

# WHY COMMON GRACE IS NOT ENOUGH FOR CHRISTIANS WHO COUNSEL

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## Part One

Christians who undertake to counsel must make a decision about authority. When we counsel, we must make decisions about what a human being is (anthropology), what is the purpose of a human being (teleology), and how do we help people (methodology)? These are not the only issues, but they are necessary to begin our work.

These questions will necessarily raise issues about authority: How do we answer our questions about anthropology and teleology and methodology? For Christians, the answers to these questions all must come from one of two sources: Scripture and/or common grace (i.e., “every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.”)<sup>2</sup>.

Biblical counselors assert that Scripture is sufficient for counseling;<sup>3</sup> which implies that counseling can be done without some additional bestowal of the benefits of common grace.<sup>4</sup> Common grace is seen as a source of God’s goodness in the world

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<sup>2</sup> John Murray, “Common Grace,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 5, no. 1 (1942): 4.

<sup>3</sup> “The doctrine of sufficiency of Scripture is crucial to our movement, and is also what has made us so controversial to other who contend for different approaches to counseling. A doctrine so central and so debated has required constant defense by leaders of our movement.” Heath Lambert et al., *Sufficiency: Historical Essays On the Sufficiency of Scripture* (not stated, 2016), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Heath Lambert, “Introduction,” in *Counseling Hard Cases*, ed. Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 14 (“The carefully developed view of the biblical counseling movement is not that the Scriptures provide Christians with all of the information we desire but rather with the understand we need to do counseling ministry.”); John Street, “Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 40 (“Biblical counselors believe the counselor needs new glasses. Christian psychologists believe the counselor needs more marbles.”). Now, one could contest here that biblical counselors do rely upon the ability to comprehend language and the continued functioning of their bodies and upon sunlight causing plants to grow and upon oxygen not being poisonous to human beings, et cetera; and that all such things are “common grace.” For such a person, I will provide a narrower definition: “common

(which it is), and that such goodness includes “the assured results of modern science,” such as psychology.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is alleged, Christians who reject psychological findings are rejecting God’s goodness.

Jay Adams rightly attacks the overly broad claims for common grace by those who claim, “All truth is God’s truth.”<sup>6</sup> “Of course all truth is God’s truth,” Adams admits; but, not all that claims to be the truth of common grace is common grace: it certainly cannot include Freud, Rogers or Skinner: “You can be sure that it is not the result of common grace that two rival ways of counseling exist side by side! God cannot be charged with such contradiction. His common grace is not responsible for false teachings by Freud (man is not responsible for his sin).”<sup>7</sup> Yet, in another place, Adams admits that a Christian standing upon a solid scriptural foundation can “can pick and choose and adapt from that perspective whatever nuggets that an unbeliever (in the common grace of God) has unearthed.”<sup>8</sup>

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grace” as a source of “scientific” understanding of the physical environment, including the functioning of human beings which is studied under the label “psychology.”

<sup>5</sup> There is a rat’s nest of problems here: First, the word “psychology” refers to any number of disciplines from neurology to Jung’s Gnosticism. Second, due to the breadth of subdisciplines within psychology, the word “science” is not always applicable, “although some psychologists are certainly scientists, many are not.” B R. Hergenhahn and Tracy B. Henley, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, seventh ed. (Belmont, CA, USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014), 13. Third, “assured results” is very problematic in the sciences generally, and in psychology in particular: “So the replication failure rate for psychology at large may be 80% or more overall.” John Ioannidis, “Psychology Tests are Failing the Replication Test—For Good Reason,” *Guardian*, Aug. 28, 2015, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/28/psychology-experiments-failing-replication-test-findings-science>. Fourth, there are substantial difficulties moving from the “scientific” to the subjective states of human consciousness. See, e.g., Octavio S. Choi, “What Neuroscience Can and Cannot Answer,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online* 45, no. 3 (September 2017): 278-85, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://jaapl.org/content/45/3/278> Fifth, psychology as an academic discipline is atheistic or at least deistic. How good can a science of human beings be if it begins with a denial of a fundamental variable? Who would trust a science of gravity that ignored physical objects? (And yes, I realize that “Christian Psychology” and many others seek to avoid this error.) In this article, I will use the word “psychology” to refer to the subjective conscious state of a human being: one’s cognition, affections, conduct, will, and identity Thus, exercising one’s memory would be an aspect of human psychology. “The definition of psychology may be best given in the words of Professor Ladd, as the description and explanation of the states of consciousness and such.” William James, *Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1904), 1. Finally, I note that the word “psychology” is sometimes used to refer to everything which is not Biblical Counseling. However, in light of all the potential confusion, I think it important to use this word in this context: the subject of counseling is what is going on in a human being.

<sup>6</sup> “The attempt to integrate psychology and theology springs from a belief in “the unity of truth” (Holmes, 1985).” R. L. Timpe, “Christian Psychology,” ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 194.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Edward Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 1986), 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> Jay Edward Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 92–93.

Seen in that light, Adams does not really seem that different from the “Christian Psychology” perspective? Christian psychology seeks to take seriously the noetic effects of sin upon the observer, together with a high view of Scripture, and actively seeks to make use of those “nuggets” of psychology to create a distinctively Christian psychological enterprise.<sup>9</sup> And as such it is distinctive from the “integrationist position.”

If Biblical Counselors can make use of “nuggets” and Christian Psychologists have a high view of Scripture, how then do we differ? In fact, many other non-“Biblical Counselor” Christian counselors would espouse exactly the same goals. We all want to be “biblical.” No one wants to incorporate something false or inimical to Christ into our counseling.<sup>10</sup>

We all desire to be careful to seek to take into account the noetic effects of sin upon observations. Biblical counseling for its part does not deny neuroplasticity, the effects of medication (although there will be debate upon when it is appropriate), or any number of other “nuggets” of “common grace.”

If we have so much in common—then how do Biblical Counselors differ on common grace (or even the sufficiency of Scripture)?

### *The Crux of the Matter*

The foundational issue for human psychology lies in the relationship between God and Man. While the sufficiency of scripture is a hallmark of Biblical Counseling, the more fundamental characteristic the insufficiency of man.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rick Scholette, “The Christian Psychology Distinctive: Revisited,” Society for Christian Psychology (blog), January 26, 2015, [http://www.christianpsych.org/wp\\_scp/the-christian-psychology-distinctive-revisited/](http://www.christianpsych.org/wp_scp/the-christian-psychology-distinctive-revisited/) (accessed January 9, 2018); Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), see particularly pages 27-130 for a discussion of the use of the Bible.

<sup>10</sup> Even those who would use no Scripture in counseling certainly do not hope for the damnation of their counselee!

<sup>11</sup> For the phrase of “the insufficiency of man,” I must cite to private conversation with Dr. John Street.

## *An Illustration*

The San Andreas Fault bisects California. Two great tectonic plates move in opposite directions. The plates do not smoothly pass one-another; rather the rock faces grind and jar against one-another. The energy from that conflict breaks loose in earthquakes. The grinding and the breaking have created a maze of spidery faults which run throughout California. These secondary faults lead to substantial earthquakes. Indeed, the only earthquakes I have experienced in my life have been result of these secondary faults.

To combat the threat of earthquakes, Californians are taught to prepare and respond. We have building codes and social strategies all designed to lessen the effects of earthquakes—and for the most part, they have kept people safe and alive.

Now all the real faults and real earthquakes could be put to rest if only we could control the San Andreas Fault.

Take the Fall for the Fault. There is a real breach which both generated the original trouble and which constantly informs and perpetuates the trouble. The psychological and emotional troubles which human beings experience today are the direct result of the Fall and the continual breach between God and Man.<sup>12</sup>

Biblical Counseling holds that all benefits which may accrue from common grace can neither provide a proper understanding of the true cause of human psychological troubles, nor can common grace provide a proper remedy. Common grace was not given to deal with the transformation of the human heart which came about as the result of Adam's Fall. We hold to the sufficiency of Scripture, because only the Spirit's use of the Word of God is sufficient to tame the San Andreas Fault between God and Man.

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<sup>12</sup> "Scripture identifies sin as the chief (not the only) problem of man for counseling. other contributing factors include both organic problems and sins committed by others [both of which came about due to the judgment on sin and the effects of sin]. All counseling matters result from the wickedness of a sin-cursed and demon-infested world (James 3:14-16)." John Street, "Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 45-46.

## Toward an Understanding of Common Grace

As will be explained below, common grace is a matter of God's goodness in the world after the Fall and the subsequent judgment as a result of that Fall. An understanding of common grace is necessarily bound up with our understanding of the Fall. If we will rightly understand the place of common grace as Biblical Counselors, we gain a clear view of two interrelated but distinct issues: (1) How does the Fall inform human psychology; and (2) how does common grace ameliorate the effects of the Fall (which will be examined in the second part of this essay).

### Part One: Theology Determines Psychology

This section of the argument will primarily concern the manner in which the Fall affected human psychology (cognition, affection, conduct, volition and identity). The first question is whether the Fall had any effect upon human psychology. This is not inappropriate, in that secular psychologies necessarily trade upon the idea that human psychology is some isolated from God in some sense.<sup>13</sup>

As will be addressed below, the Scripture states that human psychology is under judgment; therefore, relief from that judgment is a necessary — indeed sufficient — element of any true good.

#### *One Possibility: Human Psychology is Independent of Spiritual Concerns*

The manner in which the Fall affected human psychology goes back at least to the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius. Pelagius held that human psychology

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<sup>13</sup> It is precisely here that secular psychology goes wrong in its attempt to view man, apart from God, as better than he is. Machen attacks what he calls the "empty-room" view of the presence of God in the redeemed man. This is the concept that before a man becomes a Christian he is basically all right except for the neglected empty room of his spirit. When this neglected, "spiritual" part of man is properly developed, man will become complete. Instead, Machen argues that the "human soul" and the "human spirit" are one and the same. "The real state of human nature after the fall is not that one part has been cut off or can only attain a stunted growth," he writes, "but that all of it is corrupt." When a man is saved, he does not give God access to any empty room, but the whole man is transformed by the Spirit of God. Ed Hindson, "Biblical View of Man: The Basis for Nouthetic Confrontation," ed. Howard A. Eyrich and Jay E. Adams, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 3, no. 1 (1979): 35, fns. omitted; Jay Edward Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 1986), 110.

operated and existed with relative independence from one's relationship to God. Augustine argued that human psychology was altered by the Fall.

Augustine notes that Pelagius breaks human faculties three faculties, capacity, volition and action: God conveyed upon us capacity; of our volition and action Pelagius "asserts to be our own; and he assigns them to us so strictly as to contend that they proceed simply from ourselves."<sup>14</sup> God has "graced" us with the capacity to be what God calls upon us to be; while our will and conduct are within our scope. To put it differently: Adam's Fall did not fundamentally corrupt human psychology.<sup>15</sup> While one's position with God will affect the Last Judgment, it is not of importance in day-to-day psychological working (except for the subjective effects of believing in God in producing hope or fear).

Someone may object that Pelagius was concerned with our ability to obey God's law — not our psychological condition. This is an untenable contention. True obedience to the law of God requires one's conduct, cognition, affect and will.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the ability to obey the law entails a properly functioning psychology.<sup>17</sup> In his letter to his "Letter to Demetrias," Pelagius writes:

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<sup>14</sup> Augustine of Hippo, "A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin," in *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 5, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 218–219.

<sup>15</sup> The parallel proposition is that one's salvation does not effect any real change—except on Judgment Day. Dallas Willard uses a brilliant image of "Bar-Code Faith." The scanner at the supermarket will read the bar code and register the item according to the bar code affixed. "If the ice cream sticker is on the dog food, the dog food is ice cream, so far as the scanner knows or cares." Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 36. Many Christians treat justification in the same way. There is no essential change in how one lives day-to-day. "[T]he payoff for having faith and being 'scanned' comes at death and after. Life now being lived has no necessary connection with being a Christian as long as the 'bar code' does its job." *Id.*, at p. 37. This is precisely the position of many Christian counselors- whether they realize it or not.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:22 & 5:28, 21:28-32, 22:36-40, 23:28; John 3:16, 14:21; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:8-17; Col. 2:8; et cetera. "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections." Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith and Harry S. Stout, Revised edition., vol. 2, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 95; et cetera.

<sup>17</sup> Again, I am using the word "psychology" deliberately to push back against the idea that there is some "spiritual" aspect of a human being independent of one's psychological state. Pelagius is quite right to put the full power to obey the law of God within the human being's psychological being, his capacity, volition and action. No honest atheist would hold that a Christian's belief, affection, conduct and volition toward God are somehow divorced from the Christian's psychology. The atheist may think the Christian diseased, defective, neurotic or whatnot, but would not divorce the affections, will, identity, et cetera from the Christian's belief in God. It is remarkable that a Christian would admit the body affects psychology but the Holy Spirit does not.

When I have to discuss the principles of right conduct and the leading of a holy life, I usually begin by showing the strength and characteristics of human nature. By explaining what it can accomplish, I encourage the soul of my hearer to the different virtues.<sup>18</sup>

He explains that strength as an absolute libertarian freedom of will, “You should not think that humanity was not created truly good because it is capable of evil and the impetuosity of nature is not by necessity to unchangeable good. The glory of the reasonable soul is located precisely in its having to care a parting of the ways, in its freedom to follow either path.”<sup>19</sup>

If the power to do good lies within the human will, why then do any follow a corrupt path? To Pelagius then, it is not any inherent original sin which has perverted the human psyche: rather, it is the result of sociological and psychological patterns gained from the environment. “Doing good has become difficult for us only because of the long custom of sinning, which begins to infect us even in our childhood.”<sup>20</sup>

Conversely, the manner of becoming “good” is a process of cognitive-behavioral psychology; granted Pelagius was rudimentary in his development, but he was on the “right path” (some might say): “If you therefore you want your way of life to correspond to the magnificence of your resolution... Apply yourself now so that the glowing faith of your recent conversation is always warmed by a new earnestness, so that pious practices may easily take root during your early years.”<sup>21</sup> (In short be mindful of what you think and what you do, so that through repetition you may become what you resolve to be). The transformation of the human life is contingent upon God granting a new nature; rather, transformation is a matter of the right therapeutic practice.

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<sup>18</sup> J Patout Burns, ed., *Theological Anthropology*, ed. and trans. J Patout Burns, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 40.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 50; Benjamin Warfield, “Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy,” in *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 295 (“It was only an ever-increasing facility in imitating vice which arose from so long a schooling in evil; and all that was needed to rescue men from it was a new explanation of what was right (in the law), or, at most, the encouragement of forgiveness for what was already done, and a holy example (in Christ) for imitation.”).

<sup>21</sup> J Patout Burns, ed., *Theological Anthropology*, ed. and trans. J Patout Burns, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 51.

Augustine held to a fundamentally different understanding of the Fall's effect upon the human being:

According to him the nature of man, both physical and moral, is totally corrupted by Adam's sin, so that he cannot do otherwise than sin. This inherited corruption or original sin is a moral punishment for the sin of Adam. It is such a quality of the nature of man, that in his natural state, he can and will do evil only. He has lost the material freedom of the will, and it is especially in this respect that original sin constitutes a punishment.<sup>22</sup>

Have we as human beings lost our freedom to follow after God? This question lies at the heart of the debate between Biblical Counseling and other schools of psychology. The real crux of the matter lies in what happened to human beings at the Fall. Biblical Counseling takes seriously the historical Augustinian strand of Christian doctrine. We hold that the Fall distorted human psychology, and, therefore, restoration of the Godward relationship is critical to human psychology.

The effects of the Fall unquestionably extend beyond the primary attack upon human psychology. One's own sin, the sin of others against us, even the effects of sin generally (death and disease, including disease of the central nervous system) are all real things: they can be observed, studied and even fall into patterns. Biblical Counseling does not deny these secondary effects.<sup>23</sup>

The Fall of Adam caused comprehensive damage to the human heart: the cognition, affections, behavior, volition and identity of Man was fundamentally distorted. This "psychological" damage, when coupled to a body which suffers from death and disease, and which exists in an environment of sinful fellow creatures and a

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<sup>22</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 244. In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther expresses rejects the proposition that human psychology remained unaltered at the Fall. Kurt K. Hendel, "The Smalcald Articles," in *Word and Faith*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, Kirsi I. Stjerna, and Timothy J. Wengert, vol. 2, *The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 444.

<sup>23</sup> "Furthermore, we are both victims and perpetrators. There is no human being since the fall who is only a victim; yet is also true that every sinner is also sinned against." Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2011), 427.

world subjected to “futility” leads to the range of “mental health” and “psychological” troubles which are the subject of counseling.

Biblical counseling holds that the necessary issue is the breach with God. Only on the foundation of a renewed, flourishing relationship with God can a human being be psychologically “right.”

### *The Fall*

Genesis 3 records the rebellion and fall of mankind in Adam (Romans 5:12).<sup>24</sup> The eating of that

... Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden...<sup>25</sup>

While libraries have been written on this event, I merely wish to point to evidence that the Fall created subjective transformation of human psychology (cognition, affection, volition, conduct & identity).<sup>26</sup>

### **Genesis 3**

Immediately upon eating from the tree, “the eyes of both of them were opened” (Genesis 3:7a). They realized “that they were naked” (Genesis 3:7a). Thereupon, they made themselves a poor covering of fig leaves (Genesis 3:7b). When God comes for an afternoon visit, the pair “hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God (Genesis 3:8).<sup>27</sup> By Genesis 3:12, they were already

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<sup>24</sup> Although I am acutely aware of the disputes on this issue, I will take the sacred record of Genesis 3 as historical.

<sup>25</sup> John Milton, “Paradise Lost,” Book I, lines 2-4

<sup>26</sup> In the second part of this essay, we will look to the objective, physical, environmental aspects of the Fall.

<sup>27</sup> “Clearly an expression of guilt-consciousness, as also, an indication, at the same time, of the fall into sin, and of the decline into a state of corruption.” John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 231. “It was part of the sad deception that the man and woman who wanted so much to be ‘like God,’ rather than obtaining the stature of deity, are afraid even to commune with him.” K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26, vol. 1A*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 239.

exhibiting blame-shifting. The Scripture makes plain the damage to the human heart as the result of this rebellion.<sup>28</sup> First, the human pair were brought to a state of shame<sup>29</sup> and fear:

The immediate effects of their act of disobedience were a sense of shame—“the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (ver. 7); and a dread of judgment—“Adam and his wife hid themselves,” through fear, as Adam afterwards admits—“I was afraid” (vv. 8, 10).<sup>30</sup>

The human being became fundamentally disordered—at least with respect to God, and with respect to self. Fear of death subjected humanity to “slavery” (Hebrews 2:14) and damaged love (1 John 4:17-18):

There is always a reaction. The stolen fruit is not as pleasant as we had thought. A kind of spiritual indigestion follows the eating of it. Somehow, we cannot get away with it. If we could, of course, we would not need any psychologists. But they are doing a thriving business because, though we think we are so bold and so wonderful, something within us tells that we are cads, that we are cowards, that we are fools, that we are foul, that we are vile, that we are beasts and worse. And we cannot get rid of such a conviction. We cannot sleep because of it. We cannot silence this voice that is within us. If we could we would, but we cannot, and we are wretched, and we have complexes -- we will call them that, but we will not call them sin. We will not admit the fear, the shame, the strain, the pressure. Is that not the simple truth? We would like to explain it all away psychologically, we cannot. We are up against the facts.<sup>31</sup>

This transformation of fear and shame was inherent in the disobedience.<sup>32</sup> God made no new pronouncement prior to this transformation. As Driver wryly notes, “The serpent’s words (v. 5)

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<sup>28</sup> “Only since humankind has become divided from the Creator are human beings divided within themselves.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, ed. Martin Rüter, Ilse Tödt, and John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, vol. 3, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 128.

<sup>29</sup> See, P. Woolley, “Shame,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1085.

<sup>30</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *The Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1868), 72.

<sup>31</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Gospel in Genesis: From Fig Leaves to Faith* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009), 53. “Shame, therefore, fear, and falsehood, are the bitter fruits of sin. Guilt is felt; death is dreaded; guile is practiced. The consciousness of crime begets terror; for ‘the wicked flee when no one pursueth.’” Robert S. Candlish, *The Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1868), 74; John Calvin, *Genesis*, electronic ed., *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 1998, Genesis 3:8.

<sup>32</sup> Here that shame is explained as the consequence of the guilt of sin. Before human disobedience there was no shame (2:25), but with sin the man’s self-consciousness had changed. His sense of humiliation impacts his covering up before the woman as well as before God. By this Adam admits his sense of shame, which has been motivated by his guilt.” K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 241.

were thus fulfilled: but the knowledge gained was very different from that which they had been led to anticipate.”<sup>33</sup>

This *knowledge* marks a critical stage in human psychology: The Fall created abnormality in human psychology — an abnormality which can only be remedied by restoring that relationship with God. The Pelagian error is to think that while body and soul affect one-another and thus human psychology, that the “spiritual,” Godward aspect of human existence somehow operates independently of human psychology (except perhaps, as the thought of God creates a basis for hope or fear, et cetera).<sup>34</sup>

B.C.’s central insight is that the relationship between God and man is not a bare “spiritual” (whatever that might be) or moral relationship but rather that it is a comprehensive relationship and unquestionably determines the content of human psychology.

### *Romans 1*

In Romans 1, Paul argues that the rebellion and repression of humanity has led to the corruption of human psychology.<sup>35</sup> In verse 18, he notes that we repress the knowledge of our rebellious state before God. This leads to a profound loss, “Being to ourselves what God ought to be to us, He is not more to us than we are to ourselves. This secret identification of ourselves with God carries with it our isolation from Him... For mankind be itself God, the appearance of the idol is then inevitable.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis, with Introduction and Notes*, Westminster Commentaries (New York; London: Edwin S. Gorham; Methuen & Co., 1904), 46.

<sup>34</sup> “Of the texts cited for the contrary view, only Romans 7:7–25 requires some further discussion. Pelagians have at all times appealed to this pericope to prove that the mind (*νοῦς*) or the spirit (*πνεῦμα*) in humans has remained free from sin, and the latter only resides in the flesh (*σαρξ*); in modern times this exegesis has been adopted almost universally. But Augustine in his later period and all his followers, both in the Catholic Church and in Protestant churches, have consistently rejected this interpretation.” Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 81–82. When put baldly, it is bizarre for a Christian to assert that the body—but not the Holy Spirit—has an affect upon human psychology.

<sup>35</sup> “Paul argues that humanity irrationally distorted God’s image through idolatry and that God in turn expressed his wrath against this idolatry by handing them over to their own irrational desires.” Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul’s Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 86. “Religion is one of the chief ways we cover up our shame without actually dealing with the guilt. And project a god who will satisfy our suppression of the truth about ourselves. ‘Idolatry is not an accident,’ Jenson notes, ‘as if some of us just happened to hit upon the wrong candidates for deity.’ Not only in our immorality and lying but even in our proud moral striving, self-confident religious devotion, and sincere pretensions, we are storing up God’s

Paul details a series of psychological injuries which result to the human beings as a result of this repression: “they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21).<sup>37</sup> Such irrationality has plagued humanity ever since. Humanity became subjected to idolatry (Romans 1:23). As Jonathan Edwards explains:

It appears, that man’s nature is greatly depraved, by an apparent proneness to an exceeding stupidity and sottishness in those things wherein his duty and main interest are chiefly concerned. I shall instance in two things; viz. men’s proneness to idolatry and so general and great a disregard of eternal things, as appears in them that live under the light of the gospel. ’Tis manifest, that man’s nature in its present state is attended with a great propensity to forsake the acknowledgment and worship of the true God, and to fall into the most stupid idolatry.<sup>38</sup>

A further step is the depravity of destructive passions (Romans 1:24-27). Paul speaks of God “giving-up” human beings: “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves” (Romans 1:24); “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.” Human worship (worship of the creature rather than the Creator) and human sexuality become perverted. This leads to a further stage of degradation:

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:28).

That debased mind lies at the trouble of human psychology. The word translated by the ESV as “debased” is *adokimos*, which as Keener explains, “can refer to something tested and found unfit or, by extension, to what is worthless and disqualified. This failed mind contrasts with the renewed mind that Paul will mention later, which will test or evaluate (*dokimazo*) matters to

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wrath against us.” Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 429.

<sup>37</sup> “But it is a sober acknowledgment of the fact that the καρδιά [heart] as the inner self of man shares fully in the fallenness of the whole man, that the intellect is not a part of human nature somehow exempted from the general corruption, not something which can be appealed to as an impartial arbiter capable of standing outside the influence of the ego and returning a perfectly objective judgment.” C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 118, fns. omitted. “So, having rejected God, we can use our minds only to rearrange error.” James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 171.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, ed. John E. Smith and Clyde A. Holbrook, Corrected Edition, vol. 3, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), 147.

ascertain what is good and thus belongs to God's will" (Romans 12:2).<sup>39</sup> Thomas Manton explains:

There are perverse inclinations in the heart that carry the soul another way. Men look upon everything as it cometh dyed in the colour of their own affections. Here is the great depravation of nature since the fall, that those things which should follow guide and sit at the stern; vile affections besot the judgment: Rom. 1:26, with 28, 'God gave them up to vile affections;' and presently afterwards, 'He gave them over to a reprobate mind.' Men are so injudicious, because they consult with their affections.<sup>40</sup>

Augustine, in *The City of God*, argues that this twisting of affections is the great division in humanity, "Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self."<sup>41</sup>

But this is not all: the perversion of thought, affection and will ends in a bog of destructive conduct (Romans 1:29–32, 3:9-18). In short, Romans 1 demonstrates that the Fall of Adam, the rejection of God has led to cognitive, affective, volitional and behavioral corruption.

### *Image of God and Identity*

God created Adam and Eve in the image of God. Genesis 1:26-27. That image persists in some manner after the Fall.<sup>42</sup> Genesis 9:6. How precisely the image was affected is a matter of great dispute. Richard Lints in *Identity and Idolatry* manages to sidestep much of the dispute about what aspects of human life constitute the "image." He takes the issue of "image" in the sense of mirror, "human beings may be said to have a reflective identity."<sup>43</sup> Our identity is bound up with what we reflect, "The *imago Dei* captures this transitory identity – as an image

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<sup>39</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016), 27. "They scorned God, God was compelled to give them up. They reprobated him, their own mind became reprobate; any test would discard it. That is the mind they got, the reason of which so many of these wise fools (v. 22) are proud, when their inner grasp of mind (ἐπίγνωσις) threw out God." R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 118.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 3 (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1871), 256.

<sup>41</sup> Augustine of Hippo, "The City of God," in *St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 282.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015), 45, quoting: Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Lints, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 36, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 29.

is contingent upon the object for its identity, so the imago Dei is contingent upon God for its identity.”<sup>44</sup>

Now this identity, for good or ill, depends upon the object which the human mirror reflects. As Greg Beale has extensively argued, the repression and exchange of Romans 1:18-25, is a theme which runs throughout the Scripture: that the exchange of worshiping the true God has led to a fundamental corruption of human identity whereby human beings become conformed to the object of their idolatrous worship.<sup>45</sup>

On this side of the Fall, the human heart (unless regenerate) is busy imaging something other than God. Human identity is now developed on the basis of idols—internal human desires made objects of desire and returning to control human identity. This alone shows the futility of any counseling psychology that does not take Christ as its Lord. For, by seeing Christ, we are conformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10).<sup>46</sup> Only in the new life, the new self, can human identity be set on a proper basis.

#### *The Fall Comprehensively Altered Human Psychology*

The point here is that at the moment of rebellion against God, human psychology became unalterably damaged and defective. Human cognition, affections, behavior, volition and identity have all been injured.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Lints, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 36, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 29. "Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 37, fn. omitted. "To conclude, we come to know ourselves as human beings—that is, as God's image bearer—not only by looking within but chiefly by looking outside ourselves to the divine Other who addresses us. It is only as we take our place in this theater of creation—the liturgy of God's speaking and creaturely response—that we discover a selfhood and personhood that is neither autonomous nor illusory but doxological and real." Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2011), 405.

<sup>45</sup> G K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 357-80.

<sup>46</sup> "Sin defaced the image of God in us: Romans 3:23, 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' We lost not only the favour of God, but the image of God; the great excellency of our nature was eclipsed and defaced. Now the plaster will not be as broad as the sore, nor our reparation by Christ correspondent to our loss by Adam, if our nature be not healed, and the image of God restored in us." Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 2 (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1871), 205.

<sup>47</sup> "Our history tells us plainly that sin in its formal relation is, before all things, a transgression of the divine command; whilst in its material relation it is a wounding of the proper personal life, even unto death, and, in

It is the human heart that is corrupt (Genesis. 6:5; 8:21; Psalm 14:1; Jeremiah 17:9; Ezekiel 36:26; Matthew 15:19); from it flow the springs of life (Proverbs 4:23). It is from within the human heart that all iniquities and all sorts of incomprehension flow (Mark 7:21). The mind of humans is darkened (Job 21:14; Isaiah 1:3; Jeremiah 4:22; John 1:5; Romans 1:21–22; 1 Corinthians 1:18–23; 2:14; Ephesians 4:18; 5:8). The human soul is guilty and impure and needs atonement and repentance (Leviticus 17:11; Psalm 19:7; 41:4; Proverbs 19:3, 16; Matthew 16:26; 1 Peter 1:22). The human spirit is proud, errant, and polluted and therefore has to be broken, illumined, and cleansed (Psalm 51:19; Proverbs 16:18, 32; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; 1 Corinthians 7:34; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). The human conscience is stained and needs cleansing (Titus 1:15; Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:22). The human desire, inclination, and will reach out to what is forbidden and is powerless to do good (Jeremiah 13:23; John 8:34, 36; Romans 6:17; 8:7; 2 Corinthians 3:5). And the body, with all its members—the eyes (Deuteronomy 29:4; Psalm 18:27; Isaiah 35:5; 42:7; 2 Peter 2:14; 1 John 2:16), the ears (Deuteronomy 29:4; Psalm 115:6; 135:17; Isaiah 6:10; Jeremiah 5:21; Zechariah 7:11), the feet (Psalm 38:16; Proverbs 1:16; 4:27; 6:18; Isaiah 59:7; Romans 3:15), the mouth and the tongue (Job 27:4; Psalm 17:10; 12:3f.; 15:3; Jeremiah 9:3, 5; Romans 3:14; James 3:5–8)—is in the service of unrighteousness. In a word: sin is not located on and around humans but within them and extends to the whole person and the whole of humankind.<sup>48</sup>

And:

According to Scripture, in addition to guilt and pollution, suffering also is a punishment for sin. As a result of it, humanity not only lost true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, but also dominion and glory. This became evident already immediately after the fall and is further confirmed throughout Scripture. God put enmity between the human race and the serpent and thereby in principle took from humanity the dominion over the animal world originally granted to it (Genesis 1:26; 2:19). God further pronounces upon the woman the penalty of painful childbirths and of an ever-gnawing desire for her husband

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consequence thereof, a hostile turning away from God, a self-entanglement in the love of self and of the world, as flowing from the abuse of the freedom of the will to an apparent freedom which degenerates into bondage. That sin, after it becomes fixed, is especially to be regarded as selfishness.” John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 246–247.

<sup>48</sup> Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 80–81; Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 431.

despite the former. The man himself gets his share of suffering from the curse pronounced upon the earth, a curse that obligates him to work arduously for his appointed share of daily bread. With this, a history of suffering is ushered in for all humanity and all the earth. And all the suffering that strikes people here on earth—a short life; a sudden, violent death; famine; plagues; wars; defeats; childlessness; painful losses; deprivation of goods; impoverishment; crop failure; cattle mortality; and so on—all has its root in sin, indeed not always in personal sins (for there is also a sparing of the wicked [Genesis 18:26ff.] and punishment as a testing of the righteous [Job 1; Matthew 13:21;26 John 9:1; 11:4; 2 Corinthians 12:7]), yet still in sin in general. Without sin there would be no suffering (Leviticus 26:14f.; Deuteronomy 28:15f.; Ezekiel 4:17; Hosea 2:8f.; Revelation 18:8; 21:4). Even the irrational creation has been subjected to futility and decay and now collectively sighs, as though in labor pains, looking forward to the revelation of the glory of the children of God, in hope of being itself set free from bondage to decay (Romans 8:19–22).<sup>49</sup>

The true nature of this fault cannot be seen without the operation of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). As shown above, due to the noetic effects of sin (Genesis 3; Romans 1), the human heart cannot rightly understand its trouble with God (Romans 1:28).

It is the Christian claim that God came into the world to redeem and restore humanity and creation. While the complete restoration will await the age to come, God has not abandoned humanity until that time.

In this age, God has granted salvation and common grace. In this age, God does not restore either our bodies or the objective creation. However, God does begin the work of renewing and restoring our psychology. Our old self has been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). Our identity is being renewed: “[We] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:28-29).<sup>50</sup> Our mind is being renewed (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23). Our thoughts and affections are to be transformed (Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 1:13, 4:7, 5:8). Our behavior is to be transformed (Colossians

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<sup>49</sup> Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 176.

<sup>50</sup> “We can never encounter God and remain unchanged. Beholding this glory effects our transformation as we are changed into a veritable likeness of him.” David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 200.

3:5-17). In the midst of trials of the greatest kind, we may be content (Philippians 4:11-13). The work of the Holy Spirit in this age, and irrespective of one's background, circumstance or other condition, is promised to provide the utmost of "mental health" (Galatians 5:22-24).

This restoration is commensurate with the loss caused by the Fall: if humanity's thoughts, loves, actions, will, identity has been damaged as a result of the loss of right relationship with God, then it is not surprising that restoration of that relationship in this age will transform human psychology.