herman's admission, “despite [her] best efforts and those of her colleagues in the trauma field, the American Psychiatric Association chose not to designate C-PTSD as a distinct entity because the committee did not like the fact that the description of the condition includes symptoms that overlap with other diagnostic categories without its own diagnostic criterion.” See American Psychiatric Association, ed., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV*; Includes ICD-9-CM Codes Effective 1. Oct. 96, 4. ed., 7. print (Washington, DC, 1998); American Psychiatric Association and American Psychiatric Association, eds., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th ed (Washington, D.C: American Psychiatric Association, 2013); Michael S. Scheeringa, *The Trouble with Trauma: The Search to Discover How Beliefs Become Facts* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2021); Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2015 edition (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 386.

trauma actually minimizes and negates the suffering of such individuals.⁸ While this is partly due to the ever-expanding definition of trauma and a culture of ubiquitous pathology that venerates personal narrative over objective truth, the natural man will always exchange the truth of God for the wisdom of the age that gives explanatory power to the experience of human suffering and sin (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).⁹

For this reason, a critical evaluation of van der Kolk's hypothesis that the body keeps the score (hereinafter referred to as, "BKS") will help the present-day reader to understand the philosophical presuppositions for his non-scientific theory.¹⁰ "Contemporary science has, with modern tools and

⁸ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "trauma" was first used in the 17th century to describe an acute physical wound in the field of medicine. Even references to physical trauma did not appear with any frequency until the mid-19th century, and by that time, the industrial revolution was in full swing, and with it a marked increase in the frequency of industrial accidents causing serious injury. Physicians treating the survivors of those accidents occasionally noted odd behaviors or mysterious, unexplainable symptoms, but it was believed that such symptoms were due to an underlying physical cause, even if the physical cause had not yet been detected. A Danish physician, John Eric Erichsen called it "railway spine," because rail travelers who had experienced even minor accidents were reporting to their doctors strange and oddly psychological symptoms, including memory difficulties, lack of appetite, nightmares, and anxiety. Erichsen explained that these patients were suffering from microlesions of the spine, which was causing emotional havoc in their lives, and it could be a striking coincidence, but liability insurance was created during the same period. Some of these survivors of "railway spine" made their way to neurologist Hermann Oppenheim's office in Berlin. Oppenheim came to believe that these strange symptoms were due to more than physical trauma, and that they are attributed to an underlying psychological problem. In 1889, his book titled "The Traumatic Neuroses" became the first medical use of the term "trauma" to describe a purely psychological response. In short, this begins the search for the question—is trauma physical or non-physical? Does trauma affect the brain or the mind or both? For more, see George A. Bonanno, *The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience Is Changing How We Think about PTSD*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2021); Carlos Blanco, "Epidemiology of PTSD," in *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. Dan J. Stein, Matthew J. Friedman, and Carlos Blanco (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011), 49–74, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119998471.ch2>; Patrick Bracken, Celia Petty, and Save the Children Fund, eds., *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (London New York: Free Association Books, 1998); Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, *War Neuroses, American Military Experience* (New York: Arno Press, 1979); Allan V. Horwitz, *PTSD: A Short History*, *Johns Hopkins Biographies of Disease* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

⁹ Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the New American Standard Bible, 1995 (NASB) (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

¹⁰ Van der Kolk claimed that Pierre Janet is the "real hero [and his] most important teacher." Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 180–81. There is a myriad of approaches in trauma-informed care (TIC), but the researcher will be examining the first order presuppositions of van der Kolk's theory (ontological arguments) in this paper, because the ontological incompatibility

in current language, discovered many of the central topics first spelled out for psychiatry by Janet,” he concedes, adding the neuroscience research to the theoretical foundation of 19th century French psychiatrist Pierre Janet.¹¹ So the aim of this essay is to demonstrate that Bessel van der Kolk’s theory that trauma is encoded in the brain and body is based upon the theories of traumatic stress and dissociation developed by the Janet rather than verified scientific findings; therefore, pastors ought to expose this particular folly of scientism with the superiority and sufficiency of the Word of God.

PIERRE JANET’S THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Pierre Janet (1859-1947) was a philosopher who became a psychiatrist and a psychologist in order to better understand the nature of human consciousness. His quest for the nature of “self” led him to Jean-Martin Charcot’s clinical workhouse, La Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, with over 5000 mentally ill patients.¹² These patients were known to suffer from a condition of a secular worldview with a biblical worldview will subsequently inform the incompatibility of integrating secular methodology in biblical counseling. See “Word of God and Counseling” by Doug Bookman in Heath Lambert, *Sufficiency: Historical Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, 2016).

¹¹ “Pierre Janet and the Breakdown of Adaptation in Psychological Trauma,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 146, 12 (December 1989): 1533, <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.146.12.1530>. Van der Kolk acknowledges that the goal of he and his colleagues’ work (Judith Herman and Herbert Rosenfeld) is to demonstrate the theoretical validity of early psychiatrists who understand psychological trauma to be the ultimate source of psychopathology. While Herman revived Freud’s original, self-repudiated seduction theory, arguing that repressed memories of sexual abuse, often incestuous abuse, caused traumatic symptoms, van der Kolk utilized more of Janet’s writings and clinical practice because Janet did not focus on sexual traumas, but instead often described sickness, accidents, and other common experiences as the origin of dissociated states. More specifically, Janet’s theory that the natural psychological defense against traumas was for the mind to protect itself by blocking memories of the trauma while retaining them in a hidden part of the psyche that can be recovered through techniques such as hypnosis. See Van der Kolk, *Psychological Trauma*, 1; Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Onno Van Der Hart and Rutger Horst, “The Dissociation Theory of Pierre Janet,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, 4 (1989).

¹² Pierre Janet’s views are important because they have been accepted by clinical practitioners and psychiatrists as an alternative to Freud’s theory of repression in the interpretation of certain cases of shell shock, and modern trauma theorists including Bessel van der Kolk who hailed Janet as a pioneer in traumatology, especially his writings on the nature of trauma, memory, and narration. Cf. Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Onno Hart, Paul Brown, and Bessel A. Kolk, “Pierre Janet’s Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, 4 (October 1989): 379–95, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00974597>; Van Der Hart and Horst, “The Dissociation Theory of

called “hysteria,” which would be the present-day equivalent of “borderline personality disorder” (BPD).¹³ In 1889, he published the first book-length scientific account of traumatic stress: *Liautomatisme psychologique*.¹⁴ Sharing Charcot’s belief in the hereditary nature of hysteria, Janet studied these patients using his termed method “psychological analysis,”¹⁵ and categorized

Pierre Janet.” For an overview of the historical development of trauma, see Table 1 in Appendix (p. 57-58), which demonstrates the parallel threads that influence contemporary traumatology.

¹³ Russell Meares, *A Dissociation Model of Borderline Personality Disorder*, 1st ed, Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

¹⁴ Pierre Janet (May 30, 1859 – February 24, 1947) was a well-known French psychiatrist, physician, philosopher and psychotherapist who specialized in the field of dissociation and traumatic memory. Janet was born to an upper middle-class family, and at twenty-two, he became a professor of philosophy in Le Havre, and he devoted his spare time to volunteer work with patients at the hospital and to psychiatric research. Janet’s report (1882) of an unusual case of hypnosis and clairvoyance gained him the attention of neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot who was a French neurologist and professor of anatomical pathology. Charcot has been referred to as “the father of French neurology” for his work on hysteria and hypnosis. As a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Paris, Janet studied automatic acts, and in his thesis (1889), which went into many editions, he introduced but did not amplify the concept of the unconscious. This work engendered a later dispute with Sigmund Freud over priority. At Charcot’s invitation, Janet became director of the psychological laboratory at the largest Paris mental institution, the Salpêtrière Hospital (1889). There he completed his work for his M.D., which he received for the thesis *L’État mental des hystériques* (1892; *The Mental State of Hystericals*, 1901), in which he attempted to classify forms of hysteria. He popularized the concept of dissociation, traumatic stress, hypnosis, and other emotional disorders involving anxiety, phobias, and other abnormal behaviors. Together with well-known psychotherapists such as Wilhelm Wundt and William James, he is known as one of the founders of contemporary psychiatry. See Giuseppe Craparo, Francesco Cocco Ortu, and Onno van der Hart, eds., *Rediscovering Pierre Janet: Trauma, Dissociation, and a New Context for Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2019); “Pierre Janet and the Breakdown of Adaptation in Psychological Trauma”; Pierre Janet and Serge Nicolas, *L’automatisme psychologique: essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l’activité humaine* (1889), Erw reprograph. Nachdr., *Encyclopédie psychologique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005).

¹⁵ Janet and Nicolas, *L’automatisme psychologique*, 484. Janet defines psychological analysis “as an essential method for a psychology of the individual that aims to seek out those characteristic behavioural patterns that distinguish one individual from another,” which is different from Freud’s “psychoanalysis” that is a set of theories and therapeutic techniques to deal with the unconscious mind. Janet summarized in three arguments the main differences between his “psychological analysis” and Freud’s “psychoanalysis”: 1) The notion of a narrowed field of consciousness as a direct and passive effect of the vehement emotions experienced during and after a traumatizing event is different from Freud’s idea of an active psychological defense mechanism developed to banish from consciousness unacceptable mental contents; 2) Janet’s view of the subconscious as an expression of a complex hierarchy of mental functions, whose lower level of automatic operations does not involve any type of consciousness, while the higher levels culminate with fully fledged reflective consciousness markedly diverges from Freud’s concept of the dynamic unconscious as a product of defense mechanisms; and 3) Janet hypothesized that human behavior is driven by a variety of psychobiological systems stemming

his observations into two syndromes, namely, hysteria and psychasthenia.¹⁶ He proposed that at the root of what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the experience of “vehement emotions,” or intense emotional arousal.¹⁷ Hence, he sought to explore the psychological processes involved in the transformation of traumatic experiences into psychopathology (study of mental disorders). He explained that after a person is traumatized, he automatically keeps repeating certain actions, emotions, and sensations related to the trauma.¹⁸

According to Janet, psychological trauma is a life experience that causes a powerful emotional shock that separates from conscious awareness and voluntary control, leading to fragmentation of unintegrated memories manifesting as pathological automatisms, or in today’s language, the body

from both evolutionary processes and individual development, thus rejecting what he called “Freud’s pansexualism” as a case of unrestrained generalization of hysteria. Janet accused Freud of using concepts that he himself had introduced without quoting the source: “they [i.e., the Freudians] used the term ‘psychoanalysis’ for what I had called ‘psychological analysis’, they described as a ‘complex’ what I had termed a ‘psychological system’ . . . , they regarded as ‘displacement’ what I had associated with ‘constriction of consciousness...’” In short, Janet disputes the view that all mentally ill persons are impaired by sexual trauma and the emphasis on dreams in treatment is given too much warrant. For more, see Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Paul Brown and Onno Van Der Hart, “Memories of Sexual Abuse: Janet’s Critique of Freud, a Balanced Approach,” *Psychological Reports* 82, 3 (June 1998): 1027–43, <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1998.82.3.1027>; Karl-Ernst Bühler and Gerhard Heim, “General Introduction to the Psychotherapy of Pierre Janet,” *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 55, 1 (January 2001): 74–91, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2001.55.1.74>.

¹⁶ See Figure 2 on page 55. Hysteria refers to illnesses that impair the personality and cause the appearance of subconscious concepts due to insufficient mental tension (or a weakened mental state), because the primary mode of adaption is the dissociation of feelings or memories related to frightening experiences, which results in a narrowing of consciousness. In contrast, psychasthenia refers to ideas that do not become part of the subconscious and the syndromes do not impair the personality because an individual has a decreased capacity for creative adaption to reality and the mind is deflected into various phobias, anxiety, or obsessional disorders. Outside the psychoanalytic field, a growing number of theoretical and clinical perspectives are explicitly based on Janet’s dissociation theory. See these three studies: 1) The polyvagal theory by Stephen Porges; 2) Loss of dendrites in the prefrontal cortex; and 3) Studies of the brain’s bioelectrical activity in pathological conditions. Craparo, Cocco Ortú, and Hart, *Rediscovering Pierre Janet*, 99; Stephen W. Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*, 1st ed, *The Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

¹⁷ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 182–83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

keeps the score.¹⁹ While Janet's conception of dissociative disorders is part of a larger discussion, this paper will focus on two main ideas, namely, traumatic stress and dissociation.

First, Janet proposed a traumatic stress model of dissociative disorders. While he did mention how congenital tendency (predisposition), physical illness, and exhaustion may result in hysterical symptoms, he primarily emphasized the role of vehement emotions like terror in response to traumatic events.²⁰ This initial emotional reaction to the traumatic event ("vehement emotion") accounted for subsequent symptoms: "Traumas produce their disintegrating effects in proportion to their intensity, duration and repetition."²¹

¹⁹ This emotion preserves the experience of the trauma. Janet emphasized the need to distinguish the emotional shock from the sentiment or feeling that serves to regulate behavior. Emotional shock is an affective reaction that always reoccurs in the same way and is chronic. In this respect, emotions are the cause of the psychological trauma because they prevent ill-prepared individuals from adapting successfully to specific situations. These individuals are exposed to feelings of fear, rage, or sorrow, or to feelings of incompleteness and disturbed cognitive processes that may generate fixed ideas—a kind of distorted experience, memory, imagination, or appraisal of the traumatic event. Janet proposed that individuals may possess a susceptibility or a predisposition for a type of reaction that manifests itself as a trauma and leads to the progressive loss of psychological energy. See Gerhard Heim and Karl-Ernst Bühler, "Psychological Trauma and Fixed Ideas in Pierre Janet's Conception of Dissociative Disorders," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 60, 2 (April 2006): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2006.60.2.111>; Pierre Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria: Fifteen Lectures Given in the Medical School of Harvard University* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1965).

²⁰ He focused on the subjective events of these events rather than on their objective aspects. This means that it is *not the nature* of the event (i.e.: its severity) that causes dissociation and hysteria, it is the emotions that are evoked by the event. He observed that certain patients responded with extreme fear or anger to situations which were trivial for most people and he made a careful distinction between feelings, which he saw as regulators of behavior, and emotions as extreme fear and anger when the subject is not able to adapt. These vehement emotions then exert a disintegrative effect on the mind (sufficient force to cause hysteria). He wrote, "I was led to recognize in many subjects the role of one or several events in their past life. These events, which were accompanied by a vehement emotion and a destruction of the psychological system, had left traces." Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria: Fifteen Lectures Given in the Medical School of Harvard University*; Van Der Hart and Horst, "The Dissociation Theory of Pierre Janet." Similarly, van der Kolk notes that stress never lies with the stressful events, it lies in one's reaction to them, and patients who are chronically hyper-aroused will have trouble regulating their emotions and behavior (Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 16).

²¹ Janet and Nicolas, *L'automatisme psychologique*, 1558. Janet described how traumatized people become "attached" (Freud would later use the term "fixated") to the trauma: "Unable to integrate the traumatic memories, they seem to have lost their capacity to assimilate new experiences as well. It is ... as if their personality which definitely stopped at a certain point cannot enlarge any more by the personality which definitely stopped at a certain point cannot enlarge any more by the addition or assimilation of new elements."

In other words, traumatic stress is brought about by vehement emotions that results in a pathological phenomenon: a weakening of one's mental tension and force (psychological energies) over time that develops into fixed ideas and dissociation.²² Janet also believed that a long time may pass between the occurrence of a traumatic event and its full-blown psychopathological expression: "Rarely do the principal disturbances of the emotion appear exactly at the moment of the provoking event."²³ Van der Kolk therefore proposed the theory that long after the actual incident has occurred, the brain may continue sending signals to the body to flee a threat that no longer exists.²⁴ In fact, today's scientific journals also refer to Janet's writings on the build-up of traumatic stress as being instrumental in the diathesis-stress framework that is proposed to play a central role in etiological theories for functional neurological disorders (FND).²⁵

²² See Figure 2 on page 55.

²³ Janet and Nicolas, *L'automatisme psychologique*, 1556.

²⁴ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 54. Van der Kolk writes, "Fear is the core emotion and primary dysrhythmia in developmental trauma. As long as the trauma is not resolved, the stress hormones that the body secretes to protect itself keep circulating, and the defensive movements and emotional responses keep getting delayed." According to this claim, stress hormones are abnormally elevated to control physical movements, cause emotions to repeat, imbue trauma memories with qualities not found in normal memories. But biblically, what Janet and van der Kolk are describing (not a discovery) is a sinful response to life circumstances. Janet especially noted that it is not the intensity or severity of the traumatic event, it is the emotional shock. What is an emotional shock? It is a whole-person response that flows out of the active interpretation of the heart (Proverbs 4:23).

²⁵ See Figure 3 on page 56. Functional neurological disorder (FND) is a neuropsychiatric condition whereby individuals present with sensorimotor symptoms that are incompatible with other neurological disorders, and it has been historically conceptualized as the archetypal stress-related condition. While the etiology of FND remains controversial, modern-day conceptual models continue to posit that early-life maltreatment (ELM) is one of the risk factors for developing FND on the basis that ELM is an important predisposing vulnerability within a diathesis-stress model. These scientific journals referenced Janet as one of the "notable clinicians who studied FND, or hysteria as it was then known." Ibai Diez et al., "Early-Life Trauma Endophenotypes and Brain Circuit–Gene Expression Relationships in Functional Neurological (Conversion) Disorder," *Molecular Psychiatry* 26, 8 (August 2021): 3817–28, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-020-0665-0>; Roxanne C Keynejad et al., "Stress and Functional Neurological Disorders: Mechanistic Insights," *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 90, 7 (July 2019): 813–21, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2018-318297>; Susannah Pick et al., "Emotional Processing in Functional Neurological Disorder: A Review, Biopsychosocial Model and Research Agenda," *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 90, 6 (June 2019): 704–11, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2018-319201>.

Second, dissociation, which is also known as “diminution of personal synthesis,” describes a condition whereby the patients are unable to integrate the various phenomena of mental life into a coherent whole.²⁶ This is because some terrifying events are so intense that people are unable to incorporate them into their current cognitive frameworks. As a result, these frights caused hysterics to split traumatic memories into “pathogenic secrets” or “mental parasites,” which then trapped the person in an endless state of existential horror.²⁷ Sometimes, even the idea of an event that did not happen could provoke physiological traumatic symptoms, and Janet calls them “subconscious fixed ideas.”²⁸ The remarkable capacity of fixed ideas to endure over long periods and to produce behaviors (automatisms) over which the conscious personality has no control, is explained by their isolation: “They grow, they install themselves in the field of thought like a parasite, and the subject cannot check their development by any effort on his part.”²⁹

²⁶ Janet put it this way: “All the psychological phenomena that are produced in the brain are not brought together in one and the same personal perception; a portion remains independent under the form of sensations or elementary images, or else is grouped more or less completely and tends to form a new system.” Janet and Nicolas, *L’automatisme psychologique*, 492.

²⁷ Janet “predicted” that unless the patients became aware of the split-off elements and integrate them into a story that happened in the past, they would experience a slow decline in their personal and professional functioning. For example, his female patients who were afflicted with a paraplegia (paralysis of the legs) were said to development accidental symptoms from the nature of the traumatic event. Janet calls these muscles “the guardians of virginity” because they provide a defense against vaginal penetration and he suggests that these contractures have been brought about by the “memory of rape or by sexual relationships with a husband who had become odious.” See *Ibid.*, 358, 592; Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria: Fifteen Lectures Given in the Medical School of Harvard University*.

²⁸ Subconscious fixed ideas refer to a system of unconscious traumatic memory recorded like a script, and when an individual is triggered by circumstances in the environment that resemble the trauma, or by some internal trigger, the “script” is activated and played out as fragments. They appear as if direct sensory imprints of aspects of the trauma on the mind-body-brain system. Janet writes, “an idea that disappears from consciousness does not, therefore, cease to exist...” In addition, Janet extended the notion of trauma beyond a single event to include cumulative trauma when “symptoms and fixed ideas that the subject presents in these cases may be determined by a succession of slight forgotten shocks, even though there are no distinct or dangerous memories.” See Pierre Janet et al., *Subconscious Acts, Anesthesias and Psychological Disaggregation in Psychological Automatism: Partial Automatism* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 275; Onno van der Hart and Barbara Friedman, “A Reader’s Guide to Pierre Janet on Dissociation: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage,” *Dissociation*, 1989; Onno van der Hart, E. R. S. Nijenhuis, and Kathy Steele, *The Haunted Self: Structural Dissociation and the Treatment of Chronic Traumatization*, 1st ed, *The Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

²⁹ Janet and Nicolas, *L’automatisme psychologique*, 267; Brown and Van Der Hart, “Memories of Sexual Abuse.” Janet was not the first person to argue that autonomous groups of ideas might

Subsequently, trauma victims can have two distinct states of consciousness: total automatisms and partial automatisms—total automatisms refer to the entire body being placed outside the control of the conscious personality (i.e., alternating personality), and partial automatisms affect only parts of the body, such as paralyses, anesthesias, and automatic speaking.³⁰ In other words, memories of past traumatic events remained present in a subconscious, dissociated condition, and manifest themselves through hysterical symptoms, including paralysis of limbs and vomiting. They could also have long-term effects on physiological, neurological, and psychic systems, especially among people with weak central nervous systems, or pre-existing hereditary conditions.³¹ This is why treatment of psychological trauma is aimed to recover and integrate the memories of the trauma into the totality of the person's identity since Janet considered the inability to integrate traumatic memories to be the core issue in hysteria.³² Like many of his contemporaries, Janet used

be fixed in a person's mind by traumatic experiences, as Charcot had made a similar claim about memories of fictitious accidents that are implanted in the mind by suggestion. For instance, Janet described a man who was going through one train car to another just as the train was entering a tunnel and it occurred to him that his left side, which projected, was going to be knocked slantwise, so he quickly moved, and his left side was not even grazed. In spite of this, he had a paralysis on one side of the body. Another example is a woman whose blindness in the left eye was suggested by Janet that she could have been forced during her childhood to sleep in the same bed as a child who had impetigo on the left side of her face.

³⁰ “Pierre Janet and the Breakdown of Adaptation in Psychological Trauma”; Janet and Nicolas, *L'automatisme psychologique*; Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, 3. print., 1. paperback print, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 34.

³¹ While it is unclear if Janet thought that a pre-existent inherent deficit of higher mental function was necessary in order to let the vehement emotions associated with traumatic experiences and memories narrow the field of consciousness, but Janet's work and reviews of his theory suggest his belief in a multiplicity of factors predisposing to posttraumatic dissociation, such as innate temperamental factors, which are as we know today, genetically determined and early adverse experiences. In other words, Janet regarded the dissociative outcomes of traumatizing events and memories as a passive “mental exhaustion,” a pathological narrowing of the field of consciousness that took place in individuals predisposed to it by temperament and by early adverse experiences. For more, see Meares, *A Dissociation Model of Borderline Personality Disorder*; Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*; Hart and Friedman, “A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet on Dissociation: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage.”

³² Janet distinguishes two kinds of memory—traumatic memory, which unconsciously repeats the past, and narrative memory, which narrates the past as past, and the goal of therapy is to convert traumatic memory into narrative memory by getting the patient to recount his or her history. Janet's goal of treatment can be divided into three stages: 1) stabilization, 2) identification and exploration of traumatic memories, and 3) relapse prevention, personality reintegration, and rehabilitation. Janet and Nicolas, *L'automatisme psychologique*, 410–12.

hypnosis to retrieve the hidden memories of his hysterical patients because remembering traumas, not forgetting them, was the first step of recovery.³³

Similarly, van der Kolk claims to be “uncovering secrets of traumatic memory [that is] now well-documented in contemporary research,”³⁴ but the neo-Gnostic lens that he employs is not based upon findings in behavioral neuroscience. Rather, it is founded upon Pierre Janet’s premise that traumatic stress (including events that did not occur) plays a crucial part in the development of psychopathology.³⁵ Van der Kolk himself summarizes Janet’s impact on the BKS theory in the following manner:³⁶

[Janet] hypothesized a biologically based trauma response resulting in a fragmentation of mental cohesion, causing biological, cognitive, and emotional residues of past experience to continue to govern current behaviour... [His] understanding that vehement emotions impair the capacity to think, feel, and act in a purposeful, unified way, combined with his realization that this must be reflected in biology, is so basic that it had to be rediscovered. His crucial notion, first formulated in 1889, that traumatic experiences are stored in memory in ways different from ordinary events, is as challenging today as it was to William James almost 100 years ago. One century later, much remains to

³³ In contrast to Charcot, however, Janet recognized that the successful recovery of traumatic memories through hypnosis was highly dependent on the degree of patient’s vulnerability to therapeutic suggestions. Janet also noted that hysterical symptoms could arise as a result of patients’ desires to please their therapists. Van der Kolk notes that Janet’s theory about “the pleasure of completed action” guides his practice of sensorimotor psychotherapy. He writes, “I regularly observe that when I practice sensorimotor psychotherapy and somatic experiencing (which is the exploration of physical sensations of the imprints of past trauma), patients can physically experience what it would have felt like to fight back or run away, I see that they will relax, smile, and express a sense of completion.” Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 220.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁵ Here Janet clearly shows the connection between traumatic memory and the course of illness: “As the uncovering of such traumatic memories is of significance for the understanding and treatment of certain neuroses, one must do everything possible to uncover them if they are present. However, as it’s obvious that such memories are often missing in other cases of neurosis, which must therefore be assessed and treated differently, one must be equally careful not to discover such traumatic memories where they do not actually exist.” Bühler and Heim, “General Introduction to the Psychotherapy of Pierre Janet.”

³⁶ “Pierre Janet and the Breakdown of Adaptation in Psychological Trauma.”

be learned about how memories are stored and keep on affecting emotions and behaviour (i.e.: affect regulation problems), as well as how they and their permutations can be successfully retrieved and mastered in order to diminish their hold over current experience.

Although the diagnostic labels have changed from hysteria to complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD), the description and explanation of trauma between Pierre Janet in the 19th century and van der Kolk in the 21st century are strikingly similar: The body remembers trauma by converting dissociated, non-physical trauma into numerous physical problems.³⁷ And the way to be healed is the brain and body (outer man) changing the consciousness of the mind (inner man) through neurofeedback.³⁸ Van der Kolk's hypothesis is, at its core, a belief system. This means that he is not merely following the science behind trauma research. Instead, he is hand-picking the observational data for this age-old theory on trauma.³⁹ This is why his neurobiological diagnosis of trauma is quickly met with self-help verbiage, empowerment, and human connection, not medical treatment.⁴⁰

³⁷ According to van der Kolk, “The great advances [in the late nineteenth century] came in the study of hysteria, a mental disorder characterized by emotional outbursts, susceptibility to suggestion, and contractions and paralyses of the muscles that could not be explained by simple anatomy. Hysteria became a window into the mysteries of mind and body. The names of some of the greatest pioneers in neurology and psychiatry, such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Sigmund Freud, are associated with the discovery that trauma is at the root of hysteria. These early researchers referred to traumatic memories as “pathogenic secrets” or “mental parasites” because as much as the sufferers wanted to forget whatever had happened, their memories kept forcing them back into consciousness, they automatically keep repeating certain actions, emotions, and sensations related to the trauma, and they are trapped in an ever-renewing present of existential horror.” Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 179.

³⁸ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*; Hart, Brown, and Kolk, “Pierre Janet’s Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress”; Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*.

³⁹ Van der Kolk maintains that the studies conducted by him and his colleagues confirmed the dual memory system that Janet hypothesized at the Salpêtrière more than a hundred years earlier: “Traumatic memories are fundamentally different from the stories we tell about the past. They are dissociated: The different sensations that entered the brain at the time of the trauma are not properly assembled into a story, a piece of autobiography” Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 196.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 314, 387. Neurofeedback is an example of one of the many pseudoscience treatments that van der Kolk advocates for; it suggests that the brain plasticity that resides in the electrical oscillations of the brain can be “changed” through brain wave training. His interest in neurofeedback began with psychotherapist Sebern Fisher who integrates neurofeedback and psychotherapy to “help” her patients with developmental trauma. After examining a 10-year-old patient’s drawings, which had transformed from stick figures to more skillfully drawn images of his family portrait, van der Kolk remarked, “I was intrigued because I never encountered

UNFOUNDED FINDINGS IN THE BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE-INFORMED APPROACH TO TRAUMA

As it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess every scientific study on trauma to date, the researcher will provide three compelling reasons for why the BKS theory is based upon manipulated, not applied neuroscience.⁴¹ There is not a single case report to date of at least one individual who had brain imaging and/or cortisol levels measured before trauma exposure, then suffered trauma exposure, and then was followed over time with serial measurements of brain imaging and/or cortisol to document the most basic elements of the toxic stress theory in real time.⁴² This is because even though it is actually a straightforward scientific experiment to determine whether psychological trauma can permanently alter human brains: simply examine human brains before psychological trauma occurs, wait for psychological trauma to happen, and then re-examine the same brains to determine whether any changes have taken place. However, it would be unethical for researchers to enlist participants in a study and then purposefully subject them to traumatic experiences.⁴³ Nonetheless, the BKS theory gains its credibility, prestige, and

a treatment that could shift [a human being] so dramatically.” While one does not need “neurofeedback” when art lessons will also serve the same purpose of improving one’s drawing skills, it is important to note that Sebern Fisher herself says that she is not a neuroscientist or researcher and that she is a Buddhist meditator “who understands what it is to be one with everything, because [she is].” After experiencing personal enlightenment and developing a new sense of self, she bought a neurofeedback equipment and started using it in her psychotherapy practice. For more of this kind of Eastern mysticism, see Sebern F. Fisher, *Neurofeedback in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma: Calming the Fear-Driven Brain*, First edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014); Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1994); Christine A. Courtois, ed., *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders: Scientific Foundations and Therapeutic Models*, Paperback ed (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2014).

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion on why the current scientific studies do not support the BKS theory, see the 42 claims provided by Michael S. Scheeringa, *Analysis of the Body Keeps the Score: The Science That Trauma Activists Don’t Want You to Know* (Monee, IL: Central Recovery Press, 2023).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴³ The research on trauma can be categorized into two waves: In the first wave of research (1985-2005), purely cross-sectional studies (cross-sectional studies make comparisons at a single point in time, whereas longitudinal studies make comparisons over time) were done with a few observations: Individuals with PTSD appeared to have faster resting heart rates, smaller hippocampus, smaller amygdala, overactive amygdala, underactive cingulate cortex, underactive prefrontal cortex and some kind of dysregulation of cortisol. At the time van der Kolk’s book was published in 2014, there were 23 studies of the amygdala and 21 of them were cross-sectional studies, and even the cross-sectional ones did not support his claim. See G A

the appearance of scientific validity due to its theoretical association with the paradigm of neuroendocrinology, complex explanations, and a network of observational data.⁴⁴

The three claims against the BKS theory are: 1) the pre-trauma prospective studies in humans demonstrate that the neurotoxic stress theory (NST) is

Van Wingen et al., "The Neural Consequences of Combat Stress: Long-Term Follow-Up," *Molecular Psychiatry* 17, 2 (February 2012): 116–18, <https://doi.org/10.1038/mp.2011.110>; Roe Admon et al., "Human Vulnerability to Stress Depends on Amygdala's Predisposition and Hippocampal Plasticity," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, 33 (August 18, 2009): 14120–25, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0903183106>. Meanwhile, the second wave of research (2005 to the present) include pre-trauma prospective studies of neurobiology. In the first of such studies, for instance, Rachel Guthrie and Richard Bryant measured the skin conductance in 87 firefighter recruits before their first year of active duty during a startle-response paradigm. They found that pre-trauma physiological activity was predictive of post-trauma acoustic startle responses, which suggests that diathesis stress theory (DST)—neurobiological differences existed prior to exposure—may be the vulnerable factor for the development of PTSD symptoms. A few qualitative reviews further suggest that the scientific evidence for the BKS theory to be at best, insufficient, if not demonstrably false. See Rachel M. Guthrie and Richard A. Bryant, "Auditory Startle Response in Firefighters Before and After Trauma Exposure," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 162, 2 (February 2005): 283–90, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.162.2.283>; Michael S. Scheeringa, "Reexamination of Diathesis Stress and Neurotoxic Stress Theories: A Qualitative Review of Pre-trauma Neurobiology in Relation to Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms," *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research* 30, 2 (June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1864>; Julia A. DiGangi et al., "Pretrauma Risk Factors for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Clinical Psychology Review* 33, 6 (August 2013): 728–44, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2013.05.002>.

⁴⁴ For the purpose of evaluating the scientific basis of the BKS theory, studies on PTSD (not C-PTSD) will be evaluated. This is because PTSD has more longitudinal studies with meta-analyses whereas C-PTSD is rejected by the DSM for lack of evidence. Also, Judith Herman's 1992 paper on Complex PTSD did not provide a single description of a real patient with C-PTSD and absolutely no standardized data. Yet, this paper has been cited 4000 times (Google Scholar, accessed July 10, 2023), and after it was rejected as a new diagnosis by the APA, van der Kolk came up with a new strategy in 2005. He gave C-PTSD a new name, developmental trauma disorder, and claimed that it applied to children and adolescents, but there was little, if any, mention of the old C-PTSD. Like C-PTSD, developmental trauma appeared out of thin air, based on no solid evidence, and was rejected by the APA to be included as an official disorder in the DSM-V due to the lack of evidence. A third separate diagnostic category, acute stress disorder (ASD) was also rejected by the APA for its unreliable evidence. Only about 20 percent of people exposed to a potentially traumatic event meet the criteria for ASD and most of those people do not develop PTSD. For more, see Judith Lewis Herman, "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome in Survivors of Prolonged and Repeated Trauma," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 5, 3 (July 1992): 377–91, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490050305>; Bessel A. Van Der Kolk, "Developmental Trauma Disorder: Toward a Rational Diagnosis for Children with Complex Trauma Histories," *Psychiatric Annals* 35, 5 (May 2005): 401–8, <https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20050501-06>; Richard A. Bryant, "The Current Evidence for Acute Stress Disorder," *Current Psychiatry Reports* 20, 12 (December 2018): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-018-0976-x>.

false, 2) biological plausibility and strong association are not the same as direct, single factor causation, and 3) actual medical conditions such as Cushing's disease (CD) demonstrate the reversibility of the hippocampal volume and cortisol level.

First, the two main theories that could potentially explain the origin of neurobiological factors associated with PTSD are the diathesis stress theory (DST) and the neurotoxic stress theory (NST).⁴⁵ While NTS contends that trauma results in neurobiological damage and subsequently the formation of PTSD symptoms, DST contends that there are predispositional vulnerabilities, such as genetic and biological factors, that render an individual at a higher risk of developing PTSD symptoms.⁴⁶ If DST is true, it is unlikely that NST can also be true, and vice versa.⁴⁷ In a qualitative review of pre-trauma prospective research studies, Michael Scheeringa reviewed all of the research studies available in 2020 (a total of 22,175 papers).⁴⁸ Out of 22,175 papers, 25 second-wave studies were located that measured neurobiology prior to traumatic experiences, 19 supported the DST (6 were negative), and of the 10 studies out of 22,175 papers that were capable of testing the NST, only 3 were positive and 7 were negative. This means that van der Kolk can continue to cite animal studies and cross-sectional studies (cross-sectional studies have no power to determine cause-and-effect because subjects are examined at only one point in time, instead of before and after trauma),⁴⁹ but pre-trauma studies in humans

⁴⁵ Marvin Zuckerman, *Vulnerability to Psychopathology: A Biosocial Model*, 1st ed (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Bonanno, *The End of Trauma*.

⁴⁶ Scheeringa, *Analysis of the Body Keeps the Score*, 60.

⁴⁷ Scheeringa, *The Trouble with Trauma*, 35.

⁴⁸ Scheeringa, "Reexamination of Diathesis Stress and Neurotoxic Stress Theories." Out of the 22,175 papers, only six studies involved brain imaging, seven studies measured cortisol or other indices of the hormonal-stress-response systems, eight studies measured autonomic stress responses such as heart rate and skin conductance, and four studies measured other types of molecular variables.

⁴⁹ Van der Kolk and his colleagues hypothesized that just as an increased severity of shock exacerbated a rat's conditioned fear, so should an increased severity of trauma exacerbate a victim's PTSD symptoms. This is because they believed that a laboratory rat's reaction to an inescapable electric shock parallels at least some aspects of the human response to overwhelming trauma. Unlike laboratory stressors that are measurable in purely physical terms entirely independent of the animal's behavior, researchers have to rely on the retrospective self-reports of the survivors themselves as the sole basis for measuring stressor magnitude in the trauma field. This practice presupposes that severely distressed individuals can furnish reliable, objective accounts untarnished by clinical state, and it is this presupposition that led to many

show that his hypothesis of trauma changing physical brain structures and irreversibly destroying hardwired neurocircuitry is *an unproven assertion*.⁵⁰ In other words, the studies in the first wave of neurobiological PTSD research were all cross-sectional, but a second wave of research followed which used prospective repeated-measures designs that measured neurobiology prior to trauma exposure experiences overwhelmingly confirm DST, not NST.

Second, biological plausibility and strong association are not the same as direct, single factor causation. This indicates that observations of the physiology-related changes and symptoms in a person cannot be solely attributed to trauma. Van der Kolk and other trauma theorists employ the cortisol hypothesis as a central tenet of the BKS theory.⁵¹ But other syndromes

problems with the repressed memory movement. The controversy concerning repressed and recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse has been deeply divisive in psychology and psychiatry. Some scholars argue that there is no convincing evidence that people can banish and then recover memories of horrific experiences (e.g., Pope et al. 1998), whereas others proclaim, “overwhelming scientific support for the existence of repressed or dissociated memory” (Brown et al. 1998, pp. 538–39). What is most bizarre about this debate is that proponents on both sides appeal to the same scientific studies to support their diametrically opposed positions. How is this possible? Anyone who actually reads the contested studies, however, will immediately realize that the most influential advocates of the traumatic amnesia position misunderstand much of the science they cite. For more, see Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Elizabeth F. Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse*, 1st St. Martin’s Griffin ed (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996); Steven J. Lynn and Judith W. Rhue, eds., *Dissociation: Clinical and Theoretical Perspectives* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994); Marilyn Laura Bowman, “Individual Differences in Posttraumatic Distress: Problems with the DSM-IV Model,” *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 44, 1 (February 1999): 21–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674379904400103>.

⁵⁰ In fact, another qualitative review of neurobiology in this field by Julia DiGangi and associates also reached the same conclusion: “Many of these categories, long considered aspects of post-trauma psychopathology were actually present before the index trauma.” Cf. DiGangi et al., “Pretrauma Risk Factors for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.”

⁵¹ An extraordinary claim necessitates extraordinary evidence. But the evidence has been weak, inconsistent, unreplicable, and meta-analysis reviews concluded that, there was no difference in cortisol levels between trauma-exposed and non-exposed individuals. See John W. Mason et al., “Urinary Free-Cortisol Levels in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Patients;” *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 174, 3 (March 1986): 145–49, <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005053-198603000-00003>; Marie-Louise Meewisse et al., “Cortisol and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Adults: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 191, 5 (November 2007): 387–92, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bj.p.106.024877>; Ellen R. Klaassens et al., “Adulthood Trauma and HPA-Axis Functioning in Healthy Subjects and PTSD Patients: A Meta-Analysis,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 37, 3 (March 2012): 317–31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2011.07.003>; Xiongfeng Pan et al., “Salivary Cortisol in Post-Traumatic

such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and children with conduct disorders also report low cortisol levels.⁵² Moreover, he does not explain how the cortisol hypothesis is unique to PTSD patients and how the biological processes that account for “ordinary” stress responses also account for the etiology and symptoms of PTSD.⁵³ Therefore, a physiological finding that impacts a variety of patient groups has no diagnostic value and only relates to a small subset of the population calls into question a specific etiology in the BKS framework.⁵⁴

Third, actual medical conditions such as Cushing’s disease (CD) demonstrate the reversibility of the hippocampal volume in the brain and

Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *BMC Psychiatry* 18, 1 (December 2018): 324, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1910-9>.

⁵² See Eva Fries et al., “A New View on Hypocortisolism,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 30, 10 (November 2005): 1010–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2005.04.006>; Daniel J.H. Powell et al., “Unstimulated Cortisol Secretory Activity in Everyday Life and Its Relationship with Fatigue and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: A Systematic Review and Subset Meta-Analysis,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 38, 11 (November 2013): 2405–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2013.07.004>; Jaap Oosterlaan et al., “Low Basal Salivary Cortisol Is Associated with Teacher-Reported Symptoms of Conduct Disorder,” *Psychiatry Research* 134, 1 (March 2005): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2004.12.005>; Scheeringa, *Analysis of the Body Keeps the Score: The Science That Trauma Activists Don’t Want You to Know*, 60.

⁵³ Van der Kolk provides plenty of rhetorical assertions without clear explanation (or demonstration by scientific evidence) of how enduring traumatic stress supposedly changes the brain and body. Also, PTSD has a unique burden of proof not shared by other diagnoses because its diagnosis rests on a core assumption—a distinct class of events (Criterion A: “the stressor criterion”) is causally linked to a distinct set of reactions (Criteria B through D: the symptom criteria”), which means that an individual could not receive a PTSD diagnosis without the occurrence of a traumatic event. For this reason, PTSD differs from virtually all other diagnoses in the DSM (i.e.: schizophrenia, major depression, panic disorder) in that it assumes a specific etiology. Hence, researchers must prove a clear link between a precipitating stressor and resulting signs and symptoms. See John P. Wilson, “The Historical Evolution of PTSD Diagnostic Criteria: From Freud to DSM-IV,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 7, 4 (October 1994): 681–98, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490070413>; Rosen and Lilienfeld, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.”

⁵⁴ The heart rate variability (HRV) is another study that van der Kolk and colleagues conducted to demonstrate that the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are out of sync in PTSD patients. But the study had no control group and they only divided PTSD subjects into three subsamples of low, middle, and high respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA). Contrast this cross-sectional study with a different pre-trauma prospective study that demonstrates relatively low RSA appears to be a pre-existing vulnerability factor and it is not unique to PTSD nor caused by trauma, see Amy J. Mikolajewski and Michael S. Scheeringa, “Examining the Prospective Relationship between Pre-Disaster Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia and Post-Disaster Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms in Children,” *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 46, 7 (October 2018): 1535–45, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-017-0396-0>.

cortisol level.⁵⁵ Cushing's disease is a hormonal disorder that results in brain impairment when patients have extremely high levels of cortisol, including explicit memory deficits and hippocampal atrophy.⁵⁶ But surgical correction of the tumour normalizes cortisol levels and eliminates memory deficits and enables the hippocampus to rebound to its normal size.⁵⁷ Similarly, neuropsychological deficits due to hypopituitarism after traumatic brain injury have also been reversed in patients after medical treatment.⁵⁸

Furthermore, besides substantiating his belief that trauma interferes with declarative memory (i.e.: conscious recall of experience) with Janet's famous case of Irene,⁵⁹ van der Kolk provides two hypotheses: 1) the massive release

⁵⁵ Symptoms of CD include depression, anxiety, trouble concentrating or remembering, negative emotions (or affect dysregulation), chronic migraines, weight gain, slow wound healing, bone loss, stunted growth in children and so on. Edward R. Laws, ed., *Cushing's Disease: An Often Misdiagnosed and Not so Rare Disorder* (Amsterdam; Boston: Elsevier/Academic Press, 2017).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cushing's disease involves brain impairment caused by excessive cortisol. See the reversibility of whole-brain changes in remitted CD after transsphenoidal surgery (TSS) in the largest longitudinal study cohort: Bo Hou et al., "Reversibility of Impaired Brain Structures after Transsphenoidal Surgery in Cushing's Disease: A Longitudinal Study Based on an Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Tool," *Journal of Neurosurgery*, January 2020, 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.3171/2019.10.JNS191400>; Isabelle Bourdeau et al., "Loss of Brain Volume in Endogenous Cushing's Syndrome and Its Reversibility after Correction of Hypercortisolism," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 87, 5 (May 2002): 1949–54, <https://doi.org/10.1210/jcem.87.5.8493>; Monica N Starkman et al., "Decrease in Cortisol Reverses Human Hippocampal Atrophy Following Treatment of Cushing's Disease," *Biological Psychiatry* 46, 12 (December 1999): 1595–1602, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0006-3223\(99\)00203-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0006-3223(99)00203-6).

⁵⁸ Joshua R. Dusick et al., "Chapter 1: Pathophysiology of Hypopituitarism in the Setting of Brain Injury," *Pituitary* 15, 1 (March 2012): 2–9, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11102-008-0130-6>; Sanjiv Gray et al., "Hypopituitarism After Traumatic Brain Injury," *Cureus*, March 1, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.4163>; Marianne Klose and Ulla Feldt-Rasmussen, "Hypopituitarism in Traumatic Brain Injury—A Critical Note," *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 4, 7 (July 14, 2015): 1480–97, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm4071480>; M Keller, "Reversible Neuropsychological Deficits after Mild Traumatic Brain Injury," *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 68, 6 (June 1, 2000): 761–64, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jnnp.68.6.761>. For a more in-depth discussion on why there is no clear physical, irreversible damage on the brain and body in PTSD patients, see Richard J. McNally, "The Ontology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Natural Kind, Social Construction, or Causal System?," *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 19, 3 (September 2012): 220–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cpsp.12001>; Denny Borsboom and Angélique O.J. Cramer, "Network Analysis: An Integrative Approach to the Structure of Psychopathology," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 9, 1 (March 28, 2013): 91–121, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-050212-185608>; Allan V. Horwitz, *DSM: A History of Psychiatry's Bible* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021).

⁵⁹ This is different from implicit or nondeclarative memory (i.e.: memory system that controls

of stress hormones impairs memory, and 2) the subcortical activation of the amygdala is responsible for traumatic dissociative amnesia.⁶⁰ These hypotheses are not proven with scientific evidence for two reasons. First, a study on only eight Vietnam veterans with PTSD and a control group with exposure to combat-related stimulus showed *no significant hormonal differences* between the two groups.⁶¹ But the researchers responded with two explanations to preserve

conditioned emotional responses, skills and habits, and sensorimotor sensations). This means that the extreme emotion experienced during trauma renders it difficult for people to recall the memory, and dissociative amnesia, then, occurs. See Bessel A. Kolk and Rita Fisler, "Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories: Overview and Exploratory Study," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 8, 4 (October 1995): 505–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02102887>; Bessel A. Van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisath, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).

⁶⁰ Van der Kolk cited the behavioral neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux's research on Pavlovian fear conditioning that suggests two pathways for activating the amygdala: One pathway rapidly transmits sensory input about fear stimuli to the amygdala via a subcortical route whereas the second pathway passes through the cortex, taking about twice as long to reach the amygdala. Subcortical activation of the amygdala makes it possible for a fight or flight reaction to begin even before the information about the fear-evoking stimulus has reached conscious awareness via the cortical route. LeDoux's animal conditioning model illustrates how sexual abuse survivors might retain implicit, emotional memories of trauma while being incapable of consciously recollecting what happened. Psychotherapists have praised this theory because it authorizes therapists to interpret body memories, flashbacks, fragments, sudden intense feelings, avoidant behaviors, images, sensory processes, and dreams as implicit expressions of dissociated traumatic memories, which in turn, ought to be recovered during therapy and integrated into one's conscious memory. See Joseph E. LeDoux, "Emotion Circuits in the Brain," *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 23, 1 (March 2000): 155–84, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.neuro.23.1.155>; Joseph LeDoux, "Rethinking the Emotional Brain," *Neuron* 73, 4 (February 2012): 653–76, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2012.02.004>; Ruth A. Lanius et al., "Neural Correlates of Traumatic Memories in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Functional MRI Investigation," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 158, 11 (November 2001): 1920–22, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.158.11.1920>; R. A. Lanius, R. L. Bluhm, and P. A. Frewen, "How Understanding the Neurobiology of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Can Inform Clinical Practice: A Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Approach: Neurobiology of PTSD and Clinical Practice," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 124, 5 (November 2011): 331–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.2011.01755.x>.

⁶¹ Roger K. Pitman, "Naloxone-Reversible Analgesic Response to Combat-Related Stimuli in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Pilot Study," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 47, 6 (June 1, 1990): 541, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1990.01810180041007>. The veterans were exposed to a 15-minute neutral videotape, followed by a 15-minute segment of a movie about Vietnam, and then another 15-minute neutral video. The hypothesis behind the experiment was that the exposure of the PTSD patients to a combat-related stimulus would provoke a release of endorphins with consequent analgesia, an analgesia that might be reversed by naxalone, a drug known to block interaction between neural receptors and the opiate class of endorphins, but that would not be affected by the saline placebo. Even though the neural-hormonal theory predicts that exposure to combat videotape would produce a marked hormonal response in combat veterans with PTSD, the results did not substantiate the theory.

the hypothesis: 1) The predicted hormonal response was not detected because of certain technical problems, and 2) The findings are correct, but they could be explained by appealing to more untested hypotheses. This is an example of rescuing a null hypothesis with an auxiliary explanation.⁶²

Second, Van der Kolk's recent attempt to prove the BKS theory includes experiments with brain-imaging (positron emission tomography PET), which is claimed to demonstrate an increased activation of the visual area and decreased activation of Broca's area during the provocation of traumatic memories or flashbacks in PTSD subjects.⁶³ However, the experiments were carried out on a total of eight PTSD patients (six men and two women) *without any controlled groups.*⁶⁴ Simply put, there are no longitudinal studies to demonstrate the causal evidence of trauma permanently damaging human

⁶² According to the French philosopher of science Pierre Duhem, when researchers predict that a particular outcome will occur under specified circumstances, but the outcome does not occur, they will usually rescue their original hypothesis with an auxiliary hypothesis that finds fault with their methods: "If the stars are not where theory predicts, blame the telescope, not the heavens." Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*, 2. print., and 1. paperback print., with corr, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998).

⁶³ Broca's area is the part of the central nervous system most centrally connected to speech and according to van der Kolk's hypothesis, with narrative memory.

⁶⁴ Bessel van der Kolk, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Nature of Trauma," *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 2, 1 (March 31, 2000): 7-22, <https://doi.org/10.31887/DCNS.2000.2.1/bvdolk>. In their PET scanning experiments, the investigators used radioactively labelled oxygen inhaled into the blood stream of the patient to scan changes in the regional flow of blood in the brain; the changes indirectly reflected alterations in cerebral neuronal activity. The method required the employment of a thermoplastic mask to minimize the patient's head movements during the delicate brain-scanning process as well as the use of cannula inserted into the nose for the gas inflow and an overlying face mask, which made it difficult, if not impossible for the patient to speak during the experiment. No wonder Van der Kolk and his associates found that Broca's area was turned off. More erroneously, this claim that "effects of trauma are not necessarily different from the effects of physical lesions in an ischemic stroke" is not scientifically true. Even if there was a temporary reduced level of activity in the Broca's area due to flashbacks or strong memories, it is not the same as neuron death from a stroke. For more details, see Scott L. Rauch, "A Symptom Provocation Study of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Using Positron Emission Tomography and Script-Driven Imagery," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 53, 5 (May 1, 1996): 380, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1996.01830050014003>. For a recent assessment and concerns about the use of neuroimaging in PTSD (and a discussion of Rauch, van der Kolk et. al's study), see Rachel Yehuda and New York Academy of Sciences, eds., *Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Decade of Progress, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, v. 1071 (Boston, MA: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the New York Academy of Sciences, 2006); Scheeringa, *Analysis of the Body Keeps the Score: The Science That Trauma Activists Don't Want You to Know*.

brains and causing scores of physical diseases for many generations because it changes the expression of genes through a process known as epigenetics.⁶⁵ This is why van der Kolk's oversimplification of hard science about the brain and body is unsettling. For example, he claims that "when our emotional and rational brains are in conflict, a tug of war is played out in the theatre of visceral experiences—your gut, your heart, and your lungs—and will lead to many physical manifestations of trauma."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ This particular branch of study is highly debated with only cross-sectional studies (not longitudinal studies), few replicated findings, and research on animals (not humans), particularly rats born to "stressed mothers show that environmental factors such as endocrine disruptors promote transgenerational phenotypes." The archetypal example of the folk wisdom of epigenetic modification is the agouti mouse experiments by Jirtle and Waterland. The study of epigenetics was popularized by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in the early 1800s, and then a form of neo-Lamarckism was propagated by experimental biologists and geneticists, and the field is now increasingly attracting social and population scientists because this theory provides a powerful explanatory mechanism for the influence of social and economic circumstances on differential health attainment. Notably, van der Kolk did not describe or cite any studies with humans who experienced trauma that examined how the mechanism of DNA methylation might work and there is no evidence in humans that demonstrate the methylation patterns triggered by the diathesis-stress framework. For studies on epigenetics, see A. Hoffmann and D. Spengler, "DNA Memories of Early Social Life," *Neuroscience* 264 (April 2014): 64–75, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroscience.2012.04.003>; Robert A. Waterland and Randy L. Jirtle, "Transposable Elements: Targets for Early Nutritional Effects on Epigenetic Gene Regulation," *Molecular and Cellular Biology* 23, 15 (August 1, 2003): 5293–5300, <https://doi.org/10.1128/MCB.23.15.5293-5300.2003>; Michael K. Skinner, Mohan Manikkam, and Carlos Guerrero-Bosagna, "Epigenetic Transgenerational Actions of Endocrine Disruptors," *Reproductive Toxicology* 31, 3 (April 2011): 337–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.reprotox.2010.10.012>. In contrast, for studies that identify the fallacious modes of reasoning in the field of epigenetics, see Maurizio Meloni and Giuseppe Testa, "Scrutinizing the Epigenetics Revolution," *BioSocieties* 9, 4 (November 2014): 431–56, <https://doi.org/10.1057/biosoc.2014.22>; Miranda R. Waggoner and Tobias Uller, "Epigenetic Determinism in Science and Society," *New Genetics and Society* 34, 2 (April 3, 2015): 177–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14636778.2015.1033052>; Jonathan Y Huang and Nicholas B King, "Epigenetics Changes Nothing: What a New Scientific Field Does and Does Not Mean for Ethics and Social Justice," *Public Health Ethics* 11, 1 (April 1, 2018): 69–81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/phe/phx013>.

⁶⁶ Bessel van der Kolk, "The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma," YouTube, May 22, 2015, 65, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53RX2ESIqsM>. The BKS theory is far too simplistic because the brain is far more complicated than that—every brain region is highly interconnected with many other brain regions with thousands of neuronal connections, and a human brain has about 100 billion neurons; each neuron has direct connections to other neurons, and the total number of synapses is somewhere between 100 to 500 trillion. According to Dr. Scheeringa, "To claim that a brain center, such as the amygdala, can be rewired by one (or even dozens) experience of trauma is to discuss the hard structure of the brain at a comic book level of simplicity. If the amygdala gets rewired, why doesn't the cerebellum get rewired and you forget how to walk or read or talk?" To say that only region of the brain is radically damaged while other stay intact is akin to saying that one star amongst the

The BKS theory has an inherent contradiction: The neurophysiological assumption of this theory necessitates trauma to be a matter of an objective biological science, free of subjective interpretation, yet van der Kolk contradicts himself by saying that trauma is a matter of socially and contextually determined meaning.⁶⁷ He expansively describes trauma with pseudoscientific jargon, such as “secretion of stress hormones wreaks havoc with their health,” and “maltreatment is a chisel that shapes a brain,”⁶⁸ but his theory remains inadequately formulated and weakly supported by speculative scientific findings.⁶⁹ Finally, van der Kolk’s own admission in a lecture in 2015 demonstrates that he is promoting an ideology rather than science: “My colleagues and I sort of invented this trauma stuff in the late 1970s, early 1980s, and then we thought the world would become a better place... We are part of each other, the way you behave affects the way I am, and that most mental illnesses are the result of the environment and the individual being at odds with each other.”⁷⁰

THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD’S REVELATION OVER THE FOLLY OF SCIENTISM

Comparable to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 that resulted in long-lasting health impacts, many of which are still affecting the victims today,⁷¹ the BKS

hundreds of billions of stars in the universe can suddenly start operating on different physics than the rest of the universe. See Scheeringa, *Analysis of the Body Keeps the Score: The Science That Trauma Activists Don’t Want You to Know*, 9, 58.

⁶⁷ Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisæth, *Traumatic Stress*, 26–27; Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 17.

⁶⁸ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 30, 151.

⁶⁹ In *Traumatic Stress*, Van der Kolk concludes with the admission that “the question of whether the brain is able to take pictures, and whether some smells, images, sounds, or physical sensations may be etched onto the mind and remain unaltered by subsequent experience and by the passage of time still remains to be answered,” yet his entire theory that traumatic memory is real and it is encoded into one’s physical brain and body rests on the assumption that the question can be answered in the affirmative. Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisæth, *Traumatic Stress*, 297.

⁷⁰ Van Der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma.”

⁷¹ Besides 2 immediate deaths and 29 deaths from acute radiation sickness, the Chernobyl explosion resulted in long-lasting health impacts of radioactive pollution, such as thyroid cancer and birth defects, and the area around the nuclear plant will not be safe for human habitation for at least another 20,000 years. See Serhii Plokhy, *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear*

theory claims that direct experience or exposure to trauma permanently damages the brain and body for many generations. In actuality, this form of scientism is not the result of science; rather, it is a doctrine of philosophy. Scientism is the view that science and the scientific method are the superior epistemological sources of truth and knowledge.⁷² In other words, scientism is an epistemological framework with philosophical assertions about human nature.⁷³ This is evidenced in van der Kolk's revelatory claim on a moral issue when he says, “[Their] behaviours are not the result of moral failings or signs of lack of willpower or bad character—they are caused by actual changes in the brain.”⁷⁴

Here is another irony: scientism distorts science. This is because the immaterial nature of consciousness (biblically, this refers to the mind which is a faculty of the soul) is not a physical state that can be studied with scientific methods. Thus, neuroscience can be a wonderful, common grace tool, but believers need to be cognizant of what it can tell us and its limitations.⁷⁵ When it functions as a totalizing theory, intruding into the domain of other Catastrophe, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

⁷² What is crucial to scientism is not the identification of something as scientific or unscientific, but the thought that the scientific is much more valuable than the non-scientific. Ethics and religion may be acceptable, but only if they are understood to be inherently subjective and regarded as private matters of opinion. J.P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 23.

⁷³ Epistemology can broadly be defined as “the origin, nature, methods, and limits of [human] knowledge, discovering what we know and how we come to know it.” John MacArthur, ed., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 69.

⁷⁴ Van Der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma,” 3, 21, 143. Not only are there no citations provided to support this claim, this statement is logically fallacious: trauma cannot serve as both the cause and remedy (i.e.: remembrance of an unknown, dissociated traumatic memory) physical and behavioral issues. For example, the statement “Only what is testable by science can be true” will never itself be testable by science; a skeptic cannot respond by saying, “There may be no current evidence for this truth, but someday science will advance to the point of proving that it is true after all.” No further scientific discoveries could make the statement true.

⁷⁵ For example, neuroscience attempts to study mirror neurons in monkeys, but the following three views underscore the presuppositions about mirror neurons: 1) Strict physicalism states that empathy is identical to something physical (e.g.: the firings of mirror neurons), 2) Mere property dualism states that empathy is an irreducible state of consciousness in the brain, whose obtaining depends on the firing of mirror neurons, and 3) Substance dualism states that empathy is an irreducible state of consciousness in the soul, whose obtaining depends (while embodied) on the firing of mirror neurons. *Ibid.*, 94; Gregory Hickok, “Eight Problems for the Mirror Neuron Theory of Action Understanding in Monkeys and Humans,” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 21, 7 (July 1, 2009): 1229–43, <https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn.2009.21189>.

areas of knowledge, it has a distorting effect not only to the foundation of science itself, but also to the domains of God's authoritative and inerrant revelation (i.e.: the problems of man and the solution for sin).⁷⁶ This is seen when van der Kolk describes the emotional brain as being the heart of the central nervous system. The “emotional brain” is a made-up term, and thereby distorts the hard science of the central nervous system.⁷⁷

Certainly, real physiological changes and suffering that an individual experiences in a sin-cursed world should not be dismissed (Job 5:6-7), or common sense wisdom that helps individuals to better care for their physical bodies (Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 6:35-36).⁷⁸ This is because every person is an embodied soul (spiritual beings in a physical body), and so, there is a relationship between the body and the soul, but the physical factor is never deterministic of spiritual issues (2 Corinthians 4:14-16; 12:7-10).⁷⁹ When any human discovery seeks to encroach the jurisdictional domain of God,

⁷⁶ It is not wrong to closely study scientific, empirical studies, but those who elevate this secondary priority over the first priority of regulating one's orthodoxy and orthopraxy with Scripture will find themselves overtly psychologized, and even anesthetized to the God-centered realities played out in the human motives, reasoning, behavior, and so on. See David A. Powlison, “Which Presuppositions? Secular Psychology and the Categories of Biblical Thought,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12, 4 (December 1984): 270-78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164718401200402>; David Powlison, “Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, 2 (2007); Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 1986).

⁷⁷ The emotional brain is part of what van der Kolk calls the “triune brain,” which is a made-up term for the combination of the “reptilian brain and limbic system.” Van Der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma,” 57.

⁷⁸ The doctrine of common grace refers to God's universal goodness and kindness to all people without exception, but this doctrine also needs to be held in tension with the whole counsel of Scripture to avoid contradicting total depravity. It may appear that believers and unbelievers are making the same observations, but their substantive interpretation is completely different, and the unbeliever's observation will always be skewed in the end. See Henry Vander Kam, “Some Comments on Kuyper and Common Grace,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 2, 1 (1986): 60; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017).

⁷⁹ For this reason, it is important to not mistreat bodily issues and physical suffering as sinful or mistreat sin as bodily issues. So pastors, biblical counselors, and believers must take the time to distinguish between physical and spiritual issues and allow the physical to deal with the outer man issues, and the believer is only responsible to deal with the inner man issues with the Word of God. Take anxiety as an example, heart issues have much influence on the person's body, numerous physical symptoms, physiological responses that are powerful, but the heart issues will also be most important issues to deal with. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

however, then believers must discern the appearance of wisdom that the spirit of the age is promoting and competing against the sufficiency of Scripture for issues of the human soul (Colossians 2:23). The secular world does not have a biblical view of the soul, and a category for sin, or how sin has fully corrupted both the nature of man and creation itself (Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:20-21; 1 John 1:8).⁸⁰ Consequently, the noetic effects of sin will skew the natural man's interpretation of the observational data—one that is devoid of God and His truth (Romans 1:18-32). And the scheme of the evil one has always been to shift the blame to something else and to doubt the veracity of God's Word (Genesis 3:1-13). When the problem is not sin, then the solution will never be the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 1:15). Hence, this widespread lie that the body causes an individual to sin must be completely rejected. There is no such thing as dissociated, traumatic memory that can cause a person to sin or that he is now permanently trapped in the new original sin of trauma because "once it enters the body, it stays there forever".⁸¹ Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire, then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death (James 1:14-15; Genesis 4:7; Ezekiel 18:4).

The Bible unequivocally states that the control center of a person, is the heart (Matthew 12:34; Mark 7:21-23; Proverbs 4:23). And the human heart has everything to do with God (Matthew 22:37). Even though external factors such as suffering, physical illness, sins of others, and past traumatic experiences can influence a person's inner man or weaken one's resolve to

⁸⁰ Karl Menninger in his classic book "Whatever Happened to Sin?" observes that the language of sin has been replaced by language of either crime or sickness, and the norm of sin is displaced by a new social philosophy and a new code of morality, as reflected by talk therapy, behaviorism, psychopharmacology, and scientific methodology to bring about improved functioning, adaptive behavior, and personal well-being. See Karl A. Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, Ecclesia Books (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975).

⁸¹ Yehuda and New York Academy of Sciences, *Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. One of the differences between the occupation of intellectuals and that of the engineer is that engineers find themselves constantly accountable to the real world if they make mistakes. An engineer whose designs and work prove to be a repeated failure will not long be in the trade, yet if an intellectual grand idea fails, the thinker is frequently seen as a brave pioneer or prophet out of time, or the blame is placed on society and others or faulty interpretation or application of the idea. The history of every era is littered with the false prophecy of the intelligentsia of that time, and this is seen in gender theory, feminist theory, and other forms of deconstructionist fad. See Joe Boot, "The Cult of the Expert," Ezra Institute, April 25, 2020, <https://www.ezrainstitute.com/resource-library/articles/the-cult-of-the-expert/>.

respond biblically, they are not deterministic. In contrast, a biblical view of man and his problems actually provides a more robust, realistic, and hopeful prescription for suffering—the reality, consequence, and dominion of sin necessitated the God-Man to accomplish salvation (Ephesians 2:1-9; Romans 7:24-25; Isaiah 53:3-5).⁸² This salvation radically changes a spiritually dead sinner into a new creation and progressively conforms the believer into the image of Christ, which supernaturally enables a person to exercise faith, hope in God, and respond biblically in the midst of deep affliction (2 Corinthians 5:17; Lamentations 3:1-24; Habakkuk 3:16-19).

Consider the alternative that van der Kolk proposes:

In order to change, people need to become viscerally familiar with realities that directly contradict the panicked self of trauma, replacing them with new emotional scenarios that are intense and real enough to defuse and counter some of the old ones... [To] re-establish ownership of your body and your mind—of yourself.⁸³

An amalgamation of therapies and New Age practices is thus prescribed in the second half of *The Body Keeps the Score*—Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), yoga, mindfulness, theatre/performing arts, self-leadership, rewiring the mind with computer interface technology, and so on.⁸⁴ Even though the BKS theory assumes a neurobiological causality, an assortment of eclectic treatments are aimed to make a person subjectively feel and function better. Biblically, the helplessness, hopelessness, and despair

⁸² Christians do not minimize suffering, instead, we are pointing the sufferer to real hope and change in the power of God. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010); Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, eds., *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012).

⁸³ Van Der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma,” 205, 310.

⁸⁴ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 205-349. Judith Herman also prescribes a similar assortment of treatments: “In addition to hypnosis, many other techniques can be used to produce an altered state of consciousness in which dissociated traumatic memories are more readily assessable. These ranges from social methods, such as intensive group therapy or psychodrama to biological methods, such as the use of sodium amyta. Whatever the technique, the same basic rules apply: the locus of control remains with the patient, and the timing, pacing, and design of the sessions must be carefully planned so that the uncovering technique is integrated into the architecture of psychotherapy.” Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 271.

experienced by an individual under the weight of the effects of the fallen world and his own sinful responses that perpetuate a cycle of a deeper enslavement to sin ought to drive one to see his need for a Saviour (John 6:68-69). It is not only foolish to believe that one can “re-establish ownership” over his life when God owns all of His creation and He alone is able to redeem sin and suffering unto His tapestry of glory through the gospel of Jesus Christ, but to promote any solution apart from the true physician Jesus Christ is to offer tranquilizers to the noisy soul (Jeremiah 2:13).

CONCLUSION

As the scientific findings behind the BKS theory are presented to the masses as proven facts and hard science, some believers and Christian counselors have embraced its ideology and regard it as a vital external contribution to the care and counsel of souls.⁸⁵ What is at stake when an individual buys into the belief system of the BKS theory is not merely an intellectual exchange, it is a spiritual one. It results in the substitution and wholesale rejection of the wisdom, power, and lordship of Jesus Christ over the souls of men. Van der Kolk’s hypothesis does not need to be rejected based on “new scientific evidence” to prove it otherwise when believers already have the authoritative, inerrant, and all-sufficient Word of God as our grid in which we evaluate and discern every form of “human discovery” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

If the claim that trauma is encoded in the brain and body according to scientific findings is true, then trauma would be the new original sin. And the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God to transform sinners, would not be sufficient (Rom 1:16). Consequently, the souls of men would be at the mercy of their experience in a sin-cursed world. But we know such assertions are antithetical to the wisdom of God in the pages of Scripture (1 Corinthians

⁸⁵ See Heather Davediuk Gingrich, ed., *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) (Downers Grove: IVP Academic / InterVarsity Press, 2017); some biblical counselors have also espoused how helpful the BKS theory is in their counseling practice; see Alasdair Groves, “Trauma,” n.d., <https://www.ccef.org/podcast/trauma/>; Darby Strickland, “Foundations of Trauma Care for Biblical Counselors,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 36, 2 (2022); “CCEF 2023 National Conference,” (Conference Sessions, October 2023, especially Mike Emlet’s session “Trauma and the Body”), <https://store.ccef.org/conference/2023-national-conference-sessions/>.

1:18-2:16). The wisdom and rulers of this age are doomed to pass away, but the Word of the Lord remains forever, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (1 Peter 1:25; Proverbs 9:10). Therefore, to place our ultimate trust in the thinking of the unregenerate men is to be like the unwise man who built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). This is why it is important for pastors, biblical counselors, and believers to expose the folly and deceit of the scientism behind the BKS theory that is built upon the faulty theoretical edifice of the 19th century French psychiatrist Pierre Janet. Then, they are to boldly proclaim the power and grace of Jesus Christ to the sinner, saint, and sufferer, and stand on the superiority and sufficiency of God's Word. Believers can and must demonstrate confidence upon the Bible as their epistemological foundation in order to evaluate the lofty arguments and knowledge raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).

APPENDIX

Figure 1

An Increased Diagnosis of PTSD post September 11, 2001
(Bonanno, *The End of Trauma*, 62.)

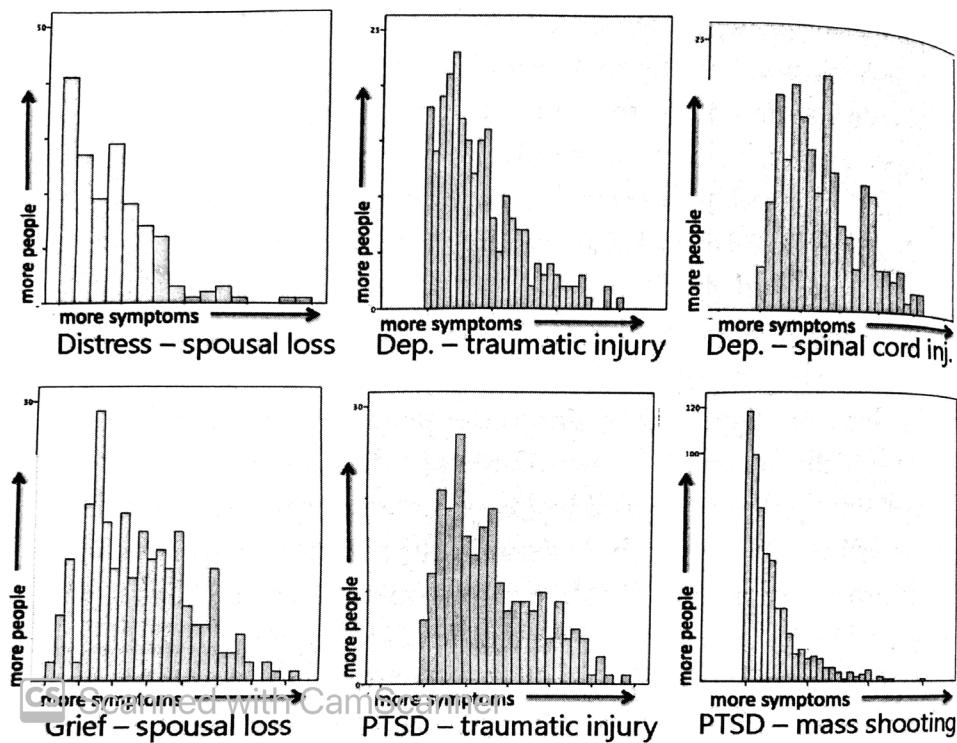


Table 1

A Broad Overview of the Development of Trauma from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First Century⁸⁶

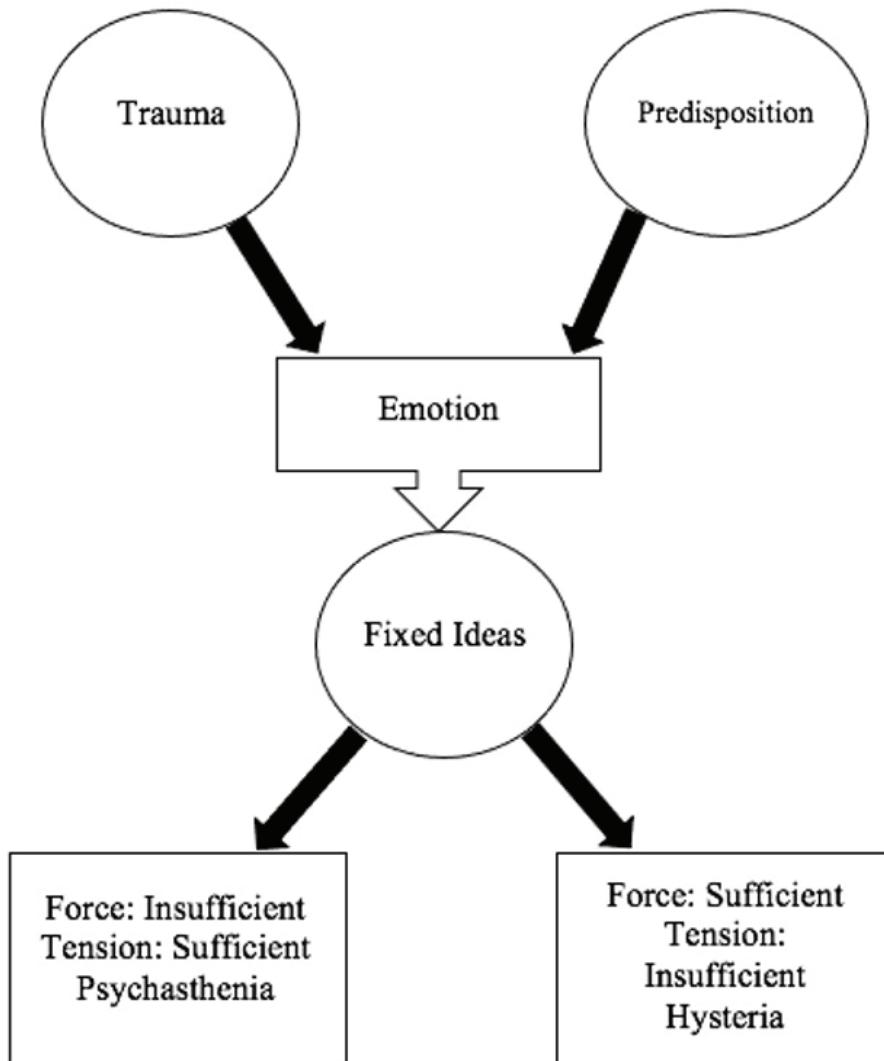
Hysteria in the Nineteenth Century		Combat Trauma in World War I	
Key Figures	Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet	Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, and Josef Breuer.	Charles Myers, Hermann Oppenheim, William Brown, and James Jackson Putnam.
Syndrome	Hysteria or Neuroses. Hysterical symptoms include paralysis of limbs, vomiting, and long-term effects on physiological, neurological, and psychic systems.		“Shell Shock” or battle neuroses in male soldiers.
Cause	External trauma triggers hysteria in predisposed patients (Hereditarian thinking)	Sexual trauma, real events to unconscious psychic	Physical injury appears to cause physical effects.
Theory	The intensity of (unrecognized) traumatic memories result in the psychological process of dissociation	Double consciousness	Early conceptualizations of trauma changing the brain
Treatment	Hypnosis	Psychoanalysis or “talking cure”	PIE treatment, medication, psychotherapy
Patient Clientele	Mainly female patients who experienced repressed traumas		Male combatants.

⁸⁶ For more, see Horwitz, PTSD; Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*; J M S Pearce, “Hermann Oppenheim (1858-1919),” *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 74, 5 (May 1, 2003): 569–569, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jnnp.74.5.569>; Bracken, Petty, and Save the Children Fund, *Rethinking the Trauma of War*; Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Van Der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma.”

Holocaust Survivors, World War II, & PTSD in DSM-III		Recovered Memory and C-PTSD	Body Keeps the Score in the 21st Century
Key Figures	Abram Kardiner's "neurosis of war;" refuted by Karl Abraham and Sandor Ferenczi	Judith Herman	Bessel van der Kolk
Syndrome	Flashbacks, night terrors, and various maladaptive behaviors	C-PTSD: Affective dysregulation, detachment from people, alternations in consciousness etc.	All kinds of biological and social issues.
Cause	Physio-neurosis refers to the somatic component of a psychosomatic ailment.	The normal regulation of bodily states is disrupted by chronic hyperarousal that is due to repressed memories	The body remembers trauma through converting repressed psychic trauma into numerous physical problems
Theory	The patient's memory, not the original event itself is the missing link between the original trauma and long-standing psychic symptoms	Recovered Freud's theory of repression and the power of consciousness to change the brain and body	Traumatic stress changes brain and body
Treatment	PIE treatment, medication, psychotherapy	Psychotherapies, Psychiatric medication	CBT, DBT, EMDR, Yoga, Self-leadership, neurofeedback etc.
Patient Clientele	Male combatants	Mainly female sexual abuse survivors	From children to adult C-PTSD patients

Figure 2:

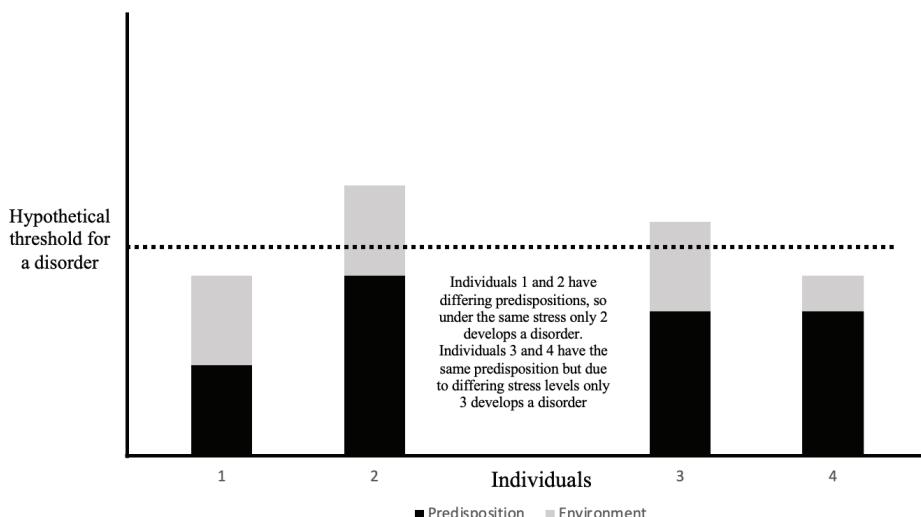
Pierre Janet's Pathogenesis of Neuroses.⁸⁷ See the explanation of Pierre Janet's Theory of Psychological Trauma in the body of the paper.



⁸⁷ Karl-Ernst Bühler and Gerhard Heim, "Etiology, Pathogenesis, and Therapy According to Pierre Janet Concerning Conversion Disorders and Dissociative Disorders," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 65, 4 (October 2011): 281–309, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2011.65.4.281>; Bühler and Heim, "General Introduction to the Psychotherapy of Pierre Janet."

Figure 3

The Diathesis Stress Model - The term “diathesis” comes from the Greek word for disposition (“diathesis”). In the context of the diathesis-stress model, this disposition is a factor that makes it more likely that an individual will develop a disorder following a stressful life event. For example, the glucocorticoid cascade hypothesis proposes that excess cortisol secretion in response to stress causes hippocampal damage, which in turn reduces negative feedback on CRH, resulting in uncontrolled secretion and further damage. Hypercortisolemia is associated with altered synaptic plasticity, reduced neurogenesis, neuronal atrophy and excess secretion of excitatory neurotransmitters such as glutamate, triggering hippocampal changes. This mechanism underlies many stress-related disorders, including FND and PTSD.⁸⁸

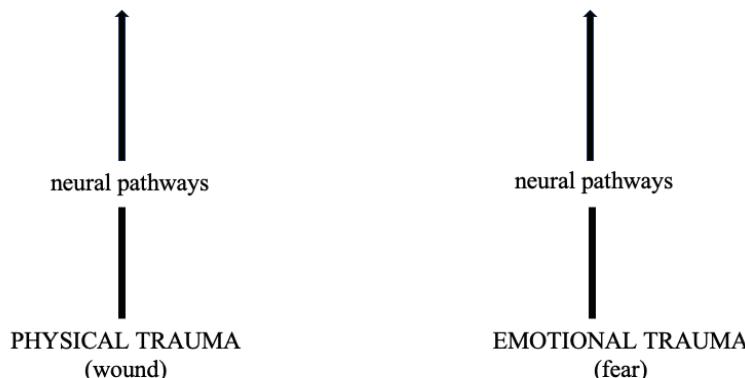


⁸⁸ Keynejad et al., “Stress and Functional Neurological Disorders.”

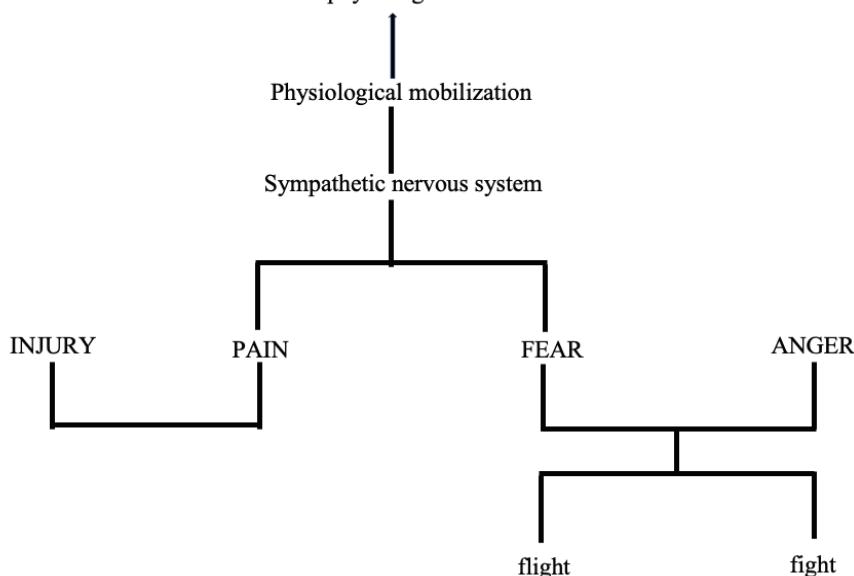
Figure 4

The Structure of Traumatic Events.⁸⁹ These diagrams are attempts to explain the mechanism behind the BKS theory, as the theory equates both physical injury and emotional trauma as causal factors to supposedly change the neural pathways that posit physiological changes.

DISTURBANCE AND DISARRANGEMENT OF ORGANS AND FUNCTIONS



Pathophysiological effects



⁸⁹ Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, 23.

COUNSELING CHURCH CONFLICT

FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 5:

“Purge the Evil Person from Among You”

Hannah Miller¹

INTRODUCTION

The word “purge” found in 1 Corinthians 5:13 is derived from the Greek word ἔξαιρω (exairo) meaning remove, drive away, to expel.² The word ἔξαιρω is only used once in the entire New Testament. The English Standard Version (ESV) defines ἔξαιρω as purge, whereas the New International Version (NIV) uses expel, the New American Standard Version (NASB) uses remove, and the King James Version (KJV) and New King James Version (NKJV) both use put away.³ This word is different from the beginning of the chapter, where, in verse two Paul says “Let him who has done this be removed from among you.” The word for removed in verse two is αἴρω (airo) which means to take up, take away, or lift up.⁴ This word is used commonly in the New Testament, around a hundred and one times. The word ἔξαιρω carries with it a heavier meaning as it is an imperative verb, meaning the listener is commanded to act.

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² Gingrich, Felix Wilbur, et al. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 24. Nestle, Eberhard, et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2015), 225-226. Mounce, Bill. “Bill Mounce.” *Ἐξαιρω*, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/exairo>. Blass, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 236.

³ These four versions were used as they are familiar to the author and versions many Christians appear to be familiar with.

⁴ Gingrich, Felix Wilbur, et al. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 4. Nestle, Eberhard, et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 225-226. Blass, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 24. “Bill Mounce.” *Αἴρω*, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/airo>.

The first word in the passage, but second word mentioned here, *αἴρω* is a verb which is also a call to action. Twice in this passage the word removed, though different words are used for it, is required of the listener. They are to remove the sexually immoral person from among them. Removal is not a side note for this passage, but is the call given to the people of the church in Corinth. This passage is bookended with the call to remove.

While 1 Corinthians 5 may seem like a discussion of the idea of sexual immorality, Paul's central message of the chapter concerns the church's response to sexual immorality. What is the church going to do? Furthermore, what will the members follow and believe, and how will they live out their practical theology? Will the church follow in the shadow of Aphrodite, or will it purify itself and follow Christ? The sentence, "purge the evil person from among you," seems harsh and antithetical to the gospel, but it is there in black and white in the Scriptures. The church was given a call to purge someone from its midst, and hand them over to Satan. How is this a godly thing to do when believers are called to love well and draw people into the church? Why might purging be for the glory of God and the good of the saints? The church at Corinth struggled with these questions. There was confusion about what actual love and grace from Christ were, and how the church might best reflect that love and grace.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he was seeking to address church conflict there. First Corinthians 5 deals specifically with the sexual sin of a member, the pride of the church, and the purity of the church. The issues that the church in Corinth dealt with are issues that still plague the church two thousand years later. Although many churches keep their sexually immoral members in the flock because they consider it kind, loving, and accepting to do so, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 states the opposite and issues a call for the church to instead purge those who call themselves Christians, but live sexually immoral lives. For allowing them to continue in the church provides opportunities for arrogance and boasting on the part of church members, destroys sincerity and truth, and confuses believers with unbelievers.⁵

⁵Diamant, Jeff, "Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable," Pew Research Center, August 31, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable>.

DEFINING TERMS

There are a few definitions of terms that will be helpful before proceeding. The first is “sexual immorality.” Though this is a common term throughout the Scriptures, it is helpful to note that in the Greek, the word for sexual immorality here is *πορνεία* (porneia), meaning any sort of sexual immorality, i.e., any sex outside of the boundaries of marriage between one man one woman.⁶ This passage in 1 Corinthians 5 refers back to Leviticus 18:8, which states “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.”⁷ This goes right to the heart of the slightly confusing wording at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 5, which states, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.” Overall, scholars agree that what is meant in both passages is that the woman is the man’s step-mother.⁸ Both passages, Leviticus and 1 Corinthians, refer to the “wife of your father” and though it is still an incestuous relationship it is helpful to know that it is his step-mother and not his birth mother. He is committing sexually immoral acts with his step-mother and this is a known sin that is being tolerated by the church. Barclay states “A man had formed an illicit association with his own stepmother, a thing which would disgust even a non-Christian and which was explicitly forbidden by the Jewish law (Leviticus 18:8).”⁹

Another term that is helpful to define is “deliver” from verse five. The Greek word for deliver is the word *παραδίδωμι* (paradidomi).¹⁰ *Παραδίδωμι* means hand over, deliver, betray, or give over.¹¹ The church at Corinth is to hand over or to deliver the evil person to Satan.

⁶ Douglas Mangum, and Josh Westbury, *Linguistics & Biblical Exegesis* (Ashland, OH: Lexham Press, 2017).

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Bible.

⁸ W. H. Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), Vol. 10, 217: “The use of *gunaika*, literally ‘woman,’ graphically shows that it was the man’s stepmother.”

⁹ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 52.

¹⁰ Gingrich, Felix Wilbur, et al. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 148. Nestle, Eberhard, et al. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 225-226. Blass, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 614.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Around 50 A.D., Corinth had been destroyed and rebuilt as a trade city for Rome. The people were primarily Romans, Greeks, Asians, and Jews.¹² The main gods that were worshipped were Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo, Demeter, Kore, Hera, Poseidon, and Asklepios.¹³ Corinth boasted the temple of Aphrodite at Acrocorinth as its place of worship for its primary deity. This is significant, as the goddess Aphrodite is the goddess of “love, beauty, desire, and all aspects of sexuality.”¹⁴ Edward Adams, Senior Lecturer in New Testament Studies at King’s College in London writes, “the old Greek city of Corinth—known as the city of Aphrodite—had apparently gained a reputation as a centre for sexual promiscuity. Aristophanes coined the term ‘to Corinthianise’ (i.e., to fornicate) after the city’s renown for sexual laxity.”¹⁵ Aphrodite was also associated with the sea and since Corinth was a seaport, it follows that she would be the primary goddess that they would worship there. She was a goddess known for her illicit affairs and her ability to woo anyone she chose.

Strabo, a well-known and respected Greek geographer and historian, claimed that more than one thousand prostitutes served Aphrodite through sacred prostitution at her temple, which was filled with riches as a result.¹⁶ Though many question if this is entirely accurate, there is little debate that Corinth was a city filled with sexual immorality. Barbette Spaeth, who denies the accuracy of Strabo’s account, nevertheless concedes: “A close connection has long existed among sailors, ports, and prostitutes. Think of the famous ‘red light’ district of Storyville in New Orleans or, more locally, Strait Street

¹² Munn G. Lacoste. “The Historical Background of First Corinthians,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 3 (1960), <https://preachingsource.com/journal/the-historical-background-of-first-corinthians/>.

¹³ “Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth - Ephorate of Antiquities of Korinthia Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth - Ephorate of Antiquities of Korinthia.” Venerating Gods and Heroes – *Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth*, <https://www.corinth-museum.gr/en/museum/glancing-in-the-city-state-of-corinth/venerating-gods-and-heroes/>.

¹⁴ Mark Cartwright, “Aphrodite,” *World History Encyclopedia*, July, 1 2022, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Aphrodite/>.

¹⁵ Edward Adams, and David G. Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), cited as Aristophanes, frag. 354.

¹⁶ Simon Geoffrey Pembroke, “Mycenae,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, July 30, 2015, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-4298?product=orecla>.

near the Great Harbour in Valetta, where at least from Crusader times sailors mingled with the local ‘ladies of the night.’ The connection was also clear in classic antiquity.”¹⁷ The practices of pagans were well-known as being sexually illicit. The practice of the day was that one’s religion did not prevent sexual promiscuity, but in fact encouraged it.¹⁸ This is important, because many of the issues might seem so obviously wrong to contemporary Bible-believing Christians, even if not in modern culture generally. However, the call that Paul was making must be seen in light of the context of the time. Paul knew that they were living in a hotbed of sin, and yet required righteousness from the church and called them to live differently from the pagans around them.

The church in Corinth must have been relatively new and filled with new believers.¹⁹ Yet, Paul is direct with them and the call that he gives the church at Corinth is the same call that the church must continue to obey today. This current age is filled with sin. There may not be temples filled with prostitutes

¹⁷ Barbette Spaeth, “Sailors, Sex, and the Cult of Aphrodite/Venus in Roman Corinth,” <https://classics.emory.edu/documents/samr-abstracts/Spaeth%20Abstract.pdf>. Valetta is the “seaport and capital of Malta, on the northeast coast of the island of Malta.” Heather Campbell, “Valletta,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Valletta>.

¹⁸ Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth*. Adams and Horrell agree that Strabo may have been exaggerating and that the particular instance of the one thousand prostitutes was before the modern city of Corinth was established: “Corinthian letters often assume the correctness of these representations and apply them to the Corinth of Paul’s time, depicting the city as a particular hotbed of sexual license and vice. (This image of Corinth also lingers on in popular perception and preaching.) Prostitution was certainly practiced in first-century Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20), but the service was hardly exclusive to this city in the Greco-Roman world: the lewd graffiti from brothels in Pompeii and the city’s erotic art are obvious examples that attest otherwise! In all likelihood, then, Paul’s Corinth was no more sexually promiscuous than any other cosmopolitan city in the empire” (8). In essence, while it is not easy to say exactly what Corinth looked like, the overall consensus does seem to be that it was not a city known for purity. The Corinthians may not have been as bad as some have claimed them to be, and it is concerning that many preaching on Corinth have not verified Strabo’s claims. However, what seems to be the crux of the issue is that sexual immorality was commonplace.

¹⁹ Mare, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 207: “Paul views his skill as an expert builder as being possible only through the grace of God. As an expert builder (cf. Proverbs 8:30), one who knew God’s plan for the building of his church (Ephesians 3:7-10), he had laid the doctrinal foundation of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2; cf. Isaiah 28:16; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6). He acknowledges that others, such as Apollos, also build on this foundation of Christ. Then he gives a warning: Every builder—Paul, Apollos, and whoever works for God—must be careful how he builds. The shift in thought is now from the worker to his work.” 1 Corinthians 3:10: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.”

worshipping a goddess who stood for sexual immorality, but current culture demands denying Christ in the name of the acceptance of sexual immorality and sinful identities. As Solomon said, there is no new thing under the sun.²⁰

THE CALL OF THE CHURCH

What is the call of the church, and of the biblical counselor, in response to sexual immorality in the church? The church and the biblical counselor are to uphold the Word of the Lord, to counsel the erring member into repentance, and to uphold the purity of the church. The purity of the church here depends on the purity of Christ and the purity of the members. Christ is pure, but the members may be in a different category.²¹ Will they submit to the Word of God or will they need to be handed over to Satan? How does the church position itself so that it can stand before Christ saying that it has handed someone over to Satan? The wording here seems harsh, unloving, unkind, even hateful, but this is the call. If this call reflects the desire of Christ, then it must reflect His character. So how is giving someone over to Satan a Christ-like call?

ARROGANCE AND BOASTING

One of the issues Paul addresses in this letter is the arrogance and of boasting on the part of the church members. In the first verse of 1 Corinthians 5, Paul states that he is writing about the sexual immorality among them—of a man committing sexual immorality with his father’s wife. Verse two states “And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.” Then, in verse six he states, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” They are boasting over their sin, and it is a sin that Paul states is one that not even the pagans tolerate.

The arrogance and boasting of the church appear to come from their notion

²⁰ Ecclesiastes 1:9

²¹ Hebrews 7:26, 1 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22.

that they are being kind and loving by tolerating this man's sin. Schreiner states, "possibly, they are proud because of a perverted view of grace and tolerance, such that they think that any reproof of behavior would contradict the free grace of Christ."²² *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states "Paul again alludes to the pride of the Corinthians. This time it was a pride that, rather than cause them to mourn over the shocking sin, allowed them to tolerate such a sinner in the congregation."²³ They feel morally superior to the pagans, prideful, because they are tolerating an abhorrent sin, and not only that, but they are teaching the church to pervert the grace of Christ. To tolerate is to love. The New Daily Study Bible (NDSB) states:

Shocked as he was at the sin, Paul was even more shocked by the attitude of the Corinthian church to the sinner. They had complacently accepted the situation and done nothing about it when they should have been grief-stricken. The word Paul uses for the grief they should have shown (*penthein*) is the word that is used for mourning for the dead. An easy-going attitude to sin is always dangerous. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it.²⁴

They should have been mourning as if the man were dead because of his sin. This man was so known by his sin that news of his deeds had made its way four hundred miles to Paul in Ephesus.²⁵ The church was not only apathetic about the sin, but they were also boasting. Perhaps this is how Paul heard of it.

The church at Corinth believed that their tolerance was reason for boasting and arrogance, but this is something that Paul calls them out for more than once.²⁶ They confused the love of Christ and were proud of sin. Guzik stated "As bad as the sin itself was, Paul was more concerned that the Corinthian Christians seemed to take the sin lightly, and they were unconcerned (have

²² Thomas R. Schreiner, *I Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 109.

²³ Mare, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 217.

²⁴ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 52.

²⁵ "Letters of Paul to the Corinthians," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Letter-of-Paul-to-the-Corinthians>.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:18; 13:4

not rather mourned) about this behavior.”²⁷ Their arrogance and boasting were concerning because it was a sign that they were taking the sin lightly. They did not view it as damning to the individual, but as a badge of honor of their own goodness. That arrogance and boasting meant that they were not handling the sin of that member.²⁸ Moreover, they were celebrating this sin.

The sin affected the entire church. Paul states in verse six, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” The lump here is the church.²⁹ The leavening here is evil.³⁰ They were boasting when the entire church was being affected by evil. Paul is admonishing them to cleanse the church, to not allow the evil to corrupt the whole church. There was confusion over removing that member since they thought what they were doing was loving, but in actuality it was corrupting the church.

SINCERITY AND TRUTH

²⁷ David Guzik, “1 Corinthians Chapter 5,” *Enduring Word*, 9 May 2019, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-5/>. Emphasis original.

²⁸ A.C. Thiselton, “The Meaning of Sarx in 1 Corinthians 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of the Logical and Semantic Factors,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973): 204-27. Thiselton states, “Paul’s censure relates not primarily to the man in question, but to the fact that the community seemed pleased with the situation, ‘You are arrogant (***). Ought you not rather to mourn?’ (v. 2). The RSV rendering “arrogant” is less satisfactory than the NEB’s words ‘And you can still be proud of yourselves!’ The self-styled ‘spiritual’ men at Corinth (not perhaps without some mixture of motives) wished to parade their new-found freedom as a bold testimony to their eschatological status. Might not some of the ‘strong’ have regarded with something akin to awe a man who unashamedly displayed a ‘freedom’ which went beyond the ordinary man’s wildest dreams? He would be neither the first nor the last of those spiritual enthusiasts who raised themselves above the mundane level of everyday questions about ethics” (11).

²⁹ Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 218: “That the church should allow such sin as that in the Corinthian church to go undisciplined would affect the attitude of the entire Christian community toward sin—‘a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.’ The church is to get rid of the old yeast—‘the sin that so easily entangles’ (Hebrews 12:1).”

³⁰ Schreiner, in *I Corinthians*, states, “Such boasting is more than a little ironic since they are tolerating obvious transgression in the church. In verses 6-8 Paul lays down from the feasts of Passover and Unleavened bread an Old Testament foundation for his perspective. Here he picks up the notion that all leaven was to be removed from houses during Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread and that nothing leavened should be eaten (Exodus 12:14-20; 13:6-7). Hence, leaven stands for what is evil and corrupting, and if one allows a *little yeast* (lit. ‘a little leaven,’ CSB) in a lump of dough, it will pervade the whole (so also Galatians 5:9; cf. Matthew 16:6). Paul’s main concern, then, is not the individual offender but the potential for sin to spread in the church.”

In verses six through eight Paul is speaking of the leaven leavening the whole lump, and in verse eight he states, “Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” In correcting their thinking about allowing evil into the church, Paul asks them to replace the leaven of malice and evil with sincerity and truth.

Concerning sincerity, one definition is “the quality or state of being sincere: honesty of mind: freedom from hypocrisy.”³¹ Paul was calling them to be sincere, to be honest, free from hypocrisy and filled with truth. The call for sincerity was in direct contradiction to the way they were living. He was asking that they no longer be hypocrites who practice the opposite of what they were supposed to be preaching, and to replace malice and evil with sincerity and with the truth.³² Truth here is straightforward: he wants them to practice the message of the Scriptures.

The church that allows the leavening of evil to continue will destroy the sincerity and the witness of truth in the church. When a church allows sin to grow and fester, the church itself becomes known by the deeds of the erring member. Such as the pastor caught in an affair or looking at pornography. Pastoral scandals are always tied to the church where they were serving. Their witness of sincerity and truth is forfeited by their sin. Many churches have been destroyed and their witness demolished by the sin of the few. One need only think of the many pastors whose sexual immorality brought their churches to ruin.

THE FOUR CALLS

Paul addresses their arrogance and boasting, and calls for sincerity and truth, and part of that call is the reality of separating the erring member.

³¹ MW Collegiate Dictionary (11th Ed.) s.v. εἰλικρίνεια (eilikrineia), *sincerity; purity of motive*. SHORT Lexicon defines it the same.

³² Kevin DeYoung, *The Lord’s Prayer: Learning from Jesus on What, Why, and How to Pray* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2022), 17: “Too often, Christians think of hypocrites as people who do one thing but feel another. But that’s not hypocrisy. Hypocrites publicize one set of beliefs but live by a different set of beliefs.”

There are four calls given to cast out the straying member. In the second verse, Paul states, “let him who has done this be removed from among you.” In verse five, Paul says, “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Then he calls them to cleanse the lump, when, in verse seven, he states, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” As indicated above, they are to live out of sincerity and truth instead of malice and evil, which means not only correcting their behavior of boasting and arrogance, but also handing over the straying member. Lastly, in verse thirteen he tells the church to “Purge the evil person from among you.”

The first call, to remove the member, is just that: he is to be removed from the church. Leeman states:

[W]hen a church excommunicates someone, it hands him over to Satan (1 Corinthians 5:5). That is, it removes its affirmation that the individual belongs to God’s kingdom, where God’s redemptive authority rules. It declares instead that the person must belong to Satan’s kingdom, where Satan rules (Matthew 4:8-9; John 12:31; 14:30). And the church has no more authority over the excommunicated member than it has over any other non-Christian in Satan’s realm.”³³

The man is acting like a pagan, so he is to be treated as though he is a pagan and removed from the church.

The second call, which very much goes along with the first, reiterates from verse five that the man is to be delivered over to Satan. Handing someone over to Satan is a call for their redemption. After all, the latter half of the verse states, “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” It is an act of unwavering love for the one who is marked by their lack of repentance. There are several ideas of what the phrase “hand over to Satan” means, but the most compelling seems to be that this was similar to God handing Job over

³³ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 84.

to Satan.³⁴ It was not a call for the man's death, but a call for him to follow God. Now Job was known as a righteous man and the man in 1 Corinthians is not, but the idea that they are handed over for the glory of Christ and for sanctification (whether initial or progressive) follows.

The third call, to "cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened" has been explained in part above, but here the emphasis is the second part of that verse which says, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." The call given to cleanse the lump is given in the context that Christ has already been the sacrifice and has made them clean. They are unleavened because they are redeemed and yet need to continue in the progressive sanctification that Christ granted them through His blood.³⁵

³⁴ Robert E. Moses, "Physical and/or Spiritual Exclusion? Ecclesial Discipline in 1 Corinthians 5," *New Testament Studies* 59, 2 (April 2013): 172–91, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688512000288>. Moses discusses if what is meant in this passage is physical or spiritual exclusion. He argues that the main two ideas concerning the phrase "hand over to Satan" are 1) "some scholars argue that 'handing over to Satan' is a death sentence; Paul expects his sentence to result in the man's death" (174) or 2) that "Paul alludes to the book of Job throughout his letters. He offers direct quotations from Job in Romans 11:35 (Job 41:11) and 1 Corinthians 3:19 (Job 5:12-13)... Thus, if we can detect a strong echo of Job 2:4-6 in 1 Corinthians 5.5, we may be on safe grounds to look to Job as a possible background for our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5" (183). Moses presents an excellent linguistic understanding of the challenges between the Greek and Hebrew texts. When explaining the possibility of Paul meaning death, Moses references Tertullian, *On Modesty* 13-14; E. Käsemann, "Sentences of Holy Law in the NT," *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969 [1957]) 66-81; R. Kempthorne, "Incest in the Body of Christ," *NTS* 14 (1968) 569-70; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 97; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 126-7; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2007 [1951-55]) 1.233; V. G. Shillington, "Atonement Texture in 1 Corinthians 5:5," *JSNT* 71 (1998) 39. G. Forkman speaks of death in "both the physical and ethic-religious meaning," see (*The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* [Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972] 146), and S. D. MacArthur speaks of "a slow death which involves physical suffering," see ("Spirit" in Pauline Usage: 1 Corinthians 5.5', *Studio, Biblica* 3 [ed. E. A. Livingstone; JSNTSup 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978] 251).

³⁵ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 114. Schreiner states that "Paul's appropriation of the Old Testament here is quite fascinating and instructive. The Passover deliverance of Israel points forward to and is fulfilled in Christ's Passover sacrifice by which he delivered the church of Jesus Christ from God's wrath. The removal of leaven during the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread points forward to the need for believers to cleanse evil from their lives, Unleavened bread—that is, evil in the congregation—reveals that the church is not living in the light of Christ's sacrifice. Here we see the relationship between the indicative and the imperative in Paul's thought. The indicative (Christ's sacrifice) is the basis for the imperative, but the indicative certainly does not

They have the ability, through the sacrifice of Christ, to cleanse the lump.

Lastly, the call is given to “purge the evil person from among you.”³⁶ This call is both ominous and blunt. The call to purge is for the protection of the church. This call is given in light of verses nine through twelve in which Paul explains that the church is not to judge the ungodly, for God will do that, but is to judge the godly, those who claim a part in Christ.³⁷ They are to remove this person from their membership, because though he is claiming to know Christ, he is living in a way that is antithetical to that claim.

Four times Paul tells the church they must be rid of that member. They must purge him from their congregation. While the topic of church membership goes beyond the scope of this essay, church membership is the church putting its stamp of approval upon someone that the church believes is saved and elders committing to keep watch over their souls (Hebrews 13:17). That person’s life should be lived in such a way that reflects their belief in Christ.³⁸ The following section will deal with how Paul explains the difference between the believer and the unbeliever and how the believer is to relate to each.

BELIEVER OR UNBELIEVER

Discerning believers from unbelievers and what to do with that information is vital for the life of the church. Paul spends the last section of 1 Corinthians

cancel out the need for the imperative. If the imperative is not carried out, it calls into question whether one has truly experienced the indicative.”

³⁶ This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 13:5.

³⁷ Mare, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 220. According to Mare, “Here Paul teaches that though it is logical for the church to exercise spiritual discipline over members in its fellowship, it is not for the church to judge the present unsaved society. By the Greek expression *tous exō* (“those without”) the apostle means those outside the church’s communion or fellowship. The words *tous esō* (“those within”) means those within the church’s fellowship. Paul now concludes (v. 13) on the basis of the preceding argument that the wicked man who had married his stepmother must be put out of the church. This he commands by quoting somewhat loosely from Deuteronomy 22:24 (a context of adultery) and from Deuteronomy 24:7 (a context of stealing). The strengthened form of the negative (*ouchi*, ‘not’) used with the indicative verb in a question expects a positive response: ‘Are you not to judge those inside [the church]?’ ‘Yes’ is the expected reply.”

³⁸ Gregg R. Allison, “The Membership of the Church,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), accessed August 20, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-membership-of-the-church/>.

5 covering this issue. He states in verses nine through thirteen:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Paul's main point seems to be that there are to be two distinct groups. There are believers inside the church, and those outside. The church is to judge those inside the church, through church discipline, and God will judge the world for its faithlessness to Him.

One of the important things to note here is that Paul is not talking of any believer who has ever been drunk, or greedy, or swindled and so forth. He is identifying character here. What is the person known by?³⁹ Schreiner states “Actually, Paul does not list the sins but the persons: the sexually immoral, those who are greedy, and so on. The reference to the persons may be significant, indicating that the people to be avoided are characterized by the sins mentioned. The list most certainly focuses on activities and not motivations.”⁴⁰ Those who are characterized by their sin are to be purged by the church.⁴¹ Paul says they are not even to eat or to share a meal with such a

³⁹ This is a reference from Matthew 7:15-20, as Christ is warning against false prophets, and is speaking of how each person is known by the fruit they produce.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *I Corinthians*, 115.

⁴¹ Peter Orr, “1 Corinthians 5: Why It Is Necessary and Loving Not to Associate or Eat with Certain ‘Christians,’” October 1, 2018, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/1-corinthians-5-necessary-loving-not-associate-eat-certain-christians/>. Orr asserts “We need to be clear on what Paul says. He tells the Corinthians not to ‘associate’ (5:9, 11) with someone who ‘is named a brother [or sister]’, but who is actually ‘a sexually immoral person or a greedy person or an idolater or an abusive person or a drunkard or a dishonest person’. In fact, they are not even to ‘eat’ with ‘such a person’ (5:11). Paul speaks not about someone who lapses into these sins but someone whose *identity* is actually marked by one or more of these behaviours so that they can actually be labelled ‘a greedy person’ or a ‘drunkard’. That is, they engage in habitual, systemic,

one.⁴²

The act that he is calling them to is ultimately an act of love and not of hate, and a fruit of the spirit by denying the works of the flesh.⁴³ Much as a parent will correct an erring child for their good, so the church must correct members for their good and for the glory of Christ. Dale Johnson states in his book, *The Church as a Culture of Care*, “The Bible teaches that the church is responsible to God to steward the duties and authority he has given to us. The church, with Christ as its head, has been granted authority in the sphere of the human soul, by which to redeem, restore, heal, cleanse, and grow in purity—in a nutshell, to care for souls.”⁴⁴ The church is called to act rightly out of the granted authority over the human soul.

Since the responsibility of the church is to care for souls, that includes the hard part of removing ones who call themselves brothers but are known by their sin. By cleansing the lump, through purging the evil person, the church is acting in love. The church must distinguish between the believer and the unbeliever as an act of care for both the believer and the unbeliever. For the believer, keeping the church pure is a blessing and helps them not be drawn astray into sin. For the unbeliever in the church, confronting them with their sin is a great act of love. The church must seek to present members before Christ pure and holy, not filled with tolerated sin.⁴⁵ James 5:19-20 states, “My

unrepentant sinful behaviour. The Christian who gets drunk and repents or who commits an act of dishonesty and repents is not in view. This is a person, rather, who has two competing identities—they may be known as ‘brother or sister’ but their behaviour identifies them as an unbeliever. Genuine Christian believers, Paul says, are not to associate with such people.”

⁴² Mare, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 220. According to Mare, “Here Paul teaches that though it is logical for the church to exercise spiritual discipline over members in its fellowship, it is not for the church to judge the present unsaved society. By the Greek expression *tous exō* (“those without”) the apostle means those outside the church’s communion or fellowship. The words *tous esō* (“those within”) means those within the church’s fellowship. Paul now concludes (v. 13) on the basis of the preceding argument that the wicked man who had married his stepmother must be put out of the church. This he commands by quoting somewhat loosely from Deuteronomy 22:24 (a context of adultery) and from Deuteronomy 24:7 (a context of stealing). The strengthened form of the negative (*ouchi*, ‘not’) used with the indicative verb in a question expects a positive response: ‘Are you not to judge those inside [the church]?’ ‘Yes’ is the expected reply.”

⁴³ Ephesians 5:13-26.

⁴⁴ T. Dale Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 16.

⁴⁵ Romans 6:13.

brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” The reward for both the brother who wandered and the one who brings him back is great. If they are unrepentant, as stated in Matthew 18, they must be purged from the flock for their sake and for the sake of the other sheep.

In *The Church as a Culture of Care*, Johnson states:

I realize that churches are full of sinners, who can and do sin against each other. Far too many churches have a culture that has harbored or hidden the carnage of sin, instead of being a haven of restoration from sin’s destruction. But that doesn’t mean we should dismiss the necessity of the church. Instead, we need to repent and return to the purposes and design God established in order to see true restoration.⁴⁶

The church has the ability to be a “haven of restoration” or lead sinners to an eternity separated from Christ. The calling that Paul presents in 1 Corinthians 5 is filled with his deep desire for the church at Corinth to not only understand that sexual immorality is wrong, but that the church must require righteousness. The church is not after perfection, but rather the progressive sanctification in the life of its members.

The discussion about judgement, in verses 12-13, is in the context of believers versus unbelievers. Paul states that those inside the church may, and perhaps must, judge those inside the church, but they are not to judge those outside the church. Those outside of the church are to be judged by Christ. One of the roles of the church is to be a willing participant in the discipline and restoration of those living in a broken world.

AN ACT OF LOVE

The act of purging one who calls themselves brother but is caught in a life characterized by unrepentant sin is an act of love. Matthew 18:15-20 is the

⁴⁶ Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care*, 4.

most commonly cited passage on church discipline and states “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.” There is much rejoicing in heaven over that restored sheep. On the other hand, there ought to be mourning if that person refuses restoration. As verse two of 1 Corinthians 5 states “Ought you not rather to mourn?” Purging for the sake of the soul of the unrepentant sinner must be viewed as an act of love by the church and one in which the church willingly partners with Christ.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING

There are two aspects of 1 Corinthians 5 that is relevant for biblical counseling. The first is that of counseling the man caught in sexual immorality.⁴⁷ The second is the counsel given to the church. The biblical counselor must be willing to proclaim even the hard parts of the Word of God, such as handing someone over to Satan. Jay Adams states, “to encourage counselees to follow their feelings rather than to obey the Word of God is to side with Satan, to solidify the original problem, and to elicit the complications that come from further sinful behavior.”⁴⁸ The same is not only true for the feelings of the counselee, but of the counselor and of the church. All three must be willing to submit to the authority of Scripture instead of the feelings that rise in hard situations.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Guzik, “1 Corinthians 5 - Confronting Immorality in the Church,” *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, 2018, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-5/>. Scholars agree that it can be presumed that the woman with whom the man was having a sexually immoral relationship was not a believer. If she was, she would have been included in the need for purging, but as she is not addressed, there is a general agreement that she could not have been a believer, and thus, under the judgement of God instead of the church.

⁴⁸ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 121.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Kellemen, *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 21. Kellemen states that “The Word of God is sufficient. All we need for life and godliness, for salvation and sanctification has been given to us in the Bible. This doesn’t mean the Scriptures tell us everything we need to know about everything or that there is a verse somewhere in the Bible that names all our problems. The Bible is not exhaustive. But it is enough. We don’t have to turn away from God’s Word when we get to the really hard and messy stuff of life. The Bible has something to say to the self-loathing, the self-destructive,

Counseling the man caught in sexual immorality is about either correcting his ignorance and helping him to understand his sin, or pleading with him not to live in rebellion against Christ. This was true then and continues to be true now. The biblical counselor will seek to work with the brother (or sister) caught in sexual immorality for the sake of their soul. If that brother is unwilling to submit to the church, go through counseling, and repent, then they must be handed over to Satan. Jay Adams states “church discipline is not only required and necessary to the good order of a church that bears Christ’s name, but it is the source of peace in the church leading to learning and every other good thing. God is honored by church discipline, rightly administered, and is greatly dishonored by its absence.”⁵⁰ Biblically counseling the erring member in cases similar to those in 1 Corinthians 5 would most likely start publicly, as the man’s sin was known even beyond their city. For example, Paul is not writing to them from Corinth, he is writing from Ephesus which is over three-hundred miles away from Corinth.⁵¹ The biblical counselor would explain the process of church discipline to the counselee, the ramifications for the counselee, and call for repentance. If there is no willingness to repent then that person must be taken through the remaining steps of church discipline and ultimately purged from the church.

Counseling the church requires preparing the church to receive the repentant man back into the flock or to purge him through church discipline if he is unrepentant.⁵² As with the church in Corinth, the church of this era must willingly follow Scripture and purge the member. Very few churches in America are willing to do this. Mohler states, “the decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with

and the self-absorbed. We do not need to be afraid to preach and counsel from the Word of God into the darkest places of the human heart.”

⁵⁰ Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, Mich: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 18.

⁵¹ “The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians)” *Spark Notes*, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/newtestament/section7/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20general%20consensus,of%20Ephesus%20in%20Asia%20Minor>.

⁵² It is outside the scope of this particular work to explain why a counselor should be a church member and actively involved in the church. For this paper, the assumption will be that there is a general familiarity with biblical counseling and the theology that guides it.

minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.”⁵³

There has not been much written on church discipline specific for sexual immorality in the past few years and it appears that the reason why is because those claiming to be Christians no longer believe in purity.⁵⁴ A study by Pew Research stated, “Half of Christians say casual sex – defined in the survey as sex between consenting adults who are not in a committed romantic relationship – is sometimes or always acceptable.”⁵⁵ The study goes on to discuss how rates are climbing of those who claim to be Christian condoning sexual immorality. Along with that, a study by Lifeway Research reveals that fifty-five percent of respondents said that “a member has never been formally disciplined as far as I know.”⁵⁶ Over half of church pastors said they have never practiced church discipline. Furthermore, “more than 8 in 10 Protestant senior pastors say their church has not disciplined a member in the past year. More than half say they don’t know of a case when someone has been disciplined.”⁵⁷ The church needs to restore church discipline. This is one of the greatest tools of redemption and love that Christ has given to the church, but it is a neglected tool. The neglect of this tool is also why purging someone may seem too harsh. If barely any churches practice church discipline at all, it is doubtful the command to purge someone will be followed. This all seems harsh towards the church if that church has not participated in church discipline, but what is loving only seems harsh when there is an unwillingness to be obedient.

CONCLUSION

Sexual immorality is a common issue. It was so for the church at Corinth, for

⁵³ Al Mohler, “Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever, (Washington DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 43.

⁵⁴ Jeff Diamant, “Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable,” Pew Research Center, August 31, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bob Smietana, “Churches Rarely Reprimand Members, New Survey Shows,” Lifeway Research, April 5, 2018, <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/04/05/churches-rarely-reprimand-members-new-survey-shows/>.

⁵⁷ Bob Smietana, “Churches Rarely Reprimand Members, New Survey Shows.”

the people of Corinth, and it is a common issue today.⁵⁸ Few people maintain the boundaries of sexual purity. Yet (even with a rapid decline) two-thirds of Americans claim Christianity as their religion.⁵⁹ There are many statistics one could look at, but the reality is clear: sexual immorality is rampant and is permitted in the church.⁶⁰ The denial of the Word of God and the boundaries that Christ set in place for His glory and for the good of the church is what has led to arrogance and boasting, the destruction of sincerity and truth, and the unwillingness to purge evil from the church.

If someone desires to truly participate in biblical counseling, they must be part of a body that practices church discipline. If someone desires to follow Christ, they need to join a church that will follow Scripture in its entirety instead of just the parts that are appealing. The church is not to conform to this world, but help to transform people into the likeness of Christ.

The church today appears to keep the sexually immoral in the church. There is a lack of church discipline across the board and sexual immorality is now actively accepted. It is considered loving and kind to be accepting. The pride of the Corinthians appears to be the same pride that permeates the church today. The call that 1 Corinthians 5 gives is to purge the church of the sexually immoral and that is the same call today. To some it may appear obvious that the church is not to keep the sexually immoral within the fold, but when one looks at the statistics of sexual immorality and acceptance of it

⁵⁸ Lawrence B. Finer, “Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954–2003,” *Public Health Reports* 122, 1 (January 2007): 73–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335490712200110>. According to Finer, “By the exact age of 20 years, 77% of individuals had had sex, and 75% had had sex before marriage; 12% had married. By exact age 44, 99% of Americans had had sex, 95% had had sex before marriage, and 85% had married. At that age, 3.3% had abstained until marriage, and 1.3% had neither married nor had sex.”

⁵⁹ “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>. In this article, the authors noted that “[There] are roughly 23 million more adults in the U.S. than there were in 2009 (256 million as of July 1, 2019, according to the Census Bureau). About two-thirds of them (65%) identify as Christians, according to 2018 and 2019 Pew Research Center RDD estimates. This means that there are now roughly 167 million Christian adults in the U.S. (with a lower bound of 164 million and an upper bound of 169 million, given the survey’s margin of error).”

⁶⁰ The author of this paper found no sources on the statistics of sexual immorality in the church, but the previously mentioned research done by Pew Research states that half of those who claim to be Christians find sex outside of marriage acceptable.

among professing Christians, the lack of biblical standards becomes apparent. What should seem obvious is covered with pride and confuses the church with the world.

Regarding the sexually immoral woman, Proverbs 7:27 states, “her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.” The church must choose if it is on the side of Christ and following His Word in its entirety, or on the side of Satan, supporting sin, and unwilling to purge evil from its midst. The call is not just to purge, but to do so because one is whole-heartedly pursuing Christ.

BIBLICAL SEXUAL ETHICS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH: A Necessary Course of Instruction

John M. Holmes¹

INTRODUCTION

The Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s accelerated a shift in Western attitudes and public policy concerning gender identity, gender expression, and sexual freedom. Three main ideas dominated its public discourse: contraception's ability to separate sex from childbearing, easy divorce separating sex and childbearing from marriage, and the call to eliminate all distinctions between men and women except those differences an individual embraces.² National discourse on sex continues to impact American society's moral and social fabric today, influencing attitudes towards sexual freedom and views on the biological family.³ The U.S. Census in 2020 showed that

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² Jennifer R. Morse, *The Sexual State: How Elite Ideologies Are Destroying Lives and Why the Church Was Right All Along*, (Charlotte: TAN Books, 2018), chap. 2. For agreement on the sexual revolution and western attitudes, see Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 22–34.

³ Bailey, Beth. "Prescribing the Pill: Politics, Culture, and the Sexual Revolution in America's Heartland." *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 4 (July 1, 1997): 827–56. Bailey attempts to document the "multiple sites of power, languages of negotiation, and critical structural changes" in which the birth control debate occurred. As one example of shifts in social acceptance, see Jason Rantz, "School board director to host 9-year-olds for classes on sexual pleasure, gender ID at sex shop," 770 KTTH Radio, July 4, 2022, <https://mynorthwest.com/3539919/rantz-school-board-director-sex-classes-shop-jenn-mason/>. Politically elected Washington state school board director, Jenn Mason, teaches classes directed at 9-to-12 year olds on sexual anatomy for pleasure and safer practices for all kinds of sexual activities. Mason says "there's no such thing as 'real' sex" because it is self-defined.

the number of children living with only their mothers has doubled in the past fifty years and that nearly one-third of U.S. children do not live with two parents, while almost half of all U.S. adults aged 55 to 64 no longer remained married.⁴ Professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Daniel Heimbach, argues that sexual morality is the most crucial moral-spiritual issue facing our time. A cultural shift towards pagan morality, Heimbach says, will eventually lead to complete social collapse.⁵ Christian philosopher and author Francis Schaeffer likewise lamented the legality of abortion, the entertainment industry's promotion of sexual perversion, and the attacks on marriage and family life under the banners of sexual freedom and personal happiness.⁶ Schaeffer urged the church to urgently talk about these issues, fearful of the day when "all morality becomes relative, the law becomes arbitrary, and society moves towards disintegration."⁷ Feminist calls to "bring an end to God" and "castrate Christianity by abolishing [its pillars of] supermale arrogance: the myths of sin and salvation" indicate that opponents of biblical sexuality do not intend to remain silent.⁸ Although the secular world emphasizes sexual fulfillment and identity as "the essence of human happiness" that is justified by science, individual freedoms, and the need to eliminate sexual distinctions to achieve equality, the church is called to teach a different sexual ethic. An examination of Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians 3–6 to grow in Christ and guard against impurity by avoiding

⁴ "Families and Households," U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/time-series/demo/families-and-households/ch-1.pdf>; See also, "Number of Kids Living Only With Their Mothers Has Doubled in 50 Years," U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2022, [https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/04/number-of-children-living-only-with-their-mothers-has-doubled-in-past-50years.html#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20America's%2072.9,with%20mother%20only%20\(21%25\)](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/04/number-of-children-living-only-with-their-mothers-has-doubled-in-past-50years.html#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20America's%2072.9,with%20mother%20only%20(21%25)).

⁵ Daniel Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 39. Heimbach says that sexual morality is the pivot point on which America's cultural foundations will erode, leading to teen pregnancy, crime, drugs, murder, poverty, family breakdown, homosexuality, gender role confusion, weakened law, attacks on family life, threats to the sanctity of life and more.

⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, (Westchester, IL.: Crossway, 1984), 20, 22–23, 101–103, 106–112, 188, 191.

⁷ Carl F. Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization* (Westchester, IL.: Crossway, 1988), 15, 19. Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, (Westchester, IL.: Crossway, 1984), 22–23. Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, (Downers Grove, IL.: Intervarsity Press, 1970), 15–6, 81.

⁸ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1973), 71–2. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaphysics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1978), xi. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1979), 90.

spiritual immaturity and the folly of human wisdom demonstrates that churches should instruct biblical sexual ethics by teaching God's design for gender, marriage, sex, and procreation to help Christians respond to the social narratives of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual freedom.⁹

BRIEF BIBLICAL POSITIONS ON FOUR GODLESS NARRATIVES

Divorced from God, no shared absolute standard exists for the atheist to come to an agreement, much less do morally “the right thing.”¹⁰ For such a person, nature holds all authority, although it is “self-originating” and “without purpose.”¹¹ Without God, man-centered desires and individual freedom reign with the scepter of relativism.¹² Either naturalistic altruism or personal happiness motivates the natural man’s behavior.¹³

Conversely, God’s moral character, as evidenced within Scripture, serves as the universal standard of morality for orthodox Christianity. Unlike the atheist, God’s special revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ is a reality for

⁹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2020), 222, 261. Trueman observed that “Freud’s emphasis on sexual fulfillment as the essence of human happiness also leads to a reconfiguration of human destiny.”

¹⁰ Kerry Walters, *Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Continuum, 2010), 33–36. One rebuttal is that godless objective morality is possible but it is ‘needs based,’ and not absolute. This does not objectively persuade in an absolute sense why we *ought* to show love by providing a starving man food. Walters argues, “In keeping with the naturalistic worldview endorsed by atheists, all that’s needed to establish an objective morality is an analysis of the sorts of creatures we are, the kinds of needs we have, and the best ways to meet those needs [...] because what makes a given act morally good or evil is in part determined by context. Once divorced from religion, values can still be objective. But they cease to be absolute.”

¹¹ Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007), 476. About American Atheists, “What is Atheism?” *American Atheists*, July 2, 2022, <https://www.atheists.org/activism/resources/about-atheism/>. Their only shared belief is that each person has “a lack of belief in gods.”

¹² Yuriy Nikshych, *So You’re an Atheist: Now What?* (New York: Algora, 2015), 54. “There are no tenets in atheism, [...] it is now up to us as individuals to create our own morality, we can [do whatever] we so choose.”

¹³ W.D. Hamilton, “The genetical evolution of social behavior,” *J Theor Biol*, 1964 7(1):17–52. RL Trivers, “The evolution of reciprocal altruism,” *Q Rev Biol*. 1971 46(1):35–57. R. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), chap. 1.

a Christian. Only Jesus flawlessly exhibited a righteous life (Hebrews 2:17–8; 4:15). The nature of man is evil.¹⁴ Therefore, biblically-based sexual ethics views human sin and depravity as the root cause of immorality—not man’s circumstances or ignorance of moral conduct.¹⁵ Among the many different ethical and moral issues debated between Christians and Atheists, four social and sexual narratives dominate public debate today. A brief biblical position follows for each topic.

First, concerning gender identity and expression, two sexes—expressing masculinity and femininity—were intentionally created and purposed by God in Scripture. Professor of Christian ethics at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Alan Branch, says that the “gift of gender is not an accident of evolution or a mere social construction.”¹⁶ The Bible explains in Genesis 1:26–31 that mankind is made both male and female and in the image of God. Linguistically, the Hebrew word *ādām* (אָדָם) can refer to only a man, or it may refer to male and female as “mankind.”¹⁷ *Anarthrous* in verse twenty-six, אָדָם appears in verse twenty-seven as הָאָדָם (with the article), prompting Senior Professor of Old Testament at Trinity College, Gordon Wenham, to suggest how it foreshadows the blessing of fertility to be announced in verse twenty-eight.¹⁸ Also notable is how the first two clauses of verse 1:27 emphasize the divine image in man using a chiasm, while the third clause explicitly specifies that women bear the divine image.¹⁹

Distinguished professor of Old Testament at Southern Baptist Theological

¹⁴ See, Genesis 6:5, 8:21, Ecclesiastes 9:3, Proverbs 28:26, Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:19, Romans 3:12, Ephesians 4:17–19.

¹⁵ David Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, B&H Studies in Biblical Ethics Series, ed. Daniel Heimbach, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 2–7, 25. Atheists sometimes favor forms of consequentialism.

¹⁶ Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 41.

¹⁷ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 14.

¹⁸ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*. Edited by Verlyn D. Verbrugge. Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 67. “Anarthrous” means no article exists, which impacts how a noun, adjective, adverbial participle, or predicate adjective functions within Koine Greek.

¹⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary*, (Dallas, TX: Word, Inc., 1987), 32.

Seminary, Kenneth Mathews, says scholars contending for a bisexual man cannot substantiate their claim in light of God's act to create the female in Genesis 2:22 and His earlier commands to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" in chapter one, verse twenty-eight.²⁰ Some scholars argue that Adam and Eve's defiance by eating the fruit contrary to God's direction somehow altered the image of God in man (i.e., Adam's corrupted image).²¹ Mathews claims that despite mankind's mutiny and punishment, from Genesis 5 forward, mankind continues in God's procreative image through sex between man and woman (cf. Genesis 5:3). After the flood, human life and childbearing remain preserved. Humans uniquely procreate and bear God's image within His divine order as male and female.²²

Second, concerning marriage, God designed and instituted marriage in Genesis 2:24. The Hebrew word for "cling, cleave to" (קָרַב) is covenantal language.²³ The New Testament affirms this picture in Matthew 19:3–5 and Ephesians 5:31.²⁴ One man leaves his parents in a lifelong commitment to one woman and consummates it within a "one flesh" heterosexual union via intercourse. The State has no authority to dissolve the union on its terms (Matthew 19:6–9). Sexual relations strengthen marital covenants and also enable the potential for new life.²⁵ Thus any other form of marriage

²⁰ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, Vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 173.

²¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 569.

²² Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, Vol. 1A. Mathews notes how the "psalmist recognizes the superiority of human life and its 'glory and honor' in creation. Human life's [glory] rests not in man's ontological features but in his commission as lord over the terrestrial world (Ps 8:5–8 [6–9])." This glory (*kābōd*), says Mathews, is distinguished in the Old Testament as the attribute of the Lord God. "It is bestowed on humans, indicating man's appointment [to dominion] as the Lord's ruling sonship [albeit diminished by sin]."

²³ Gary R. Gromacki, "Why Be Concerned about Same-Sex Marriage?" *Journal of Ministry and Theology* Volume 9, no. 2 (2005): 76–77. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 209. K. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, *The New American Commentary*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 223.

²⁴ Hebrews 13:4, 1 Corinthians 7, Romans 7:1–4, Ephesians 5:22–33, Colossians 3:18–19, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:6; 2:4–5, 1 Peter 3:1–7. The marriage union always occurs between a husband and wife in the New Testament.

²⁵ Biblical marriage portrays a Gospel picture: in a make-it-and-never-break-it covenant, husband and bride partake in an exclusive conjugal union that creates the possibility for new life. Consider, J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide* (Dallas, TX: Spence, 2003),

(homosexual) is not valid, and any conjugal act outside this bond is deemed sinful (1 Corinthians 6:9, 18–20, 7:1–40, Hebrews 13:4, Matthew 5:27, 32).

Although some argue that marriage is a social construct and that monogamous homosexual relationships constitute a valid union, orthodox Christianity has historically adhered to Scriptural authority when contesting this notion.²⁶ Efforts to redefine marriage either elevate human self-interests above Scripture, deny God, or embrace a severe misunderstanding. The Bible's design for families remains the best way to raise healthy and non-delinquent children.²⁷

Third, concerning procreation and abortion, all life is God-created and valued. Contrary to the widespread public narrative that abortion is a fixed “human right,” children represent a heritage and blessing of the LORD and not a burden (1 Samuel 2:6, Psalm 127:3). Genesis 1–2 does not say “be fruitful and multiple only when I find a six-figure salary,” or “stop at two.” Birth control enables women to overcome the former constraints of natural conception and childbearing. However, the command of Jesus is to continually seek “the kingdom of God and His righteousness” first and not selfish gain (contra feminist opinion that abortion enables sexual freedom and economic equality between genders).²⁸ Further, the sixth commandment prohibits murder, and abortion usurps a prerogative belonging only to God—death (Exodus 20:13). Some argue that Scripture excuses abortion before a child is fully developed. They wrongly ignore that God’s Word says He creates and sustains life beginning at conception (Genesis 3:16, Psalm 139:13–6, Ruth 4:13).

86–7. Contra conjugal sex (making one flesh out of two), “when a man puts the part of himself which represents life into the cavity of another man which represents decay and expulsion, at the most basic of all possible levels he is saying, ‘Life be swallowed in death.’ We cannot overwrite such meanings with different ones just because we want to.”

²⁶ Albert Mohler, “God and the Gay Christian: A Response to Matthew Vines,” *Southern Seminary Magazine* 82 (Summer 2014), 14. Despite so-called revisionist Christian arguments, homosexuality has never been embraced historically.

²⁷ Jane Anderson, “The impact of family structure on the health of children: Effects of divorce,” *The Linacre Quarterly* vol. 81, 4 (2014): 378–87. “Nearly three decades of research [...] demonstrates that children living with their married, biological parents consistently have better physical, emotional, and academic well-being. [Except marital violence], children [of biological families] fair better.”

²⁸ ζητεῖτε, Matthew 6:33, present, active, imperative verb (command to “[keep on] seeking” is ongoing action).

They also discount the importance of being formed by God and in His image (Genesis 1:26–7, 9:6). Scripture values human life (Matthew 10:30, Genesis 9:6, Luke 12:7) and recognizes an unborn child as a person (Exodus 21:22–3, Luke 1:39–45).²⁹

Fourth, concerning sexual freedom, biblical sexual morality rejects all forms of sexual activity outside the confines of marriage. Therefore, the church laments that in 2019, 40% of U.S. high school students engaged in sexual activity before marriage.³⁰ Biblically, all premarital relations must remain nonsexual.³¹ How and why people participate in intimate relations, express their gender, or identify themselves can all fall prey to social narratives further magnified by self-idolatry—the elevation of one’s desires and happiness above God and His Word. Modern society’s worship of self and demand for sexual freedoms constitutes evil and idolatrous sins resonant of those historically committed by Israel and condemned by God. The Bible decries divorce and condemns adultery, fornicating, homosexual activity, prostitution, polygamy, and polyamorous relationships, as well as forms of non-conforming gender identities and expressions. The New Testament’s usage of the Greek word πορνεία (porneia) for sexual immorality is inclusive of all of the above behaviors within its semantic range as well as various other kinds of “unsanctioned” sexual behaviors.³² In sum, social narratives can never justify sexual immorality. Neither can the Bible wink at sexual freedom resultant from any scientific or

²⁹ John Holmes, “The Sexual Ethics of Planned Parenthood” (Research Paper, DR30020 Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO, January 23, 2022), 1–21. Brian Bolton, “God Is Pro-Abortion: The Bible Says So. (Cover Story),” *American Atheist* 54, no. 3 (2016 3rd Quarter 2016): 6–9. Bolton believes “the bible does not support today’s fundamentalist Christian assault on women’s reproductive rights.” He commits the above errors and misreads Exodus 21:22–3, stating incorrectly that “while the Bible requires the death penalty for 60 specified criminal violations, abortion is not among them” and that the “[God] of the Holy Bible does not care about the lives of pregnant mothers-to-be and their unborn children.”

³⁰ Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3. Each day, about 7,000 U.S. teenagers experience sexual intercourse for the first time [and most do by age of 20]. See also, National Center for Disease Control, “High School Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) Data,” July 3, 2022, <https://nccd.cdc.gov/Youthonline/>. In 2019, 38.4% of U.S. high schoolers had sexual intercourse.

³¹ Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 19:4–5, 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5, 1 Corinthians 7:2, Colossians 3:5, Acts 15:20, Genesis 2:24.

³² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854.

biological framework—even if endorsed by the State.³³ The doctrine of *stare decisis*, or where the State has sanctioned legal precedent, does not supersede biblical authority.³⁴ For example, even though the U.S. Supreme Court's legal reasoning recorded historical evidence of the structural variety in marriage spanning millennia as one of its reasons for justifying same-sex marriage, the Bible still makes it clear that both Jesus and the apostle Paul affirmed the Old Testament's positions on same-sex associations. The biblical claim remains that the *μαλακός* ("effeminate") and *ἀρσενοκοίτης* ("homosexuals") will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.³⁵

EXHORTATIONS FROM THE PASTORAL HEART OF PAUL PERTINENT TO THE INSTRUCTION OF SEXUAL ETHICS

Paul's letters to the Corinthians represent the most detailed correspondence between an apostle and a local church in the New Testament, providing great insights into both Paul's theology and gospel application to the situations of life occurring in Corinth.³⁶ In chapters 3–6, Paul instructs believers in Corinth on how to live a life that brings honor and glory to God. In doing so, he exhorts the church to make two tasks a foremost priority. First, believers must grow in Christ, which means they must grow in spiritual maturity. Second, believers must guard against impurity, adhering to sexual ethics that glorify God. The Corinthian church remained mesmerized by the world's

³³ "All of Scripture is inspired by God and authoritative for [their] life" as stated in 1 Timothy 3:16–17. Feelings associated with sex or sexual orientation do not overrule the Bible as authoritative truth in these matters.

³⁴ Alan Goldman, "The Force of Precedent in Legal, Moral, and Empirical Reasoning," *Synthese* 71, no. 3 (1987): 323–46. John Holmes, "Same-sex Marriage: Proponent Views and a Biblical Response," (Research Paper, DR30020 Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO, January 23, 2022), 1–21.

³⁵ John Holmes, "The Sexual Ethics of Planned Parenthood," 1–21. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 135, 613. "1 Cor. 6:9 ('male prostitutes' NRSV is too narrow a rendering; 'sexual pervert' REB is too broad)" On *ἀρσενοκοίτης*, "Paul's strictures against same-sex activity cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of alleged temple prostitution or limited to contract w. boys for homoerotic service." *Μαλακός* refers to males whom other males sodomize (a passive partner), and *ἀρσενοκοίτης* is the "one who assumes the dominant role in same-sex activity."

³⁶ Mark, Taylor. *1 Corinthians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Vol. 28. The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 19.

wisdom, but Paul remains determined to orient Corinth back to their identity as Christians, new creations set apart from the world in Christ, to live as God's holy people.³⁷ People may question the legitimacy of using Scripture's sexual ethics given the cultural distance of the Bible from today. However, arguments from silence (e.g., the Bible does not explicitly discuss the morality of passionate kissing) lack merit because when the entirety of Scripture is considered—which Paul attests is authoritative (2 Timothy 3:16–17)—we find that a clear biblical sexual ethic exists concerning gender, marriage, sex, and procreation.³⁸ As such, exhortations from the pastoral heart of Paul to grow in Christ and guard against impurity reveal the importance of teaching God's design for gender, marriage, sex, and procreation so that members may respond (both in word and deed) to the social narratives of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual freedom.³⁹

GROW IN CHRIST

One way Paul exhorts believers to grow in Christ is to not fall prey to the problem of spiritual immaturity in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3. His burden toward Corinth resulted from the fact that some believers in Corinth behaved like children, and Paul had to “coddle” them as infants instead of relating to them

³⁷ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 21.

³⁸ Gerald Hiestand, “A Biblical-Theological Approach to Premarital Sexual Ethics: Or, What Saint Paul Would Say about ‘Making Out,’” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 1, no. 1 (June 2014): 13–34.

³⁹ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler. *Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012. Albeit a book of unorthodox and liberal arguments designed to shift Catholic beliefs, Salzman recognizes a “disconnect between many of the Church’s absolute sexual norms and [social/cultural] theological and intellectual developments” that have created an impetus for ongoing instruction in sexual ethics. Jones, Stanton L. “How to Teach Sex: Seven Realities That Christians in Every Congregation Need to Know.” *Christianity Today* 55, no. 1 (January 2011): 34–39. Stanton says, “We must educate and shape our young people, indeed all of our people in a deeper and truer understanding of sex. Evangelical Christians need to learn to celebrate and embrace their sexuality and to live out their sexuality in holiness, and thus to have no occasion for abortion.” Mary S. Ford, “By Whose Authority? Sexual Ethics, Postmodernism, and Orthodox Christianity,” *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 26, no. 3 (December 2020): 298–324. Ford takes the threat of theological error seriously, saying that Christians “[instruct] the ‘Good News’ revealed by Christ, and confirmed in His Church, [to our] sexually confused surrounding society and culture.

as spiritually mature adults.⁴⁰ While the context in this passage is jealousy and strife as it reflects a spiritually immature state of mind, Paul's more significant point is that their actions proved them to act like fools. By using the term "solid food," Paul implies that they should have progressed toward learning the more advanced teachings of the gospel among the mature (1 Corinthians 2:6). He is not contrasting two diets but instead "the true food of the Gospel (whether milk or meat), and the synthetic substitutes which the Corinthians have [wrongly] preferred."⁴¹

Many Christian laypersons today continue to digest Scripture with their bottle in hand without advancing toward a more mature understanding of the gospel. Trading doctrine for application or adopting relativistic interpretations (e.g., "what does this mean to you?" versus "what does the text say?") negatively impacts spiritual growth and the ability to live a godly life.⁴² Modern Christians live in a time with unprecedented technology and the most significant number of understandable Bible translations yet available to mankind. Given this fact, distinguished professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, Craig Blomberg, says that 21st-century Christians should prove themselves one of the most biblically knowledgeable societies in church history. He cautions that when church knowledge of sound doctrine becomes anemic, congregations become less able to spot, assess, and reject false teaching or less willing to address immoral behaviors.⁴³ Former professor of evangelism and preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kenneth Chafin, says that "too often [the church has played the role of the frightened] and not that of the people who gather weekly to worship the God of all true wisdom."⁴⁴ Yet, in these verses, Paul patiently models exhorting the most immature in Corinth to grow in their communion with God, to understand His will, and to make

⁴⁰ Timothy Brookins, and Bruce W. Longenecker, *1 Corinthians 10-16: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 65.

⁴¹ M. Hooker, "Hard Sayings: 1 Cor. 3:2," *Theology* 69 (1966): 21. See also J. Francis, "As Babes in Christ—Some Proposals Regarding 1 Cor. 3:1-3," *JSNT* 7 (1980): 41-60. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 125. Fee says "Corinthians do not need a change in diet but a change in perspective." Milk implies elementary knowledge; meat implies advanced knowledge of the Gospel.

⁴² James Wicker, "Using Hebrew and Greek Correctly," (Lecture, Biblical Hermeneutics, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, January 18, 2018).

⁴³ Blomberg, Craig, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 70.

⁴⁴ Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Corinthians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 47.

sense of the truths of Scripture for applying them in daily living.⁴⁵

While individual Christians bear responsibility for their spiritual growth, the local gathered body of believers must still instruct Christian doctrine. Not only does a gathering of fellow Holy-Spirit-filled Christians help detect and guard against theological error, but they also can encourage, help, pray for, or even admonish one another in the situations of daily life (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Norman Stanton wrote, “Lordship [salvation] of Jesus Christ is the singular, great confession of the Christian faith [and] Jesus [guides and builds an accountable] covenant community (Acts 1:24-25).”⁴⁶ As the Corinthian’s father in Christ Jesus through the gospel, Paul urges believers in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17 to imitate him by learning his ways in Christ Jesus—that Paul “teaches everywhere in every church.” Paul understood the non-negotiable imperative for Christ-followers given by Jesus: “make disciples.”⁴⁷ In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus elaborated by saying “go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching [them] to observe [everything that I have commanded you].” Also, the participle “teaching” appears in the Greek present tense, active voice, indicating an ongoing and continuous action applicable today (i.e., keep on teaching and do not stop).⁴⁸

A second way that Paul exhorts believers to grow in Christ is to build on the foundation of Christ as God’s co-worker (1 Corinthians 3:9-16). Church members, and therefore the entire church, should reflect the holy character of God.⁴⁹ Practically speaking, maturity requires studying God’s Word—the whole word—without neglecting selective parts so Christians may discern the truth for holy living. Paul explained to the church at Ephesus that Christ had gifted the church with teachers to “equip the saints for the work of ministry and building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). So, given Paul’s guidance to the Church at Corinth to imitate him in Christ, the implication is that church leaders will not leave spiritually immature believers in a corner unto themselves. Imitating Paul, the spiritually mature in the church should

⁴⁵ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 69.

⁴⁶ Norman Stanton, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church*, 33, 36.

⁴⁷ μαθητεύσατε (“make disciples”), Matt. 28:19, an aorist, active, imperative (command) verb form μαθητεύω.

⁴⁸ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 241.

⁴⁹ John Hammett, “Church Membership, Church Discipline, and the Nature of the Church,” In *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, ed. John Hammett, and Benjamin Merkle, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), chap.1.

help disciple the less spiritually mature to learn the ways of Jesus—“ways” that Paul says he teaches everywhere in every church and that he sent Timothy to remind them about (1 Corinthians 4:16–7).

Taylor observes that while the discussion in 1 Corinthians 3:9–11 references leaders involved in the building of the church, the entire church is in view later in chapters 8–14.⁵⁰ Thus, leaders should take responsibility for leading the church as a whole by instructing them in sound doctrine. Human failure to obey godly instruction is not a pragmatic excuse for not teaching a particular topic. It is God who leads and sets the standard. In verse nine, the word θεοῦ (“of God”) appears emphatically positioned repeatedly in a series of three repeated occurrences (“θεοῦ [...] θεοῦ [...] θεοῦ”). As God’s fellow workers, God’s field, and God’s building, the bottom line is that God owns it all, builds it all, sets the standards, and executes it all using human agency within His church. Chapter three, verses 16–7, explain that while God’s spirit empowers Christians to serve, there remains an expectation that the church faithfully builds on the foundation set by Paul while remaining holy and pure. Blomberg notes that these verses indicate that the church is not “just any building” but the body of Corinthian believers. The Christian fellowship embodies the Spirit of God, and they must walk in the Spirit, remaining holy and exercising individual spiritual gifts—such as teaching and preaching—for the edification of the entire body.

A third way that Paul exhorts believers to grow in Christ is to imitate Paul and Timothy’s faithfulness in Christ (1 Corinthians 4:14–7, 20–1). Paul admonishes the Corinthian church to imitate him with pastoral concern as their father in Christ. Taylor suggests that given Paul’s life with Christ and his role as the church’s founder in Corinth, he had unique authority to say, “Become imitators of me” in admonishment. The word γίνεσθε (“be or become”) appears in the present middle imperative as a command that is a continuous and habitual action. Paul commands, “Become imitators of me [and do not stop!]” The verb νουθετῶ (“to admonish/warn”) appears in the present active participle, expressing Paul’s purpose of continuously counseling and instructing them to cease or avoid their improper course of conduct

⁵⁰ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 105. Taylor says, “The thematic link between 3:10–17 and chaps. 8–14 is in the “building” language. See also, David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003) who notes that “to build upon” refers “to preaching and instruction (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; cf. Ephesians 2:19–22).”

like little children.⁵¹ Instruction is not a one-time event. Paul writes not to embarrass or shame but to issue an ongoing warning they must heed.

Also, Timothy is dearly loved and counted as a faithful child. Paul desires his children in Corinth to model Timothy's faithfulness, as Paul states in verse seventeen that Timothy will work to remind them of Paul's ways. Robertson and Plummer contend that "Timothy was sent to remind children who were equally beloved, but not equally faithful, of their duties towards [Paul, their spiritual father]."⁵² Hard to miss is Timothy's physical presence among God's people for instructing the church on his ways in the pattern of Christ in verse seventeen.⁵³ Instructional letter-writing cannot replace in-person servant-leaders stewarding and teaching the church in God's mysteries (1 Corinthians 4:1). Blomberg suggests that Paul's calls for imitation have references to the ancient world where sons learned a trade from their fathers by seeing it modeled. Daily life itself, lived alongside one another nearby, became the apprenticeship's classroom.⁵⁴

It is unmistakable how seriously Paul considered the need for the church in Corinth to grow in Christ by becoming spiritually mature imitators of him as God's co-worker. Seemingly influenced by Corinth's serious moral failures (detailed in later chapters), Paul indicates He will either come to them in love or with a rod of discipline in chapter four, verse twenty-one. The three ways Paul urges Christians to grow in Christ apply to the instruction of sexual morality. In all churches everywhere, Paul aims to see God glorified in body and spirit through holy and faithful living. For this to occur, churches must rid themselves of sexual immorality and self-idolatry, aided by habitual, ongoing, systematic instruction of biblical sexual ethics.

GUARD AGAINST IMPURITY

One way Paul exhorts believers to guard against impurity is to avoid the folly of human wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:18–23). This requires first that a

⁵¹ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 679.

⁵² Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., ICC, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914), 90.

⁵³ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 126.

⁵⁴ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 91.

person understands why human wisdom is sometimes wrong and how it may lead to impurity (sin). If the church does not speak or train about such issues, the world will not hesitate to tell its side. Consider three famous psychologists and at least one anthropologist who influenced sexual and social narratives over the past hundred years. First, Abraham Maslow embraced the notion that “universal human values” could be identified in human biology and that “by following the God within [ourselves], we can discover a universal set of values.”⁵⁵ Second, Maslow’s friend and cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead, thought that young people were the key to changing the social order. Cultural relativism fueled her vision of sexual utopia, leading her to argue that “teenage sexuality could be wholesome and beautiful if only parents and ‘society’ would stop interfering [and allow them to self-actualize].”⁵⁶ Third, Tim Leary, a proponent of psychedelic drugs, on the other hand, hoped to “destroy organized religion.” He projected that through LSD usage, psychologists could become “arbiters of social values [and serve as replacements for ministers, policymakers, teachers, and others with cultural influence].”⁵⁷ While *Playboy* magazine lauded Leary’s promises of orgasms and psychedelic gay conversion therapy, Leary’s counterculture thinking on personality and social relationships had a lasting impact.⁵⁸ One can argue that two pills fueled the 1960s and 70s sexual revolution—birth control and LSD—and more than anyone else in his era, Leary inspired millions to experiment with LSD.⁵⁹ Fourth, Carl Rogers argued that feelings determined truth. “Neither the Bible nor the prophets [...] neither the revelations of God nor man [...] can take precedence over my own direct experience.”⁶⁰ After the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary consulted with and subsequently adopted Roger’s ideas on free love and the open expression of sexuality, the organization fell into chaos when more than three hundred ladies resigned from the

⁵⁵ John Babler and Nicolas Ellen, *Counseling by the Book*, Revised and Expanded ed., (Fort Worth, TX: CTW, 2014), 50.

⁵⁶ Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa : A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth of Western Civilization*, (New York: William and Morrow, 1929), 11. Joyce Milton, *The Road to Malpsychia: Humanistic Psychology and Our Discontents*, (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2002), 10, 29.

⁵⁷ Milton, 82, 96.

⁵⁸ The September 1966 *Playboy* interview with Leary is reprinted in Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy*, (Berkeley, CA: Ronin, 1998). “In a carefully prepared, loving LSD session, a woman will inevitably have several hundred orgasms.”

⁵⁹ Don Lattin, *Timothy Leary’s legacy, and the rebirth of psychedelic research*, Harvard Library Bulletin 28 (1), Spring 2017: 65-74.

⁶⁰ Milton,135, 144.

organization and turned to either “new religions” or adopted various forms of inward “self-expression” as a basis for universal truth.⁶¹ Such ideas infiltrated and influenced all aspects of society, from Government policy, religious beliefs, children’s TV shows, education, social work, and business practices worldwide.⁶² Social programs such as character training, child morality experiments, and “self-esteem training” that promised cures for society find their origins in one or more of the humanistic ideas of these psychologists. At one point, a former president of the American Psychological Association remarked, “Corporations, educators, students, and above all, taxpayers need to begin to ask hard questions about why they allow psychologists to dictate their values through experiments in thought reform.”⁶³

A second way Paul exhorts believers to guard against impurity is to practice formative instruction and corrective discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Sexual immorality must never find tolerance within the body of believers. Paul pronounces judgment on sexual immorality within the church. He gives his rationale to the church in Corinth, but just as problematically as the reported sin, Corinth failed to monitor and address sin in the congregation properly.

⁶¹ William R. Coulson, “Full Hearts and Empty Heads: The Price of Certain Recent Programs in Humanistic Psychology,” a conference on *Tasks of Personalistic Psychology*, held at Franciscan University, Steubenville, Ohio, 20 October 1994. Roger’s use of “encounter groups” promoted an idea that personal authenticity required “self-expression” according to one’s inner desires without the yoke of religious dogma. See also, Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahad, eds., *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1985), 13, 328.

⁶² Milton, 54–59, 66, 75, 82, 90, 96, 112, 137, 145, 151, 196–234, 242–63. From America to Japan, the humanistic beliefs of these men influenced education, applied branches of psychology, management, and religion (inclusive of protestant, Catholic, Jewish faiths). Either atheistic or pantheistic, these men adopted antinomian views and sought to replace all sacred doctrine with man’s wisdom. New Age mysticism resulted from saturation of these concepts into society. Rogers, found himself courted by the U.S. Department of Education’s liaison to *Sesame Street* and held considerable sway among American Psychologists. As their theories became widely adopted, activists with humanistic agendas brought different types of social agendas to schools, the workplace, and businesses. For example, “diversity training” (co-opted for supporting LGBTQ equality) is virtually ubiquitous among U.S. companies today. The effect became a brainwashing of humanistic ideas across society, supporting the rise of new religions, feminism, sexual freedom, the elimination of gender identity and expression, as well as an affinity for socialism. Efforts to re-write history textbooks and other forms of revisionism all find influence under the humanistic ideas that self-actualizing, personal feelings, and happiness derive from one’s inner true self. Leary notably stated on p. 96 that “once traditional religion caught on, it would be too late.”

⁶³ Milton, 204. James Nolan, *The Therapeutic State*, (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 2-4.

How the church reacted to this affair proved as terrible as the affair itself.⁶⁴ Christians should strive for holiness as God is holy. Jesus expects purity in His church (Matthew 5:48). Although Jesus shed His blood to pay sin's penalty, Christians cannot ignore sin (Hebrews 10:19). Clinging to sin above obedience to God represented humanity's most significant transgression.⁶⁵ Christ's atoning death for sin demands faith from a pure heart (1 Timothy 5). The body of Christ is accountable when sin occurs in the 'camp' (Numbers 5:3). The church's authority is over its membership, as Paul explains. Thus, membership must consist of regenerate believers, equipped for holy living, guarding against sin's leavened dough-like spread (1 Corinthians 5:6).⁶⁶ Both Jesus and Paul set an expectation that churches will add, disciple (equip the saints), and at times remove people from the body of Christ through the use of formative church instruction and corrective discipline.⁶⁷ Paul spoke of his intentions, saying, "I wrote to you in a letter not to [...]," "I teach everywhere in every church," and commanding "remove the evil person from among you" (1 Corinthians 4:14, 17; 5:9, 11).⁶⁸ Even though churches do not always well understand and practice church discipline, and many completely ignore Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 altogether, the expectations for holy living within Christ's church have not changed.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 104–5.

⁶⁵ Jerry Pelfrey, "Pastors, Computers and XXX," In *Practical Aspects of Pastoral Theology*, ed. Christopher Cone, (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009), 364–365.

⁶⁶ See Ralph N. Cone Jr., "A Biblical Model for Church Growth," In *Practical Aspects of Pastoral Theology*, ed. Christopher Cone, (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009), chap. 8. Also, Luke 24:44, "Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." The authoritative claims found in the salvific message of Scripture require a human response of obedience.

⁶⁷ Bobby Jamieson, *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline: 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides*, Edited by Mark Dever, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 17. "Preaching, teaching, prayer, reading, and memorizing the Bible, corporate worship, accountability relationships, and godly oversight by pastors and elders are all forms of discipline. Theologians often call this kind of discipline 'formative discipline' because it forms our character to be more like Christ. In a narrower sense, discipline is when we point out fellow church members' sin and encourage them to repent and pursue holiness by God's grace. [We] often call this kind of discipline 'corrective discipline.' It means correcting fellow church members when they begin to veer from the path of following Christ."

⁶⁸ ἔξαρατε from ἔξαίρω ("to remove") appears in 1 Cor. 4:13 as an aorist, active, imperative, second person, plural verb. Paul addresses not just one but many with a command. The church body must remove the evil person.

⁶⁹ Gregory Wills, "A Historical Analysis of Church Discipline," In *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, eds. John Hammett, and Benjamin L Merkle, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), chap. 6. Wills wrote that by "the 1940s most

A third way Paul exhorts believers to guard against impurity is by reminding them that the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God and that Christians must glorify God in body and spirit (1 Corinthians 6:9–20). It is worth noting that Paul admonishes all forms of immorality, not only sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5:10–11). So, it is correct to say that churches must not ignore nonsexual sins as somehow less dangerous than sexual sins. However, Paul also reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:15–18 that sexual immorality is uniquely against the body, thus damaging a believer’s oneness with Christ (sealed by the Holy Spirit who dwells in the body as its temple). Believers (including their bodies) were bought at a price by Jesus’ blood and thus have no right to do anything that does not glorify Him (1 Corinthians 6:20).⁷⁰ As Heimbach demonstrates, the consequences of sexual sin ripple across all dimensions of society and family life, leading to dysfunctional families, crime, divorce, suicide, murder, poverty, gender role confusion, economic weakness, homosexuality, teen pregnancy, abortion, pornography, euthanasia, undisciplined children, cohabitation, disrespect for life, disrespect for authority and even risk of complete social collapse.⁷¹ Trueman adds a sobering observation that since the modern world has now firmly rejected all things sacred and allowed personal identity to become associated with the “authentic sexual self” (i.e., individual happiness), the predominately accepted social narratives now affirm what is essentially the universal human right to “self-creation”—dumping the constraints of biology for an “authentic human freedom” or an “expressive individualism” that makes man god and creator of his own identity.⁷² No longer do dignity, value, or absolute truth hold because society no longer anchors them in the sacred order. Instead, self-idolatry (clothed in consumerism) has rationalized the validity of “competing tastes” for everything according to one’s desires, from entertainment to sexual

[Baptist] associations stopped bothering to record exclusions.” This trend continued until “1979, [when] they reasserted their commitment to the full inerrancy and authority of the Scriptures.” The practice of church discipline in Baptist churches increasingly waned from the 1870s throughout most of the 20th century.

⁷⁰ ἔοξασατε from ἔοξάζω (“to glorify”) appears in 1 Cor. 6:20 as an aorist, active, imperative (command), second person, plural verb. Paul makes it clear that glorifying God through obedience to his instruction is not optional. Similarly, φεύγετε (“to flee”) from sexual immorality in verse 18 appears as a present, active, imperative, second person, plural verb. It implies that such “fleeing” is ongoing (i.e. flee, and always ‘keep on’ fleeing).

⁷¹ Daniel Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 39.

⁷² Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. 163–183.

identity, expression, freedom, and family structures.⁷³

Relative to contemporary living, Paul's corrective instruction to the Christian church for glorifying God in body and spirit amid a perverse and wicked world remains timeless. Paul possibly uses a popular Corinthian slogan in verses twelve and thirteen to rebuke hedonism and self-rule while explaining the proper use and purpose of the human body (in which Christ's Spirit dwells).⁷⁴ The message is as clear for today's world as it was to Corinth: sex is not a mere bodily function like eating food.⁷⁵ Sexual immorality has serious consequences. Believers must live congruent to their sacred union with Christ, knowing that His authority extends to body and spirit. Pastorally, Paul exhorts the church to glorify God in light of three unchanging truths: a believer's union with Christ's body (6:15), the oneness they share (6:16), and the spiritual union believers have with Christ's Spirit (6:17).⁷⁶ "You are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

THREE CATEGORIES OF OPPOSITION TO BIBLICAL SEXUAL MORALITY AND THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Christians do not need to look far before discovering widespread social resistance to the teachings of biblical sexual morality. Critics make at least three claims to refute the Christian position: 1) biological factors explain sexual behavior, 2) human rights must include all sexual rights, and 3) hegemonic power structures result in inequality for women. While not mutually exclusive, three descriptive labels can characterize these categories of opposition: the scientist, the activist, and the feminist.

The scientist assumes that either evolution or biological and social factors explain sexual behavior. For example, Ashlyn Swift-Gallan et al. argue that

⁷³ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 12–31, 35–163, 201–265, 379–407.

⁷⁴ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 155.

⁷⁵ Cleon Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers, III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 360. The Greek verb ἀμαρτάνει ("to sin") in 1 Corinthians 6:18 appears in the gnomic present, indicating that it is always principally true that the sexually immoral person is guilty of sin.

⁷⁶ Using the created order found in Genesis 2:24, Paul argues that joining to a prostitute constitutes "one body."

genetic mechanisms “appear to at least partially influence” male same-sex sexual orientation. So, it is true that research claims to have discovered limited evidence for independent factors of neurobiology.⁷⁷ It is not illogical to ponder whether human biology or other societal factors play a role in human sexuality (identity, orientation, and expression). Lehman et al. say, “Current understanding of these factors is far from complete, and the results are not always consistent.” However, the fact remains that science has not yet to date discovered a “homosexual” or “transgender” gene (nor epigenetic or genetic traits), despite suggestions that nature and nurture may provide an environmental influence.⁷⁸ Still, whether social factors influence those who make homosexuality their ‘preferred’ lifestyle choice remains unknown.⁷⁹ Unresolved research questions still exist. What is love in marriage? Why behave nicely to your spouse?⁸⁰ Atheist Richard Dawkins believed that

⁷⁷ Ashlyn Swift-Gallant, Lindsay Coome, Madison Aitken, D. Ashley Monks, Doug P. VanderLaan, “Evidence for Distinct Biodevelopmental Influences on Male Sexual Orientation,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116 (Jun 2019) 12787-12792. “Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality,” American Psychological Association, January 27, 2022, <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation.pdf>. I. Savic and P. Lindstrom, “PET and MRI Show Differences in Cerebral Asymmetry and Functional Connectivity between Homo- and Heterosexual Subjects,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 105, no. 27 (January 1, 2008). Research has begun to suggest independent factors of neurobiology. This study claims to show “sex atypical cerebral asymmetry and functional connections in homosexual subjects” that cannot be “primarily ascribed to learned effects, and they suggest a linkage to neurobiological entities.” Dean Hamer, Stella Hu, Victoria Magnuson, Nan Hu, and Angela Pattatucci, “A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation,” *Science* 261, no. 5119 (July 16, 1993): 321-27. Claims the existence of a specific allele located on the X chromosome that predicted gay versus straight sexual orientation in men.

⁷⁸ Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 64-7. Branch argues that Christians cannot “affirm gender transition or transgender behavior, especially when highly debated notions of a “transgender brain” are central to some of the arguments.” Branch cites scientific research as evidence that science has not yet discovered a transgender or gay gene. See also, Michael Lehman, Victor Navarro, Deborah Suchek, and C. E. Roselli, “Neurobiology of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation,” *Journal of Neuroendocrinology* 30, 7 (July 1, 2018). Laura Erickson-Schroth, “Update on the Biology of Transgender Identity,” *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health* 17 (2013): 154. Erickson-Schroth concludes, “To date, no studies have conclusively linked genes to transgender identity.”

⁷⁹ Emmanuele Jannini, Ray Blanchard, Andrea Camperio-Ciani, and John Bancroft, “Male Homosexuality: Nature or Culture?” *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 7, no. 10 (October 1, 2010): 3245-53. Brian Gladue, “The Biopsychology of Sexual Orientation,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 3, no. 5 (Oct. 1994): 150-54.

⁸⁰ David Barash, *Homo Mysterious: Evolutionary Puzzles of Human Nature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90.

the character trait of “niceness” originated from altruism in evolutionary biology.⁸¹ Generally, science remains content with examining any and all explanations for sexual behavior as long as it can avoid the supernatural.⁸² For example, some advocate an evolutionary spread of bisexuality because young boys traded sexual favors to heterosexual men and greatly profited from such behaviors in ancient Greece (i.e., a “learned” survival of the fittest). This logic is endlessly flawed, given that one could generate similar arguments for pedophilia and other behaviors. In short, scientists have several naturalistic theories to justify a positive sexual ethic divorced from God.⁸³

The activist believes that human rights must include sexual rights. Whether it is sexual identity and expression, abortion, gender transition, or unrestrained sexual activity at all ages, Planned Parenthood’s political action arm advocates for expressing any and all forms of sexual freedom.⁸⁴ Entitled “Young People’s Guide to Sexual Rights,” Planned Parenthood contends that all youth must have the “freedom to pursue sexual lives without fear of unwanted pregnancies.”⁸⁵ Parents, their literature says, must recognize that “sexuality and pleasure are important for all young people, irrespective of reproductive desires.” In other words, to properly “[recognize] young people’s sexuality,” parents must support unconstrained sex (as long as it is “safe”) while empowering their children to enjoy sexual pleasure.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Michael Ruse, *Atheism: What Everyone Needs to Know*, (New York: Oxford Press, 2014), 31, 155, 199–200. Ruse cites Dawkins, others.

⁸² David Barash, *Homo Mysterious: Evolutionary Puzzles of Human Nature*, 90: “How can natural selection have favored any genes whose phenotypic outcome [...] results in its own diminished success? [...] The paradox exists for those who are bisexual, since it is mathematically provable that even a tiny difference in reproductive outcome can drive substantial evolutionary change. [...] Gay men have children at about 20% the rate of heterosexual men.” Yet, the authors still vigorously argue that its prevalence in nature likely prefers a biological (not spiritual or psychological) answer.

⁸³ David Barash, *Homo Mysterious: Evolutionary Puzzles of Human Nature*, chap. 4. Barash exhaustively examines a plethora of naturalistic reasons homosexuality remains selected to some degree in evolutionary biology. Cited reasons include, evolution, pathology, natural exuberance, homosexual genetics, altruism in nature, heterosis, social payoffs, sexually antagonistic selection, reproductive skew, birth order, neoteny, and other proximate traits.

⁸⁴ John Holmes, “The Sexual Ethics of Planned Parenthood,” 1–21.

⁸⁵ “Youth Declaration of Sexual Rights,” International Planned Parenthood Federation, January 13, 2022, https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_exclaim_lores.pdf.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Margaret Sanger, Planned Parenthood's founder, perceived that poor families were "burdened with children" while well-off families had few children.⁸⁷ In *What Every Boy and Girl Should Know*, she passionately hoped to persuade her readers on the merits of her logic for controlling pregnancy, saying, "Young people [ought to] create their own standards to suit their own generation [without advice or moralizing] [...], the aim of life [...] is to free all inhibitions [...] to direct one's controls [by use of] logic and reason—not fear and morality."⁸⁸ "The most merciful thing a large family does to one of its infant members is to kill it."⁸⁹ Today, the official position of Planned Parenthood is that the "Hyde Amendment is a dangerous and unfair policy that lets politicians interfere in people's personal health care decisions."⁹⁰

Planned Parenthood's online platforms campaign for the normalization of every practiced type of sexual activity (vaginal, oral, and anal), married or not (young or old), and drive an agenda of unconditional support for any type of gender identity, orientation, and expression.⁹¹ Marketed as a community health provider (offering services such as abortion, contraceptives, and hormone therapy for gender transitioning), clinics actively adhere to a policy of enabling the sexual freedoms of young people.⁹² Depicting themselves as a

⁸⁷ Robert Marshall and Charles Donovan, *Blessed Are the Barren: The Social Policy of Planned Parenthood*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991), 131. Also, Margaret Sanger, *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger, Volume 4: Round the World for Birth Control, 1920–1966*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2016), xix–xxvi.

⁸⁸ Margaret Sanger, *What Every Boy and Girl Should Know*, (1927; reprint, Fairview Park, Elmsford, NY: Maxwell Reprint Co., 1969) 140, 7, 13–4.

⁸⁹ Margaret Sanger, *Women and the New Race* (New York: Brentano's, 1920), 63.

⁹⁰ "Federal and State Bans and Restrictions on Abortion," Planned Parenthood, January 12, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/abortion/federal-and-state-bans-and-restrictions-abortion/hyde-amendment>. See also, "Texas Abortion Laws," Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas, January 13, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-gulf-coast/sb8>. At Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast, we believe that all individuals must be free to control their own bodies [...] It is unthinkable that anti-abortion extremists could be allowed to stand in the way of people accessing essential health care." See also, S.142, *Hyde Amendment Codification Act*, 113th Congress (2013–2014), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/142>. The Hyde Amendment prohibits the use of federal Medicaid funds for abortion except when the life of the woman is endangered by carrying the pregnancy to term.

⁹¹ Planned Parenthood's primary online presence includes three websites, PlannedParenthood.com, PlannedParenthoodActionFund.com, and the website of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (ippf.org). Additionally, there are 59 affiliate/State websites and hundreds of "partner" sites linked to for sex-related resources.

⁹² "Empowerment Kits," Planned Parenthood, January 13, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-greater-texas/patient-resources/empowerment-kits>. Where permitted

leader in the fight for human rights, a historically noble cause, individuals or organizations who stand opposed to their agenda, such as conservative and religious critics, will receive an understandably harsh branding as “extreme” spreaders of patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, and racism.⁹³

Contemporary feminists believe that hegemonic power structures result in inequality for women. Simone De Beauvoir, the author of *The Second Sex* and progenitor of the second-wave of global feminism, believed, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”⁹⁴ De Beauvoir’s ideas became the basis for the contemporary notion that gender is a social construct, not a biological trait.⁹⁵ In an interview with the *Saturday Review*, she stated, “No woman should be authorized to stay home and raise her children. Society should be different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.”⁹⁶ Mary Daly, who advocated neo-paganism in *Beyond God the Father*, stated, “If God is male, then male is God.”⁹⁷ Daly is a well-known American theologian, philosopher, and ethicist who pioneered radical feminist theology.⁹⁸ Feminist Shulamith Firestone noted that, unlike the earlier feminist movement, the later movements should not just seek to eliminate male privilege but that of sex distinction itself and

by legal statute, this is accomplished through the reduction of parental consent. Texas young persons can even request medical “empowerment” kits that comprise emergency contraception (the “morning-after” pill), a pregnancy test, and condoms. “Pleasure Protection Kits,” Planned Parenthood, January 13, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-great-plains/pleasure-protection-kits>. Planned Parenthood Great Plains delivers to children 15-years and older, three classes of free “pleasure kits”—the “non-latex,” “the classic,” and the “oral only” with flavor—so its users may continue to “have [uninhibited sexual] fun” in private without risk.

⁹³ John Holmes, “The Sexual Ethics of Planned Parenthood,” 1–21. A strategy of political rhetoric has been an effective street-fight tactic among abortion activists. For more, see Joshua Wilson, *The Street Politics of Abortion: Speech, Violence, and America’s Culture Wars. The Cultural Lives of Law*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford Law Books, 2013).

⁹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1st American ed., (Knopf, 1953), 267.

⁹⁵ Alan Branch, “A Brief History of Modern Feminism” (Lecture, DR30020 Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO., January 23, 2022).

⁹⁶ Betty Friedan, “Sex, Society, and the Female Dilemma: An Interview with Simone de Beauvoir,” (*Saturday Review*, June 14, 1975), 18.

⁹⁷ Mary, Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19, 129.

⁹⁸ Margalit Fox, “Mary Daly, a Leader in Feminist Theology, Dies at 81,” The New York Times. Archived from the original on October 9, 2021.

the “tyranny of the biological family.”⁹⁹ These women were leading feminists, whose ideas sought to eliminate patriarchy and outdated sexual ethics by eliminating gender differences. As such, they believed that human gender should have no more importance than other human traits.

Biblically speaking, in response to the scientist, it does not matter if researchers confirm a gene responsible for influencing sexual orientation, identity, or expression, because it will not negate human responsibility before God for holy living—made possible by the Holy Spirit. All of creation is under bondage and corruption from sin’s curse (Romans 8:22). God remains the standard-bearer, representing absolute truth. His word is unchanging truth (John. 17:17, 2 Corinthians 6:7). It gives us truthful guidance on living in a broken and fallen world. Thus, science derives from God, whose created order has a purpose and intentional design (albeit in bondage under sin). Gender, sex, and marriage have a divinely sanctioned purpose.

In response to the activist, yes, human rights and freedom matter because all life has value, meaning, and purpose. The Bible says all humans were fearfully and wonderfully made, with a body, and that God knows children in their mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13–6, Galatians 1:15, Luke 1:15, Isaiah 49:1, Job 31:15). Humans were made on purpose for a purpose and granted agency in the created order (Genesis 1:26–8, 2:7–23, Acts 1:6–11, 1 Corinthians 12:12–26). Further, God loves all people. He sent His only Son to die such that none would perish due to sin (John 3:16, Romans 5:8). Therefore, all life is precious. Embryos do not represent a mindless clump of cells. In the image of God, He made mankind. Thus, abortion violates the sixth commandment prohibiting murder (Exodus 20:13). Intentional or not, any serious injury to a pregnant woman receives the penalty of *lex talionis*.¹⁰⁰ “If her children come out” and serious injury occurs, a penalty occurs in like kind (Exodus 21:23).

⁹⁹ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, (1970; repr., New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 11. “And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class *privilege* but of the economic class *distinction* itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of sex *distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally.”

¹⁰⁰ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, Vol. 2, The New American Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 492–7. “Tooth for Tooth,” “Eye for Eye,” “Life for Life.” Penalty must match the offense.

Serious injury is contrasted with premature delivery in verse twenty-two.¹⁰¹ Abortion is evil and always prohibited—as God reigns sovereign over life and death (Deuteronomy 32:39).

In response to the feminist, God has placed the husband in loving authority over his wife (Genesis 3:16, Ephesians 5:24). The created order includes men and women (gender and sex), each with functional roles and a purposeful design. It is impossible to correct men’s rule over women by making women rule over men. Neither is it possible to erase gender without denying the reality of biology. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans chapter one, verses eighteen and nineteen, “[they] suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Indeed, the culture has changed, but our “God-given physiological differences have not.”¹⁰² By accepting whom God created us as, we can resist the world’s efforts to become something else that He did not intend.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Robert Congdon, “Exodus 21:22–25 and the Abortion Debate,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989), 134. Daniel Gurtner, *Exodus: A Commentary on the Greek Text of Codex Vaticanus*, (Boston: Brill, 2013), 391–92. John Holmes, “The Sexual Ethics of Planned Parenthood,” 8–10. “Verse 22 calls the unborn a “child” (בָּנִים) explicitly, although written in a plural form (children). The text does not say “formless or embryo” (אִילָם) as found in Psalm 139:16. Nor is the text written with an emphasis towards a stillborn “fetus” that falls out (בָּלַד) as in Job 3:16. Neither is the word for one “bereaved” or a natural “miscarriage” (שָׁבֵד) used as in Exodus 23:26. The emphasis concerning the penalty against harmful human behavior is placed entirely on a human child not yet delivered—a child, made, and formed in the image of God per Psalm 139. Exodus 21:23 in the LXX affirms the intent that the child seriously harmed is fully formed. The verb ἔξεικονισμένον appears as a perfect active participle (“[if it] has fully formed”). The perfect tense implies completed action before the harm (ἀπολί) occurs, but the word does not necessarily imply the child is full term and ready for delivery. In the case of death, contra verse 22, the rules for murder apply. They appear consistent with Genesis 1:26–7 when humans were formed in God’s image and again in Genesis 9:6 when (because of God’s image) those who shed man’s blood would receive the same in return (lex talionis). Thus, the use of the active tense implies an ongoing life (a living being) made in God’s image. Those who attempt to use Scripture as a means to justify abortion at some mid-way point before a child is “fully formed” discount the totality of Scripture with reference to God’s agency in giving life at conception (Ruth 4:13, Psalms 139:13–6, Genesis 3:16), the value God places on life (Luke 12:7, Matthew 10:30), the evidence for the personhood of the unborn child (Exodus 21:22–3, Luke 1:39–45), God’s direct prohibition on murder (Exodus 20:13), and the significance of being formed by God in His image (Genesis 1:26–7, 9:6).”

¹⁰² John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2021), 293.

¹⁰³ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 369.

CONCLUSION

Scripture claims divine authority to rule over the human family and sexual ethics because all Scripture is “God-breathed.” The assumptions of the scientist, activist, and feminist falsely position them to rule in authority over the Bible. God calls Christians to walk in the light “for the fruit of the light is goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Ephesians 5:9). They must not participate in “the fruitless works of darkness but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:8–13). By systematically teaching biblical sexual morality, Christians not only grow in Christ and guard against impurity, but they become more equipped to respond to an increasingly hostile and vocal world that does not worship God but instead, themselves.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, churches must instruct biblical sexual ethics by teaching God’s design for gender, marriage, sex, and procreation to help Christians respond to the prevailing social narratives of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual freedom.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Timothy 4:3 reminds us that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; [...] they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.” Elevating personal happiness and expressive individualism, the scientist, activist, and feminist appeal to themselves (pleasure, authentic living, self freedom), then to biology (as convenient), and lastly, false ideas of human equality not based in God’s created order.



The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors is committed to championing the sufficiency of Scripture for the Church as she engages the problems people face, speaking the truth in love. Christians have the responsibility to bring the truth of God to bear on the problems of everyday life, and to embody that truth in a life of love.

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