

WHAT FACTORS ENCOURAGE INTEGRATION¹

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A current debate among those who practice “biblical counseling” concerns whether and when one may make use of (integrate) secular therapeutic ends and/or means. To what extent may we rely upon observations? That debate to date has concerned primarily the boundaries of “common grace.” Yet, before the “common grace tools” debate there is a proceeding question, “Why would we need to go beyond Scripture?” In a subsequent, essay I argue that the expansive definition of “common grace” to include “arts and science” fails. I wish only to delineate three arguments which motivative the current “CGT” debate: biblical counseling is (1) unscientific, (2) uncompassionate; and (3) the word “counseling” implies “therapy.” I will answer these contentions in subsequent essays.³

It used to be the habit in theological texts for the author to include a prayer to begin the work. To that end, I will offer this (medieval) prayer:

*Teach me your servant, therefore, Lord, teach me, I pray you, by your Holy Spirit,
how to devote myself to them
and how to spend myself on their behalf.
Give me, by your unutterable grace,
the power to bear with their shortcomings patiently,*

¹ I want to thank Drs. Gifford and Tan, and my friends who waded through the substantially longer version of this still too long essay. I would also like to thank Olivia Hansen for her kind attention and comments during the editing process of this article. The errors which remain are all mine own.

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³ (1) Expecting biblical counseling to conform to “science” is a category error. (2) Biblical counseling is not un-compassionate. (3) We may give instruction without engaging in “therapy.” (4) Perhaps underlying at the most fundamental level we find the modern obsession with “technique” as that concept is articulated by Jacques Ellul.

to share their griefs in loving sympathy,
and to afford them help according to their needs.
Taught by your Spirit may I learn to
comfort the sorrowful,
confirm the weak
and raise the fallen;
to be myself one with them in their weakness,
one with them when they burn at causes of offence,
one in all things with them, all things to all of them, that I may gain them all.
Give me the power to speak the truth straightforwardly,
and yet acceptably;
so that they all may be built up in faith and hope and love,
in chastity and lowliness,
in patience and obedience,
in spiritual fervor and submissiveness of mind.
And, since you have appointed this blind guide to lead them,
this untaught man to teach,
this ignorant one to rule them, for their sakes, Lord, if not for mine,
teach him whom you have made to be their teacher,
lead him whom you have bidden to lead them,
rule him who is their ruler.
Teach me, therefore, sweet Lord,
how to restrain the restless, comfort the discouraged, and support the weak.
Teach me to suit myself to everyone according to his nature, character and
disposition, according to his power of understanding
or his lack of it,
as time and place require, in each case, as you would have me do. ⁴

⁴Aelred of Rievaulx, *Treatises, The Pastoral Prayer, Cistercian Fathers*, vol. 2, 114–115; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Pastoral Care*, vol. 3 of *Pastoral Counsel* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 11.

INTRODUCTION

The phrase “biblical counseling” is the inheritance of Jay Adams’ coinage.⁵ Since that time, the concept has undergone significant application to a number of counseling theories and methods which, though they bear a degree of semblance to one another, are not wholly consistent.⁶ My intention herein is not to trace the variations through time, nor is it to comprehensively survey the issue of the variations currently in use.

The issue which has taken my attention concerns the scope of “biblical counseling” as it is used in public-discussion among a subset of those who claim the title “biblical counseling.” In the interest of full disclosure, I am a biblical counselor certified by ACBC (the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors), have taught at various ACBC functions in United States, South Africa, and Chile, and I am also an adjunct professor at The Master’s University and at Brookes Bible College.

The phrase “biblical counseling” is also used by a number of our brothers and sisters with an emphasis upon certain distinctive elements such as “clinically informed” and “trauma informed.”⁷ The phrase “redemptive counseling” and

⁵The first use of the phrase appears to be in *Competent to Counsel* by Jay Adams (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970). See also “Google books search for ‘biblical counseling’ (1800–1997),” Google Books, accessed June 1, 2026. https://www.google.com/search?q=%22%22biblical%20counseling%22%22&tbm=bks&tbs=cdr:1,cd_min:1800,cd_max:1997&lr=lang_en; David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2010).

⁶Professor Brooks of SEBTS has provided his own explanation of the variation history in a recent X (neo Twitter) thread, <https://x.com/natejbrooks/status/1811072726376849600>. As he stated in one of his posts, “Biblical counseling has never been a term used to refer to just one approach. It’s a family of approaches, and, like the members of a family, there are different hair colors, freckles, size of frames, that sit around the dinner table.” In this essay I am not contending for a definition of the phrase, per se. For many reasons I prefer alternative nomenclature such as “biblical soul care” (the name of this journal). My rationale for reticence on this topic will appear below.

⁷On one hand is the use of that phrase by ACBC and certain educational institutions, such as Midwestern Seminary, The Masters University, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, and Bob Jones University. These are not the only institutions which instruct in “biblical counseling” in the manner which I will advocate in this series of articles. I trust I will handle the difference of opinion(s) on this topic fairly. However, I am beginning from a position, and I am arguing to a position which holds to a “narrow” use of the phrase “biblical counseling” and a “maximalist” position on the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling. See, e.g., 1. Corinthians 13, particularly 13:4; Ephesians 4:1–3, etc. To the extent that anyone finds anything I say herein to be a personal affront, please know that nothing was written to offend or confront. I do not write this with

“third generation biblical counselor” have also been offered, with their own definitions and emphases.⁸ Again, some of the men and women who use these more capacious definitions are people I know or at least with whom I have communicated.⁹

The various hyphenated biblical counseling theories arise, at least in part, from the proposition that it would be good and wise to incorporate various elements of secular psychology.¹⁰

The debate concerns whether we may or whether we must (if we are good and wise) integrate psychological knowledge in our biblical counseling.¹¹ The

the illusion that I have reached the perfect summit of knowledge. The nuances of relationship between Scripture and secular knowledge disciplines are complex. For example, in connection with the building of the temple, we read in Exodus 31 that the Spirit of God has gifted men with abilities which are not classically “spiritual.” Moreover, such skill is certainly analogous to many men and women at that time. How does one ferret out the distinction between inherent capacity, learned skill, and peculiar gifting of the Spirit? Why does the line of Cain possess such inventive ability? (Genesis 4:20–23). On the other hand, I see no reason to believe that human beings at all have been gifted peculiarly to gain insight into the mechanics of soul, especially when their modeling denies the entire Godward relationship (1 Corinthians 2:10–13). A scientific model can be remarkably accurate and utterly wrong. Consider the medieval complications of the Ptolemaic model of planetary motion with its retrogrades. We can assume that ancient sacrifice of children was instituted to relieve some anxiety (perhaps Girard’s theory explains the behavior), but should Israel have copied this action as an effective means of “common grace”? (See, e.g., Ezekiel 16:20–21).

⁸ As I was finishing this essay, I came across another post by Professor Nate Brooks who is contending that perhaps the division is less acute than some may believe. X.com, 2025 (Formerly Twitter), <https://x.com/natejbrooks/status/1886795075998367749>.

⁹ In a subsequent essay, I will explain how one’s personal experience, one’s education, relations, personal inclination, et cetera will affect the manner in which one approaches the issues which arise in the context of “biblical counseling.” This background is not mere window dressing, it is integral to the argument which I am making herein. In addition, one’s “ethos” is a fundamental element of argumentation and persuasive speech, per Aristotle. Christof Rapp, “Aristotle’s Rhetoric,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford.edu, May 2, 2002. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>. And my ethos must be considered in evaluating what I have to offer.

¹⁰ Even the phrase “secular psychology” is too broad. There is certainly a difference between the study of the central nervous system and Carl Jung’s collective unconscious. The entire discussion over “common grace,” “integration,” and “psychology” has been a trainwreck of logical error (most particularly equivocation and the genetic fallacy, failure to understand induction, abduction, or deduction; misuse of evidentiary categories; et cetera). I will endeavor to avoid these faults, but I write fearing I will fail.

¹¹ It is not my intention to merely point to the blasphemous nature of Freud or Dewey’s atheism and desire to use public education to instill “Unitarian Universalism.” Dale McGowan, “John Dewey Redefines God for Humanists and Atheists,” Dummies, accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.dummies.com/article/body-mind-spirit/religion-spirituality/atheism/john-dewey-redefines->

dispute of late has largely centered around the concept of “common grace.” A recent edition of the journal of Southeastern Seminary Theological Review stated definitively that integration is not merely possible, but it is both unavoidable and necessary to counsel well.¹² ACBC has taken a stance generally opposed to the position advanced recently by the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹² The position of ACBC may be found at the “Sufficiency Statement.”¹³

While I earnestly desire to avoid rancor, I do not believe we can avoid the discussion. The stakes are far too high to avoid frank debate on the ground that I may find myself feeling uncomfortable (Galatians 2:11). If I disagree with you, my dear reader, please take that as a disagreement over the matters in debate and not as a personal criticism.

It is my intention that this essay will be a preface to a further essay addressing the overarching question of whether and what elements of the field termed “psychology” should be incorporated into use by “biblical counselors.”¹⁴ Of particular interest will be the conditions under which some biblical counselors contend contemporary therapeutic procedure and goals, *if any*, should be incorporated into biblical counseling.¹⁵

god-for-humanists-and-atheists-165808/). To merely argue from their questionable motives to all current therapy would be lazy and an unfair application of the genetic fallacy.

¹² Sam Williams, ed., *Southeastern Theological Review* 15, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Updated-15.1.pdf>.

¹² For the biblical counseling perspective, Heath Lambert’s recent introductory work on common grace would be representative. Heath Lambert, *Biblical Counseling and Common Grace* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2023). Here is an example of equivocation on the word “integration.” This word, which is capable of various definitions, is employed in various inconsistent manners, which primarily proves that self-styled biblical counselors may be fine when dealing with people but lack certain fundamental skills in other areas.

¹³ “Sufficiency Statement,” [Sufficiencystatement.com](https://sufficiencystatement.com), 2024, <https://sufficiencystatement.com>.

¹⁴ If you are familiar with the field, you would know that there is no single theory or “school” which constitutes “psychology.” As Dr. Baker explains, there are only psychologies. This also overlaps with the field covered by “common grace.”

¹⁵ I have not undertaken a thorough review of the literature and certainly do not know all who work in the field of “biblical counseling.” I have noticed a number of people who will incorporate EMDR (usually in a basic and untrained fashion) of some Cognitive Behavioral means (which in various instances duplicate biblical means) or a therapeutic goal of simply seeking symptom reduction as part of their “biblical counseling” and such “integration” is done without understanding what has been done. Whether wittingly or unknowingly, such incorporation runs the danger of straying into Colossians 2, by seeking to build upon revelation with some form of further knowledge.

A third group of Christians (and more beyond Christianity) hold the opinion that biblical counseling should not be practiced at all and the whole of the matter should be given over to “trained therapists.”¹⁶ I will not be interacting in any concerted effort with their position in this essay. I have one final essay in this series which will contend that the expansive Neo-Calvinist (particularly Kuyper/Bavinck) common grace definition should be retired.¹⁷

THE NATURE OF THE DISPUTE

A debate is taking place among “biblical counselors.” The moniker is typically self-applied, and often by people whom I wish would not use the title. I am referring to a current debate taking place among men and women who use the title “biblical counselor” with some justification. The people involved all love the honor of Christ and the good of their fellow believers.

While I will begin where I began, as a certified counselor with ACBC who adheres to the positions of ACBC, I am not claiming that everyone on one side of this argument holds all the “right” and the “other” holds all the wrong. Should we disagree, let us disagree in love. I have learned a great deal, even from those with whom I disagree.

¹⁶While any number of instances could be provided, I offer one of the less aggressive “cautions” against biblical counseling: “You do not have to see a Biblical Counselor. Particularly if you have trauma from abuse, PTSD, or suicidal ideation, you need a therapist specialized in those particular things. You can supplement with pastoral or Christian counseling as needed but get specialized support.” Jennifer Greenberg (@JennMGreenberg), X.com, June 2, 2022, <https://x.com/JennMGreenberg/status/1532549087047950341>.

¹⁷An element which I cannot elaborate herein, but which seems to be involved in this prong of the debate, is what is meant by “spiritual”. The “only trained therapist” contingent seems in part to have relegated “spiritual” to something which is not strictly psychological or physical. Adams addressed this argument from a different angle in his various discussions of trichotomy. Another element of this discussion entails Paul’s writing on the matter of “inner man” (2 Corinthians 4:16) At this point, I will assert without further argument that we as human beings cannot live in a way which segregates out matters which are spiritual and not spiritual. Gathering sticks, surely the most quotidian of tasks, holds spiritual significance (Numbers 15:32–36). Sure, my thoughts and feelings fall within the ambit of spiritual concerns (Jeremiah 4:14, “O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, /that you may be saved./How long shall your wicked thoughts/lodge within you?”; Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith and Harry S. Stout, revised ed., vol. 2, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 95, “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”

Structure of the Argument

The ultimate issue: should a biblical counselor incorporate contemporary therapeutic techniques and aims into one's practice of counseling? A related question: to what extent, if any, does "common grace" make an epistemological contribution to soul care?¹⁸

First Premise

If God has given us a technique of common grace, we despise the goodness of God by not using that tool.¹⁹

Second Premise:

Technique X is a blessing of common grace.

¹⁸ Here, we immediately run into the problem of definitions. The phrase is used in a number of different and inconsistent ways. Some use the phrase "common grace" to refer to anything which a human being does involving any intellectual or moral quality. Writing this sentence is common grace. Thus, Dr. Mengele using his medical skill to torture a child is using common grace. Some reserve the word for admirable things in science and art. This runs into its own problems. What scientific theory is actually common grace, when science is a method of skepticism and even the most certain theories are overturned. Is it perhaps the best science and art? What moral position is common grace? Is IVF common grace or a sin? Is it God lessening the effects of sins destruction as a general proposition while not referring to any particular skill or event? Is it the restraint of sin which permits the exercise of creational attributes of humanity which may then be used for good or ill? And why select one or the other? The phrase common grace loads the argument, because it privileges whatever I choose to be the "grace" (and hence a gift of God). Perhaps the entire concept as a concept should be scrapped; not as a rejection that God has shown mercy to humanity, but rather, that each thing must be judged in isolation. A doctrine which cannot distinguish between a perverse prison doctor and a loving missionary doctor is of limited value. This If-Then argument preys upon the deliberate equivocation of the phrase;

Once again, this raises the issue of scientific modeling (because scientific reasoning will always entail empirical observation as made meaningful by a model). If the current model of self-understanding includes gender fluidity (as a sort of polymorphous perversity of children a la Freud), is that common grace? I recently wrote a brief on behalf of ACBC before the Supreme Court on this precise issue in response to a law which found that not accepting such a model is morally and psychologically harmful to the child. When such a position is adopted by the APA, on what *scientific* ground does the biblical counselor exclude such information from the realm of common grace?

¹⁹ Does the refusal of some method which the biblical counselor takes as an instance of God's common grace (as opposed to a human misuse of some inherent capacity of perversion of common grace) mean that another biblical counselor who rejects what another has embraced constitutes a devilish deception? (1 Timothy 4:1-5) If they are in the same church does this require church discipline for rejection of means or aim which is derived in relative independence from Scripture?

Conclusion:

Therefore, we must use technique X lest we despise God.²⁰

For example,

If God has given us a technique of common grace, we despise the goodness of God by not using that tool.

Trauma-Informed therapy is a blessing of common grace (or a “common grace tool”).²¹

Therefore, we must use Trauma-Informed Therapy, lest we despise God.²²

The debate, to which this essay partially responds, has taken on the structure of this argument. The first premise has been generally affirmed without taking the trouble to define common grace. When the first premise is made *without clarity and precision*, the argument focuses on the second premise, which is where the debate most often takes place. Much of the debate has centered upon questions regarding whether “trauma informed therapy” is a “common grace tool.” There

²⁰ Lydia Kim-van Daalen writes:

For all these reasons, Christians “must be careful not to reject the good things that unbelievers do as totally evil” (Grudem, 1994, p. 665), because by doing so, they may neglect and undermine the work of the Holy Spirit through common grace. What is more, Christians have an obligation to interact with what is happening in secular psychotherapy.

Lydia Kim van Daalen, “The Holy Spirit, Common Grace, and Secular Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 40, no. 3 (2012): 229–39, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/holy-spirit-common-grace-secular-psychotherapy/docview/1152080064/se-2>. See, e.g.:

On the other hand, if we deny or minimize the motif of common grace, we run the risk of intellectual arrogance, a defensive isolationism from the culture in general and the academy in particular. Such isolationism deprives Christian theologians (and Christian thinkers in other disciplines) of important resources for testing and correcting our own ideas and interpretations. A devaluation of God’s goodness in common grace may also foster an anti-intellectualism that despises God’s general revelation in the created order and his providential dealings in history. Spiritually, ignoring common grace may foster attitudes of suspicion, antipathy, and contempt toward non-Christians.

“Spiritual Antithesis: Common Grace, and Practical Theology.” n.d., Westminster Seminary, California. <https://www.wscal.edu/resource/spiritual-antithesis-common-grace-and-practical-theology/>.

²¹ I have found a great deal of trauma informed therapy and theory to be based upon questionable foundations and untested theory.

²² As I will contend in the next essay, this form of argument lends itself to a Mott-Bailey type of argument.

are then two forms of disagreement as to the second premise:

2A: Common grace does not include trauma-informed therapy, because trauma informed therapy is bad science (and hence not an instance of common grace).²³

Or

2B: Common grace does not extend or include trauma-informed therapy. (A definitional argument concerning the scope of “common grace”).

Here it seems to me the dispute functions as follows: each side thinks themselves to be doing right. Each side thinks the other is in error. One side thinks ACBC is mistakenly rejecting a tool granted us by common grace. Those on the side of ACBC would think trauma-informed counseling (or whatever may be the particular matter under consideration) is not a tool of common grace (and inconsistent with other commitments we should hold as Christians; again, note the trouble which hinges upon the definition).

While that is true, it does not quite answer the question of why we are having this problem (aside from the glaring logical errors which populate this discussion on just the matter of what we are even talking about). While the dispute is “academic,” the effects of the dispute are practical. Scholars may disagree over the grammar of a long dead language without affecting the “real life” of anyone. But this disagreement has real life consequence. Is ACBC saying “be warm and filled”

²³ If one uses the “everything is common grace” argument, trauma theory is common grace. Failed physics is as much common grace as classical mechanics. Indeed, since all scientific knowledge is tentative and based upon models of reality which we hope are accurate, we cannot rule out anything at any time. How do we rule out, in a principled manner, astrology? Because it is not true? That is a modern prejudice. How do we exclude the theory of ether? Until the Michelson-Morely experiment, it was known to be true. Was the theory of ether common grace in 1886 but not in 1887? But there is no need to reach for the 19th century to find an example. Two instances which I came across while writing this article make the point a contemporary issue. Here is physics: Robert Sanders, “A Recent Fast Radio Burst Calls into Question What Astronomers Believed They Knew,” Phys.org, January 25, 2025. <https://phys.org/news/2025-01-fast-radio-astronomers-believed-knew.html>. Here is medicine: Beth Mole, “Your doctor’s office could be reading your blood pressure all wrong,” Arstechnica.com, October 8, 2024, <https://arstechnica.com/health/2024/10/your-doctors-office-could-be-reading-your-blood-pressure-all-wrong/>. The medicine article makes the point with great clarity: if something as mundane as reading one’s blood pressure needs modification, what do I say about matters as complex as human psychology? Were blood pressure readings common grace until the problem was discovered and now the new form is common grace? How does common grace advance? If it is a gift of God, do the gifts evolve? Again, the structure of the doctrine is problematic.

(James 2:16) when it fails to take up the latest discovery of modern science and then disregards such discovery when a second fails to replicate the prior test?

The Reason for a Dispute

In addition to examining the nature of a debate, it is often useful to consider why the debate even exists. A military leader may examine the manner in which the armies move about the battlefield, but the politicians consider the reason for the war. In addition to considering the structure of the argument, we must also examine the manner in which an argument gets its start.

A dispute can exist because the parties desire two opposite ends. Two teams are in a sporting match. Each team wants to win, but only one can win. That is the dispute among us biblical counselors. *We are seeking the glory of God and the good of our fellow man* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Unfortunately, we may speak “past” one another:

(1) The parties do not fully comprehend the “opposing” side of the debate.²⁴

Or

(2) The parties do not understand what motivates the “opposing” side.

What is the “need” for this argument? What problem do the parties’ respective arguments seek to solve?

The Criticism of Biblical Counseling

When we consider the troubles we have faced in counseling (and we all have faced difficulties), the question arises, “Have I been doing this right?” We speak with someone (and as noted above, words are the only tool available to us), and they remain depressed. We speak with another, and he does not end a habitual

²⁴ For example, the Trinitarian debates in the early church fell afoul of linguistic difficulties between Greek and Latin, “When the Latins on the other hand said *una substantia in tribus personis*, ‘one substance in three persons,’ they could be heard as saying one *hypostasis* (‘person’) in three roles, in other words, of teaching Sabellian modalism.” Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007) 130.

sin.²⁵ We think our technique has failed.²⁶

Our failures are of two sorts. One fault can be a matter of execution. If I have the right method but fail to execute that properly. Biblical counseling is good, but I didn't use the Bible correctly. A second sort of fault is that it could stem from my method. Should I add to my counseling model and knowledge? This essay responds to the second question. I have the correct information, I say the "right things" but do so in the "wrong manner." There is an argument that Biblical Counseling should incorporate various "clinical" *methods*. What is the wise thing to do? (Proverbs 1:7). I consider such work a function of wisdom, not technique (Proverbs 1:1-7).

I found John Flavel useful at this point. He writes in *Keeping the Heart*, "And by keeping the heart, understand the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties, to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God." Our trouble arose when the breach in that communion arose (Genesis 3). The physical and psychological ills which we will be called upon to address in biblical counseling all have a root in this soil (and no, I am not contending someone who suffers from a physical disability has sinned in relation to that loss; see, e.g. Job 1-2). If a man is right with God, in communion flowing from union with Christ, it may not remedy a trouble at this time (Psalm 88), but it does lead to a means to live through such sorrow (Philippians 4:11-13).²⁷

Biblical counseling has been criticized on several grounds at various times. I am going to focus on four criticisms in this essay:

²⁵ No matter how "clinically informed" you believe yourself to be, you can only talk to the "counselee." You can tell them to do something, but you are still only talking. You cannot prescribe medication. You cannot give them electroshock. You can talk. All of us only listen and talk as far as tools go. You may pray and read with them, but you are still limited to words.

²⁶ We give far too much credit to our efforts and far too little to the Spirit who effectuates any true transformation.

²⁷ I acknowledge the criticisms which would come at this point. But now is not the time to respond to such. I am aware of the critique. This essay is merely a first stage in a response to such critique.

First Criticism: Biblical counseling is unscientific.²⁸

Implication: therefore, we should add the “science” of contemporary therapy to our counseling. This criticism is attractive, because not only does an appeal to science hold out the promise of being more “effective” as a counselor, but it also includes the added bonus of intellectual respectability.²⁹ Therefore, the reliance upon “science” includes a stated and a suppressed rationale.

Second Criticism: Biblical counseling is uncompassionate, unsympathetic.

Implication: therefore, we should integrate the Client Centered Therapy technique (of Carl Rogers, and the subsequent research along these lines) into our biblical counseling (such material is routinely included in Christian counseling). I agree there are too many who have insufficient compassion and patience. I disagree that the solution is Rogerian affirmation.

Third Criticism: Biblical counseling is not “counseling.”

On this point, I will agree for reason discussed below.

Fourth Criticism: This final issue is perhaps the key trouble. Biblical counseling is not a *technique* – it should be a better technique. I heartily agree; it is no *technique*. The nature of technique is so suffused into the culture that extricating the effects of this manner of thinking presents enormous difficulty.

If our counseling always worked, or if it “worked” as well as we expect it might, such criticism would have no purchase. Thinking that counseling should work is itself an effect of technological thinking. Counseling is a ministry. God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6.) If these criticisms had no basis in reality, neither criticism would work. It is true that “biblical counseling” is not scientific in the way that Freudian psychoanalysis or Jungian psychotherapy is “science.” It is true that too many people who self-designate as a “biblical counselor” are unkind. But would integration in the manner suggested make for more faithful and more helpful counsel?

²⁸ A nontrivial case could be made that psychology as an academic discipline has been infected by a great deal of “findings” which are not science. Ignoring the barbarisms of those advocating for sterilization and mutilation of the young, there is the replication crisis of psychology. See, e.g., B. J. Wiggins and C. D. Christopherson, “The replication crisis in psychology: An overview for theoretical and philosophical psychology,” *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 39 no. 4, (2019): 202–217, <https://doi.org/10.1037/teo0000137>.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:30.

FIRST CRITICISM: BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS NOT SCIENTIFIC

“Follow the science” has become “a nice knock-down argument” which one cannot gainsay.³⁰ Two corollaries of this argument are (1) that which is not “science” lacks factual support. (2) That which is “science” cannot be denied. As will be shown below, “science” refers to such matters that are empirical and repeatable.³¹

It is a tremendous mark of status to be thought scientific and scientifically literate.³² Science is not merely true; facility with science is routinely taken as proof of a “superior intellect.” Physics and mathematics are the pinnacles of such intelligence. Now psychologists have access to remarkable machines which can peer into the skull and measure how much oxygen has flooded some fold of the brain; the prestige can be shared. Psychological studies may entail statistics.³³ This

³⁰ Per Ngram review, the phrase “follow the science” was nearly non-existent prior to the Covid crisis at which point it became an unassailable argument. To use the word “science” has a rhetorical effect similar to the language of “rights”, wherein one borrows the credibility and authority of a concept and uses it as a weapon to defend something otherwise indefensible. See, e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Who doesn’t want peace and safety?; In *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Humpty-Dumpty makes his linguistic argument in the very post-modernist manner of insisting upon his private meaning:

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Chapter VI.

³¹ The philosophy of science is a discipline far beyond the scope of this paper. What I mean by “science” in quotation marks is not an extended consideration of Kuhn, but rather the popular, generic understanding of science, particularly as it has been enshrined in a federal court decision.

³² “Nobody likes to feel stupid. But we’ve all been there. We all can recall humbling experiences. Like that time a grad school professor semi-shamed you, with his superior intellect, in front of the class.” Drew Rick-Miller, “Pair up with a Scientist. Your Church Will Thank You,” Science for the Church, last modified October 11, 2023, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://scienceforthechurch.org/2019/02/05/pair-up-with-a-scientist-your-church-will-thank-you/>; 1 Kings 4:31-33.

³³ Andrew Lang’s quip is appropriate here, “He uses statistics as a drunken man uses lamp posts—for support rather than illumination.”

makes them true and “scientific.” But of what statistics can we biblical counselors “boast” (1 Corinthians 1:31)?

Theology has been dethroned as the queen of the sciences. It is thought a bare superstition. I have been introduced as a “lawyer,” a “professor,” and as a “pastor.” While “pastor” has some status in a church, it is not a title which commands any respect. I have received some status as “lawyer” or “professor.” “Physicist” would win the prize for being smart. So, we are tempted to squeeze ourselves next to “science” as much as possible (James 1:14; the desire to be admired is a sin which is a powerful, subtle temptation; “science” is often a loaf of bread made of stone by the Tempter; Matthew 4:3).

A biblical counselor does not even possess the status of a theologian much less a pastor. I have heard pastors speak disparagingly of the biblical counselor (1 Corinthians 12:14–18). Biblical counseling does not derive its worth or purpose from an empirically validated modification of cognitive behavioral psychology. If I had to compress our labor, it would be “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6). But neither “faith” nor “love” can be demonstrated by an empirical “scientific law” demonstrated under laboratory conditions. To be a biblical counselor has no status, except perhaps among our ecclesiastical antechambers.³⁴

It is hard to settle for such a narrow title. When we gain some status, it is easy to want more. It is hard not to take the best seat at the meal, and if I am toward the middle, I want that seat next to the chief seat (Luke 20:46; Ezekiel 28:2).³⁵ Hankering after science is a desire for respectability. If we can call our work by that magical cognomen *science*, we could number ourselves among Freud and Maslow.

³⁴As biblical counselors, we must ourselves be biblical; we are to lead people in and through the Valley of Humiliation. If we are not humble ourselves, how shall we be Mr. Greatheart, who brings the pilgrim to the Valley and can say of our Lord, “He loved much to be here. He loved also to walk these meadows, for He found the air was pleasant.” John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Part II, chapter 6; Philippians 2:1–8.

³⁵“Spiritual pride is man’s chief temptation, and the true danger lies in the fact that a pride of this order is a real possibility only for the man with religious concern.” John E. Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Religious Affections*, eds. John E. Smith and Harry S. Stout, revised ed., vol. 2, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 36.

At least since Wundt, psychology has sought to be an academic science akin to physics.³⁶ There are a number of problems with such a goal. For instance, human beings in nature and influence are too complex to create a test which focuses upon a single variable.³⁷ But scientific precision is a goal; it is to seek patterns of repetition. The biblical counselor can cast an eye over to the psychologist and think that it is perhaps truer because it is “scientific.” How does such thinking differ from the people hankering after a golden calf in Exodus 31?³⁸

For the congregant, “scientific” is often more satisfying because the name has the overwhelming imprimatur of truth. The Bible is subject to innumerable interpretations and exists in the faith of uncertain “faith,” something one believes without evidence: “Biblical Counseling rejects science, psychology and psychotherapy tools.”³⁹ Now, these extremes are not the positions of those who would engage in biblical counseling nor those who would seek such counsel. Yet the cultural weight of the positions creates an expectation.

³⁶ Alan Kim, “Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt,” Stanford.edu, published June 16, 2006. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wilhelm-wundt/>. Prior to a formalization of psychology as an empirical discipline, it would be more in the vein of a speculative or rationalistic consideration of the subject, such as Kierkegaard’s work, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin*. It would be difficult to imagine such a project being undertaken by means of a double blind test.

³⁷ Any model built upon the premises that (1) human beings have no “inner man” (2 Corinthians 4:16), and (2) there is no sovereign Triune God ignores reality as surely as a theory of disease which knows nothing of the virus.

³⁸ I carry no illusion that I am secure from this temptation. “We beseech Thee, O LORD, to bestow upon us the ineffable bounty of Thy sweetness; to the end that, while we seek for Thy truth, we may overcome all the temptations of pride.” J. M. Neale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Mediæval Writers: Psalm 1 to Psalm 38*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London; New York: Joseph Masters; Pott and Amery, 1869), 480.

³⁹ Elaine R. Kelly, “Biblical Counseling: The Rejection of Science,” Elaine Kelly, November 21, 2024. <https://www.elainekelly.ca/post/biblical-counseling-the-rejection-of-science>, “All non-BC approaches appear to believe in the scientific merit of modern psychology on some level and integrate it into their counseling to some degree. BC believes modern psychology is a distinctively secular field of study”; Todd Morikawa, “A Case for Biblical Counseling,” The London Lyceum, December 6, 2024, <https://thelondonlyceum.com/a-case-for-biblical-counseling/>. This to overstate the case. As Charles Hodges writes, “Scientific studies can never take the place of Scripture. However, at times they can provide support for the counsel we offer and may act as a warning to those we counsel. Scientific research can’t make people change or even want to do so—that requires the gospel and grace.” “The Importance of Science in Biblical Counseling,” Biblical Counseling Coalition, April 2, 2021, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2021/04/02/biblical-counseling-and-science/>; “Biblical Counseling vs Psychology: Comparing Approaches to Mental Health,” NeuroLaunch.com, September 14, 2024, <https://neurolaunch.com/biblical-counseling-vs-psychology/>.

It is sheer commonplace expectation and belief in the value of “scientific,” or perhaps more to the point, “clinically verified” therapy which drives much of the discussion.⁴⁰ As I was finalizing this paper, I came across a post on X.com which put the matter bluntly, “Biblical counseling hurts people because it rejects God’s gift of revelation and CG [common grace].”⁴¹ A more sophisticated critique claims the rejection of such “science” leads us to an overt heresy: “It strikes me that a strong form of the rule of nonscientific scope would push us in the direction of a Gnostic dichotomization of the spiritual and the physical.”⁴² Others merely rue the lack of science, “Unfortunately, interest in the scientific study of forgiveness appears to have been limited to a few scholars.”⁴³ To neglect science is to hurt others:⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Such a critique is not new. Powlison, writing of dispute which developed after Adams’ 1988 address to the International congress on Christian Counseling wrote of the stereotypes which developed of each side, “the nouthetic counselors would become sectarian, anti-intellectual incompetents.” David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010) 44.

⁴¹ Austin Hobbs (@AustinDHobbs) “Biblical counseling is not faithful Protestantism,” X.com, (formerly Twitter), January 17, 2025, <https://x.com/AustinDHobbs/status/1880348917843509697>.

⁴² William L. Hathaway, “Scripture and Psychological Science: Integrative Challenges & Callings,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33, no. 2 (Summer, 2005): 89–97, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/scripture-psychological-science-integrative/docview/223667599/se-2>. See, Steven L Porter, “Wesleyan Theological Methodology As A Theory of Integration,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 3 (2004): 190–9, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/wesleyan-theological-methodology-as-theory/docview/223676692/se-2>.

⁴³ Christopher Grace, “Developing a Scientific Understanding of Forgiveness,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 29, no. 1 (2001): 86, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/developing-scientific-understanding-forgiveness/docview/223679202/se-2>. Of course, “scientific” when applied to psychology faces many difficulties when dealing with the complexity of human behavior. Peter T. Manicas and Paul F. Secord, “Implications for psychology of the new philosophy of science,” In R. B. Miller, ed., *The restoration of dialogue: Readings in the philosophy of clinical psychology*, American Psychological Association, 502–522, <https://doi.org/10.1037/10112-042>; cf., Anticipating the question of integration, M-S-W assure their readers that they are confident that their psychological work will comport with biblical truth: “We find that psychological research on forgiveness is easily harmonized with traditional Christian theology.” Alfred J. Poirier, “Taking Up the Challenge,” ed. David A. Powlison, the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 18 vol. 1, (1999): 31; “Forgiveness is not primarily for personal psychological gain.” Aaron Sironi, “From Your Heart ... Forgive,” the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26, no. 3 (2012): 47.

⁴⁴ “In the levels-of-explanation approach discussed by David Myers (2010), the best available information in science and practice can be brought forth to help our understanding of human behavior and thus maximize our intervention strategies to improve human functioning. The sciences, not only in psychology but in medical and other fields as well, can all be put to good use to help Jake.” Thomas G. Plante, chapter 3, “Levels of Explanation,” in Stephen P. Greggo and Timothy A. Sisemore, eds., *Counseling and Christianity: Five Approaches* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012).

Similarly, your pastor's expertise is most likely not in the realm of mental health, and for serious issues of depression, anxiety, addiction, or mental illness, you need to consult a professional therapist, not a theologian.⁴⁵

This "specialist" has learned skills garnered from education and internship, confirmed with a state license, and governed by professional ethics requirements.⁴⁶

How History Bears Down Upon Biblical Counseling

There is a scene in the movie "The Quiet Man," which illustrates someone going to one's clergy. The movie takes place in rural Ireland sometime in the first part of the 20th century. A problem has arisen in the marriage between John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. Unable to resolve the trouble themselves, they turn to their respective clergy, O'Hara to the Roman Catholic priest, John Wayne to the protestant pastor. What is striking is that neither seeks a "therapist." They naturally go to the pastor of their soul.

Indeed, in the history of the Church, the pastor was given the duty to care for the souls in his care. This understanding is embedded in the language used to describe a clergyman:

Curate. Properly, a clergyman who has the care ('cure') of a parish, i.e. in England a *rector, *vicar, or *perpetual curate. Such a clergyman is also known as the 'incumbent'. He is chosen by the 'patron' (the person or body having the right to nominate a clergyman for the parish in question) and is admitted to the cure of souls ('instituted' or 'collated') by the bishop of the diocese.⁴⁷

When we speak of "soul care," we are using language deeply embedded within the fabric of Christianity.

⁴⁵ "Biblical Counseling' Is Not Counseling," Medium, October 12, 2023. <https://joelherbert.medium.com/biblical-counseling-is-not-counseling-6d1f4857546d>.

⁴⁶ It is foolishness to think that a long-dead Jewish rabble rouser, executed for the crime of believing himself god and king, is present now and has the power to actually give comfort to brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 11:28).

⁴⁷ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 442.

Freud Provides Us with a Science of the Mind

The history of popular psychology cannot avoid the issue of Freud. He is not the first to treat psychology as a “science” (indeed his theories partake far more of Hegel and Spencer than any hard science).⁴⁸ He is of monumental importance to the overall discipline. His influence pervades even areas which are not directly the product of psychoanalysis. The people in your church who are unaware of anything directly related to Freud have been influenced by Freudian concepts, simplified, decontextualized, and distorted, but Freudian, nonetheless.⁴⁹

One intent of Freud was to take a field previously occupied by pastoral work and make a scientific endeavor. He succeeded in the cultural combat. Pastoral work, once his competitor to dethrone, has become intellectually subordinate to such “science.” Since that time, the weight of authority has shifted unquestionably from pastoral counsel to scientific treatment.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Consider for instance the following line from Spencer to Freud’s concepts of punishment and pleasure, “[F]rom the worship of cannibal ancestors who delighted in witnessing tortures, there resulted the primitive conception of deities who were propitiated by the hearing of pains, and, consequently, angered by the receipt of pleasures.” Herbert Spencer, *The Data of Ethics*, part one: science, (New York: P.F. Collier & Sons, 1900)110. It should be noted that original publication of the material was from 1879. He had published *The Principles of Psychology* in 1855. Though little mentioned in contemporary literature, he was a much discussed and influential thinker during the Victorian period. I have not undertaken to determine the extent to which Freud was aware of Spencer, but Spencer’s heavily “scientific” thought certainly was much in the air during his lifetime.

⁴⁹ Contemporary psychological theory and practice may seem to be more appropriate for this thesis. However, Freud’s influence over the discipline of psychology and over the intellectual landscape generally of modern culture cannot be doubted. Herbert Marcuse has infested the Western intellect far more than most people understand. Marcuse was dependent much upon Freud for his political and sexual-political thought. Consider the subtitle of *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud*. For influence of Marcuse, compare his thoughts on tolerance with contemporary events, see, e.g., “Repressive Tolerance,” Herbert Marcuse, <https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/publications/1960s/1965-repressive-tolerance-fulltext.html>.

⁵⁰ The evidence of true *scientific* effectiveness of this work is questionable. I anecdotally recall a psychology professor at UCLA mocking Freud, while I was reading Freud quite seriously in a graduate course in literature. The studies on effectiveness are not uniformly supportive. Consider, Scott D. Miller, Mark A. Hubble, and Daryl Chow, “The Question of Expertise in Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Expertise* 1, no. 2 (2018), https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_2_MillerHubbardChow_earlyview.pdf. The abstract reads:

Abstract: Although it is well established that, on average, psychotherapy is effective, outcomes have remained flat for more than five decades. Since the 1990s, the effort to identify “empirically supported treatment” approaches has done little to alter this fact. Even more sobering, studies either fail to show therapists improve with specialized training or their outcomes steadily decline with time and experience. The aim of this paper is to illuminate how findings

In the 19th Century, Sigmund Freud came along. His influence is incalculable.⁵¹ Even Christian theology uses Freud's reasoning.⁵² Freud had come to conclude that certain neuroses were not the product of the physical body alone (he had begun his medical training with a thoroughly materialistic understanding of the human being), but rather arose from the "mind."⁵³ Beginning with the body, Freud had come to posit a causation for the disturbances he found in his patients; he suggested it lay in something he still called the soul, "die seele." Despite using the word "soul" he means something far different than an immortal, immaterial

from the literature on expertise and expert performance illuminate new paths for the field of psychotherapy. Results to date point to new possibilities for helping practitioners realize improvements in the quality and outcome of their work.

On page two of the essay you will read of, "The findings related to specialized training in so-called 'evidence-based' approaches round out this grim assessment. In 1993, a Task Force within the American Psychological Association (APA) was organized to identify and promote a psychological formulary—'treatments of known efficacy,'" Dianne Chambless and Thomas Ollendick, "Empirically Supported Psychological Interventions: Controversies and Evidence," *Annual Review of Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 686, <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.685>. Though celebrated as an advance that would finally put the field on par with medicine (Nathan, 1997), subsequent research provided little support. In hundreds of randomized controlled trials pitting one method against another, none proves superior. Bruce Wampold et al., "What Characterizes Effective Therapists?" in *How and Why Are Some Therapists Better Than Others?: Understanding Therapist Effects*, eds. Louis Castonguay and Clara Hill (2017). Another paper: Jimeoin Muecke, "The Answers Are in Our Weak Spots," *Deliberate Practice Psych* (blog), October 6, 2022, <https://deliberatepracticepsych.wordpress.com/2022/10/07/the-answers-are-in-our-weak-spots/>.

According to Miller, Chow, and Hubble, about 80%–87% of whether a client improves in therapy has nothing to do with a therapist. It's based on "client-related factors" like their strengths, life history, pre-morbid functioning and situational influences (e.g., job loss). However, the therapeutic alliance may be the most important therapist effect, which accounts for 5–8% of the outcome. In comparison, individual therapist factors such as personality and life experiences accounts for 4%–9%, building a sense of hope in therapy accounts for 4%, and the therapy technique or model used only accounts for 1% in influencing whether a client will get better. Should we consider material which is 1% influential "common grace"? For this information, I am grateful to Dr. Chen. Any mistakes in presentation or citation are solely the fault of the author.

⁵¹ It is interesting to note how anti-Christian Freud was, "On April 25, 1886, Sigmund Freud opened his first private office in central Vienna. On that Easter Sunday he placed an ad in the *Neue Freie Presse* stating that 'Dr. Sigmund Freud, docent for nervous diseases at the university, has returned from his study trip to Paris and Berlin and has consulting hours at Rathausstrasse No. 7, from 1 to 2:30.'" David B. Green, "1886: Sigmund Freud Opens a Psychiatric Office in Vienna, Nobody Comes," *Haaretz*, April 24, 2016. <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2016-04-24/ty->

⁵² "Psychology, Psychiatry, and the Pastor," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 203. For another example, see J. Knox Chamblin, "Psychology," ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 768.

⁵³ "From Medicine to Psychoanalysis." n.d. Freud Museum London, <https://www.freud.org.uk/education/resources/freud-the-physician/from-medicine-to-psychoanalysis/>.

soul. Rather, he meant “drives.”⁵⁴

Here we have the body generating the drives which give rise to the human function and motivation (compare James’ observation in James 1:13–15). In this scheme, the body’s drives are held in check by external forces which impinge upon the drives. What you accumulate from others by custom and education limit such drives; this is the “Superego.”⁵⁵ The arch repression in Freudian theology (for a kind of theology it is) is “God.”⁵⁶ The concept of “God” does not refer to the Creator but rather to a human projection:⁵⁷ “God is the superego projected into a sacred realm, made divine.”⁵⁸

From Freud, the place of the psychologist who studied the “soul” (which is just a poetic version of the subconscious mind) developed.⁵⁹ While there were others who were engaged in the academic, scientific examination of what the mind could accomplish, Freud brought a dramatically new force to the discipline. Freud did

⁵⁴ Marius Dumitrescu, *The Relationship between Body and Soul from the Perspective of Freud’s Psychoanalysis*, vol. 92, October (2013): 294–98, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042813028061?via%3Dihub>.

⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, trans. Alix Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd. 1936). The relationship between Freud’s theory of a superego and the work of biblical counseling is obvious.

⁵⁶ I am sure someone has written their thesis upon the ways in which Freud’s “god” is a restatement of William Blake’s “god” who destroys love (“The Garden of Love”) and forges repression in the mind:

*In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear.*

William Blake, “London,” published 1794. I have not taken the time to dig up such a thesis, but I am certain it exists.

⁵⁷ This is a conclusion “baked” into therapy as a science. This does not mean all therapists are atheists. I know therapists who would self-identify as Christian and certainly not atheist. However, “science” is conducted on the assumption that there is not God, probably not even the Deists’ god. “Clinical psychology comes with no consensus in its view of human beings—with one critical exception. It is unified in its belief that people are free from God. Aside from that exception, there are as many theories regarding human nature as there are counseling practitioners.” Richard L. Ganz, *Psychobabble: The Failure of Modern Psychology and the Biblical Alternative* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books) 30.

⁵⁸ Curt Raney, “Freud as a Humanist from Freud and Man’s Soul by Bruno Bettelheim, and Other Sources, n.d.,” lecture notes, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, http://faculty.smcm.edu/ccraney/restricted/PDF/Freud_as_a_Humanist.pdf.

⁵⁹ “Freud’s lasting contribution to the “science” of psychotherapy is based on the above-noted concept of the vast influential unconscious. From his perspective, to understand this unconscious is to control it. To control it is to control the self.” Edward E. Hindson and Howard Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 115.

not even first raise the concept of the “unconscious,” but he did put his stamp upon the idea which is now firmly affixed to the man.⁶⁰

In particular, Freud’s work posited an “unconscious mind” (a soul) where the bodily drives crash into societal restraint. Such a “mind forged manacle” creates psychic turmoil, our trouble.⁶¹ It seems that we owe (in great part) to Freud the concept (and development of the concept) of an unconscious mind.⁶² While this “unconscious” mind is unavailable to our inquiry, the clever and appropriately trained person can understand the processes at play and develop a cure.⁶³

Freud took the human being and imposed a “scientific” model upon the analysis of human thought, feeling, and behavior. Rather than beginning with a human being who lives in the presence of God, who is the descendent of rebels against God and thus at best will be constantly tempted to rebel, and who will one day stand in judgment before God, we begin with a human being, a complex but *determined* animal.⁶⁴ God is merely societal projection imposed upon the malleable mind. Disentangling the strands of historical imposition and biological effects

⁶⁰ The awareness that there was knowledge of an unconscious before Freud is used by some writers to deprecate his work and character (Ellenberger, 1970; Sulloway, 1979; Masson, 1984). They insinuate that Freud’s having built upon a foundation of mesmerism (i.e., animal magnetism and hypnosis) plus prior developments of the Enlightenment, romanticism, and the physical sciences, discredits his work and even him as a person (Chapman & Chapman-Santana, 1995; Ellenberger, 1970; Sulloway, 1979; Young & Brook, 1994). Conversely, that there was a developing awareness and evolution of the concept of the unconscious for two centuries (Hunt, 1993) before Freud constructed his theories was extolled by his supporters (Alexander & Selesnick, 1966; Fine, 1962/1973). Carl V. Rabstejnek, “History and Evolution of the Unconscious before and after Sigmund Freud,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 73, no. 1 (2010): <https://doi.org/10.1521/psyc.2010.73.1.43>.

⁶¹ William Blake, “London.”

⁶² S. B. Narramore, “Unconscious,” ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 1236.

⁶³ Here is example of a cultural expectation which creates pressure and influence toward a particular end. “Let us not forget that every one of the human techniques is related to all other techniques.” Jacquel Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson, (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1967). We expect efficiency and reason to be the basis for all that we do and all that is done. The images of a professional in an office probing the unconscious using arcane procedures and of the therapist helping another to deal with stress of guilt: an expert solving our “mental health” troubles, an expert in a particular technique is simply taken for granted. Yesterday, in casual conversation a friend spoke of the need for a member of her family to see a therapist to deal with feelings of despair and death. Such background beliefs and expectations cannot help but affect everyone in the culture; Stephen Thornton, “Freud, Sigmund,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/freud/>.

⁶⁴ That such are core beliefs of a biblical counselor cannot be denied.

requires science. Freud's theory of the unconscious continues to exert influence over the manner in which we think about being human.⁶⁵ The unconscious is a realm explored by science. And we, if we are to care for the soul, should surely know what lurks in the depths.

John Dewey and Morality

Freud's effects upon psychology and hence biblical counseling are well known. But we must not overlook Dewey's contributions to the science of human nature *and its effect upon pastoral training*.⁶⁶ The precise manner in which one influences the thought of another is difficult to determine. That Dewey had been exposed to Freud seems certain.⁶⁷ It would not be correct to see Dewey as a doctrinaire Freudian.⁶⁸ Freud's psychoanalysis is a slow dredging of unconscious sludge. Dewey, being an American Pragmatist, looks to efficiency and efficacy in his molding of human nature.⁶⁹ In his volume, *Human Nature and Conduct*

⁶⁵ John A. Bargh and Ezequiel Morsella, "The Unconscious Mind," *Perspectives on Psychological Science: A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science* 3 no. 1 (2008): 73–79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2008.00064.x>

⁶⁶ Dr. Johnson provides extensive evidence of this issue in his book, *The Professionalization of Pastoral Care*, (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020).

⁶⁷ "Thomas promised to mail him, as he had just done with his friend John Dewey, what he thought were Freud's 'best papers' (Thomas, 1912)." Edward J.K. Gitre, "Importing Freud: First-Wave Psychoanalysis, Interwar Social Sciences, and the Interdisciplinary Foundations of an American Social Theory," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 46, no. 3 (2010): 239–62, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.20439>.

⁶⁸ "Dewey's orientation surely was "functionalist," but that term carries a host of meanings. For Dewey as for James), 'functionalism' in psychology implied that there was an essential relation between cognition and purpose. *Indeed, this idea may be taken to be a defining idea of pragmatism*. But there is more than this: For James and Dewey, it meant, as with Wundt, that intentionality was the critical feature of minded behavior." Peter T. Manicas, "John Dewey and American Psychology," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 32, no. 3 (2002): 267–229.

⁶⁹ It is curious that Dewey both believes in the ability and the need to mold human behavior through "education" and believes in democracy:

Arguably the most important similarity between Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire, and the thing that links them together more concretely than anything else, is the similarity of their overriding projects. For each of them his model of education and his political project are mutually co-dependent. Each offers a model of education that is central to a political project—a political project that is democratic, radical, and built upon a view of the interdependence of theory and practice. Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire all share, as a part of their politico-educational projects, an unwavering faith in democracy, a democracy that extends beyond the act of voting and representative government.

Neil Wilcock, review of "Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire: A Political and Educational Method," *Metaphilosophy* 52, no. 2 (April 2021): 255; see, e.g., Larry A. Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic*

(1922), Dewey addresses the issue of moral formation, human nature, with the introduction of the concept of scientific human control. As a pragmatist (along with psychologist William James, philosopher Charles Peirce, and such men)⁷⁰ he presents a practical American view that psychology should be efficient and effective (a theme which will be seen again in the section of technology).

Dewey posits the opening of a theory which will better understand a man and his environment. He first sets the stage by setting out a theory of human nature subject to internal, subjective powers.⁷¹ Working through various “schools” of thinking, Dewey concludes there is a science which will permit the study and control of such matters.⁷² Lest we fail to see how Dewey views the matter, I offer one additional quotation:

It is impossible to say how much of the unnecessary slavery of the world is due to the conception that moral issues can be settled within conscience or human sentiment apart from consistent study of facts and application of specific knowledge in industry, law and politics.⁷³

Contemporary psychological use of the concept of “unconscious” is nearer the “common sense” and practical habits of Dewey than the elaborate unconscious of Freud.⁷⁴ The work of ascertaining the various forces which will control the conscious mind has taken several fascinating turns. Work on habit formation and decision making have demonstrated remarkably effective means of transforming and guiding human behavior and opening up new avenues for research.⁷⁵

Technology (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). But this democracy is undermined by the previous control over the populace. If someone is trained to put a ballot in a box for certain purposes, how is the act of voting any choice?

⁷⁰David Hildebrand, “John Dewey,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, November 1, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey/>

⁷¹John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Random House, 1922).

⁷²Dewey, *Human Nature*, 10–11.

⁷³Dewey, *Human Nature*, 11.

⁷⁴Bargh and Morsella, “The Unconscious Mind.”

⁷⁵So that I do not veer too far afield, I will only mention the work of Nobel Prize recipient Daniel Kahneman. I would point you to the field of behavioral economics for a demonstration of powerful tools being developed and remarkably robust theories to affect and effect human behavior. Should you take the time to apprise yourself of this field, you might be surprised to learn how often your own behavior has been affected by this research.

Dewey at Church

Dale Johnson has set out in detail the way in which Dewey (among other influences) was incorporated into the curriculum at Southern Seminary and thus became a standard educational model for *pastoral training* in North America. What is most important is that such training was given to pastors:

‘In all this,’ Dobbins explained, “psychology will help to an understanding of the individual himself, of the nature and the cause of his trouble, of his deep moral and spiritual needs.” The pastor, in order to be a skilled counselor, must become specialized in the field of psychology, or more particularly in the psychology of religion. Naturally, these fields of study became a staple within the curriculum at southern seminary.⁷⁶

And so, pragmatic and scientific psychology became a standard tool in “pastoral ministry.” The effects of Dewey upon the church, broadly stated, have been well documented and are extensive:

John Dewey (1859–1952) propagated instrumentalism, a pragmatic philosophical theory of knowledge concerned with observable and measurable outcomes, through which he proposed that experience offered truth. Pragmatism is employed in myriad environments and contexts, from education to business; it is also found in Christianity. Much research has examined the CGM and its methods of fulfilling the Great Commission. Many academic works have consulted influential Church Growth scholars, such as Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, exploring the pragmatism employed by the movement. These works discuss the pragmatism which originated with John Dewey and its influence on American education; however, very little discussion exists regarding the influence of Dewey’s pragmatism on the CGM or the movement’s chief scholars and leaders.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Johnson, *Professionalization of Pastoral Care*, 116.

⁷⁷R. Vivian Pietsch, ed., review of “The Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism on the Church Growth Movement,” *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 1 (2022): 138–68.

Scientific Psychology

As a biblical counselor, I can look at the work which has been developed in this area and think we do not have extensive resources in this area. No one comes to a biblical counselor asking, “How can I get more people to buy my product, trust this politician, form or break this habit?” However, it must be noted that the use of such “scientific” technique has been suggested as means which we can incorporate into sanctification:

So, we can use secular methods, within a biblical framework and paired with biblical teaching, in such a way that they lead toward sanctification, and in doing so, they are oriented toward God’s glory and the counselee’s conformity to Christ. We are helping people move toward their God-given end, rather than simply seeking relief from pain or discomfort.⁷⁸

Such a belief from an influential figure in the field of biblical counseling demonstrates the extent to which biblical counseling can be seen as lacking the power of this common grace.⁷⁹ The development of such “scientific” theories and practice has changed society, and at a remarkable cost. A fuller study of their fundamentally anti-Christiann beliefs and purpose will exceed my space herein.

Therapy was developed as a practice to make us feel better. “Religious man was born to be saved; psychological man is born to be pleased.”⁸⁰ The science which is being proposed, is the science to please us.⁸¹ God, as both Freud and Dewey conceived, is an idea which may be used for repression (Freud) or a concept to “unify” (Dewey). “God” is useful only so long as it works. If it works, it’s “true.” But that cannot be our standard as Christians. Accordingly, it cannot be a standard as a Christian who gives counsel, certainly not biblical counsel. Russell Moore explained the two cannot be combined:

⁷⁸ Kristin Kellen, “SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As It Is and as It Could Be,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 15, no. 1 (2024): 73–86

⁷⁹ As I will mention at the end of this article, it may perhaps be more accurate to explain the pressure to “integrate” such knowledge into biblical counseling as the result most fundamentally of living in a technological society.

⁸⁰ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Wilmington: Isi Books, 2007), 19.

⁸¹ As my friend Dr. Jenn Chen said in private conversation, the purpose of therapy is “symptom reduction.”

But Russell Moore, dean of Southern's school of theology, bluntly called Oates's approach a "failed" model. The effort to integrate psychology with theology failed, he said, 'because it is so naive about the presuppositions behind secular psychologies. You can't simply say you're going to integrate the science of psychotherapy with scripture because there are only sciences and theories of psychotherapy that are contradictory and incoherent.'"⁸²

THE CHURCH IN THE MID 20TH CENTURY

Thus, by the middle of the 20th century, the Church had given up its duty for the *cure of souls* to scientific experts, each adhering to contradictory scientific theories.⁸³ Surveying the retreat of the Church, Thomas Oden has provided an extensive (four volume) analysis of Pastoral Care from the primitive church through the 20th Century. Discussing the influence of "scientific" or "clinical" psychological therapy, Oden writes,

The primary values of much modern pastoral care have come directly and unapologetically from psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, Eric Berne, et al. These psychologists have at times tended to demean and undercut potential dialogue with classical sources and foreclosed any recognition of any need for awareness of them. Strict Rogerians would tend to view these classical texts largely as "introjected values," Freudians as "super-ego intrusions," Berne as inordinate "over-parenting," and Skinner as heteronomous reinforcement. Although modern pastors do well to read these psychologists, their views are not normative for pastoral care. Even if one is unpersuaded that the classical tradition contains therapeutic wisdom, at least one has a right to examine it critically. After five decades of numerous waves of various psychological hegemonies in pastoral care, it is time to give classical views a new hearing.⁸⁴

⁸² David Winfrey, "Biblical Therapy," *Christian Century* 124, no. 2 (2007): 24–27.

⁸³ Note again, that such a belief in "science" is a belief in a "scientific" way of doing a thing.

⁸⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Becoming a Minister, Classical Pastoral Care* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 7. See also, Powlison, *Biblical Counseling Movement*, 14.

Jay Adams

Did the Church misstep? “Nouthetic counseling was only conceived in the mind and practice of its founder during the summer of 1965.”⁸⁵ The contention that the pastor must refer to a “trained” psychologist of some sort was the initial experience of Jay Adams.⁸⁶ As we all know, Adams concluded referrals to a trained therapist were unhelpful. He largely is responsible for the existence of what we now call “biblical counseling.” The phrase simply was not used prior to Adams.⁸⁷ We are having this current discussion largely under terms which go back to Adams’ decision to use the phrase “nouthetic” or “biblical counseling.”

Having reintroduced the concept of pastoral care for the individual to the Church under the moniker “biblical counseling,” and having advocated that position in his lectures and writing, Jay Adams created space for the concept of biblical counseling.⁸⁸ The label “biblical counseling” helped to distinguish his work from the contemporary “scientific” counseling. The use of the word “biblical” admitted contains within it the implicit argument that is correct or true. The label is also attractive to Christians (because all Christians seek to be “biblical”).

In so doing, and advocating for a pastoral model drawn from the Bible, Adams developed (or rather reintroduced to the Church) a model which many, if not most, found to be anti-*scientific*:⁸⁹ Adams’s position on directive counseling stood

⁸⁵ Powlison, *Biblical Counseling Movement*, 14.

⁸⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), xii.

⁸⁷ This can be confirmed by referencing Google’s ngram for “biblical counseling,” https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%22biblical+counseling%22&year_start=1800&year_end=2022&corpus=en&smoothing=3. Nouthetic counseling was never used prior to Adams.

⁸⁸ He would understand the work of counseling as a psychologist provided to be within the province of the pastor: “It is no surprise, therefore, to discover that when one attempts to deal with man in ways that demand some distinction between the organic and the nonorganic, he runs into problems. These problems cannot be solved either by Skinnerian reductionism: man is only an animal (all is organic), or on the other hand by simplistic categorization: the nonorganic is the province of the pastor; the organic is the province of the physician.” Jay Edward Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 438. The interaction of the body and soul does present a set of issues not neatly resolved by Adams’ division of organic and nonorganic. However, a psychologist *denying the existence of a soul and God* (and such a denial is inherent in the models of “science” even if not a position held by the psychologist) does not make for a more robust solution.

⁸⁹ Powlison, *Biblical Counseling Movement*, 171.

contrary to what was generally being advocated in pastoral education.⁹⁰

It must be understood that the methods of counseling, aside from behavioral counseling, at the time Adams was coming to his conclusions were largely non-directional. For instance, Rogers would allow the “patient” to come to her own conclusions. The psychoanalyst would spend years allowing the patient to disclose the workings of her unconscious conflicts (by means of recounting dreams, for instance). This lack of direction/instruction is still a necessary component of much therapy.⁹¹

These are “scientific” standards which are not consistent with pastoral standards. A lack of moral content is a necessary element of professional psychotherapy.⁹² This is a position which one can easily trace from Freud and through Dewey to the current time. It is also a position which has been enshrined in constitutional jurisprudence.⁹³

While a pastor could still make a moral demand upon a congregant, to do so would not be “scientific.” While the positions are more firmly in place now than 50 years ago, the scientific position has been the eradication of morality.

THE CONTENTION THAT BIBLICAL COUNSELING REQUIRES SCIENCE⁹⁴

Having set out a brief history of psychology and biblical counseling, we can consider more directly the contention that biblical counseling *requires* science.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Professionalization of Pastoral Care*, 118.

⁹¹ “ACA Code of Ethics,” American Counseling Association, 2014, https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=55ab73d0_1.

⁹² This is itself a moral position with spiritual value. To decide for myself, to chart my own good was offered by a certain Serpent (Genesis 3:1, et seq.).

⁹³ *Obergefell v. Hodges* 576 U.S. 644, 680–81 (2015).

⁹⁴ I hurry to make plain I am not a Luddite. I do not reject science. I do have hesitations with many things espoused in the area of clinical therapy/psychology. I have written at some length concerning some areas of psychology and my concerns. Various forms of trauma psychology, while in vogue at the moment, suffer from serious questions. Science is effectively a tool of skepticism. It is strongest when it demonstrates that certain events are not regular, repeatable events. But like a proverbial hammer, it is excellent for certain tasks and ill equipped for others.

A related contention is that biblical counseling is *defective* in that it lacks science. This contention raises a problem, depending upon how we understand the term. If we are going to be biblical, we must posit, at a minimum, a creator. However, the concept of creator is a place at which “science” draws the line. (*Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987) 482 U.S. 578, 600, fn. 2). *Edwards* was used in a later case in support of the argument that Intelligent Design is not “science.” (*Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (M.D. Pa. 2005) 400 F. Supp. 2d 707, 718). A simple examination demonstrates that any number of overtly “spiritual” conceits are all permissible as “psychology.” “Take this opportunity to enrich your spiritual life. Meditate, journal, pray, create daily spiritual practices, read spiritually uplifting writings.”⁹⁵

I am not accusing those who advocate for the integration of “science” into our counseling as also advocating a denial of God. Yet, in advocating for the integration of “science,” one is necessarily making two distinct claims: (1) Scripture itself lacks pertinent information; (2) that advocating for Scripture alone is a misrepresentation of Scripture (Scripture gives us the basis to believe truth found in nature).

An Example of How the Issue May Arise

A text wrested from its home is like a child who has lost his parent and could wander anywhere. For example:

[. . .] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.⁹⁶

Your counselee says, “I have prayed, and I don’t have peace.” Is your answer, “The Bible doesn’t work?” What if the matter is more complicated; the counselee has prayed and never received peace. She then went to a therapist who gave her

⁹⁵ “Resorting to Psychics in Uncertain Times,” *Psychology Today*, accessed June 7, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/400-friends-who-can-i-call/202008/resorting-psychics-in-uncertain-times>. There is a strange interplay between spiritual concerns and science. See, e.g., Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (University Of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁹⁶ *Philippians* 4:6–7.

advice on anxiety reduction which actually worked. She feels better now. How then can we tell her she “made a mistake?” Indeed, why do I not learn the same technique so that I might add to my work. There is an appeal to science for the purpose of showing compassion. Such was the opinion of Professor Dobbin of Southern Seminary:

The simple bifurcation sounds convincing until one grasped the foundation for expertise and understanding human nature for the pastor lies in the discoveries of psychology. And all this, Dobbins explained, psychology will help to an understanding of the individual himself, of the nature and cause of his trouble, of his deep moral and spiritual needs. The pastor, in order to be a skilled counselor, must become specialized in the field of psychology, armor reticularis and the psychology of religion. Naturally, these fields of study became a staple within the curriculum at southern seminary.⁹⁷

This comment concerns what happened nearly a century ago – that such is not a theoretical possibility or a matter from a century ago. I reference a lecture given by Brooks to Southeastern Theological Seminary in which he said,

However, given that counseling involves a diverse number of observations, skills, and topics that are not solely within the domain of spirituality Bavinck opens the door to learning from unbelievers in those aspects of counseling that appertain to this earthly life.⁹⁸

Are we holding to the ACBC statement of biblical counseling simply in a wrong way and wrong-headedly? Is it obstinate? David N. Entwistle writes in the book *Integrative Approaches To Psychology And Christianity*:

Psychology and theology—assistance with human thought—may both be concerned with human nature and functioning, but they approach the topic from different vantage points. Neither psychology

⁹⁷ Johnson, *Professionalization of Pastoral Care*, 16.

⁹⁸ I transcribed the quotation from the recorded remarks of Brooks: Nate Brooks, “Herman Bavinck, Patron Saint of Biblical Counselors: How an Old Dutch Theologian Helps Us Make Sense of Biblical Sufficiency” (lecture, RTS Charlotte Convocation 2022, Charlotte, NC, August 30, 2022), <https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical-counselors/>.

nor theology consistently gets the story right, because both of them involve human thinking, but they can provide a wealth of information. Sometimes the perspective from one road or the other will prove more illuminating for a particular question. Still, both roads—psychology and theology as approaches to understanding human nature and functioning—can give us a fuller and more accurate picture than either could alone. That, in short, is the premise of this book.⁹⁹

The academic study of human behavior has produced a number of true observations (even though it is premised upon a truncated and false view of man).¹⁰⁰ Such was the hope of Dewey (as referenced above). There are observations which have been made by sociologists and psychologists who have made observations that humans who live now, in our culture, are likely to respond in certain ways. Workers using industrial machinery are less likely to be injured when they work in a well-lit room. A student is more likely to remember material when she takes notes with a pen and paper than when she types on her computer.

So, in agreement with the general proposition of Dobbins and Brooks, Entwistle contends that we should embrace the work of psychology on the ground that it too tells us about being a human being. While his tact may be seen more as a levels-of-explanation model rather than common grace, he ends in a similar place:

[I]t means that psychological explanations and theological explanations are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it suggests that both explanations are useful, the one stemming from an attempt to understand the human functioning within its natural context, and the other recognizing that human nature and functioning, though expressed in nature, have their origin and purpose rooted in the designs of the creator.¹⁰¹

Other Christian authors have made a similar argument:

⁹⁹ David N. Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity: An Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations, and Models of Integration*, 3rd ed. (Cascade Books, 2015), 5.

¹⁰⁰ For example, imagine a Babylonian transported into the present. He could describe the shape and color of a stop sign, he could reproduce the shapes of the letters.

¹⁰¹ Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity*, 120.

A distinctively Christian approach to counseling and psychotherapy will have theological and philosophical underpinnings compatible with Christian faith; this will be most clearly reflected in its notions of personhood and philosophy of science. It will look at the task of the psychotherapist both from eternal and temporal perspectives and will fully acknowledge the reality of the supernatural. Sin and the consequences of the Fall will be taken seriously, as well as the reality of human and supernatural evil.¹⁰²

Arguing for an integration of the two disciplines, Entwistle notes that others have found 27 “models of integration.”¹⁰³ In his review of the different ways in which psychology and theology interact, he does mention the discipline of biblical counseling. He finds the discipline of “biblical counseling” to fall short in two fundamental ways:

This perspective seems problematic at two points. First it presumes that the Christian resources *sufficient for faith and practice* include all that is necessary for *psychological well-being*, and for which scripture functions as a counselling authority.¹⁰⁴ Second, it engages in theological reductionism by viewing the psyche primarily as immaterial (“soul”).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 31–32.

¹⁰³ “In his analysis of current state of integration, Brian Eck identified twenty-seven models of integration.” Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity*, 163.

¹⁰⁴ This particular proposition is a place where I seem unable to follow Brooks. As I will explain at greater length below, these issues are not so neatly segregated.

¹⁰⁵ Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity*, 197. MacArthur responds (though not to Entwistle directly):

But the movement itself is certainly not taking the church in a biblical direction. It has conditioned Christians to think of counseling as something best left to trained experts. It has opened the door to a whole range of extrabiblical theories and therapies. Indeed, it has left many with the feeling that God’s Word is incomplete, insufficient, unsophisticated, and unable to offer help for people’s deepest emotional and spiritual problems. It has directed millions of Christians seeking spiritual help away from their pastors and fellow believers and into psychological clinics

John F. MacArthur, “Rediscovering Biblical Counseling,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), 3–4.

He develops this critique further a few pages on when he writes:

Regarding the proposition that MacArthur engaged in theological reductionism, it is notable that he did not portray the soul in holistic terms that could be seen as biological, psychodynamic, or social. He primarily perceives a soul that must be sanctified by moral obedience. While *moral obedience* is crucial for spiritual health, and while sinful behavior certainly bodes ill for psychological functioning, it is erroneous and injurious to see morality as the only determinant of psychological health. Furthermore, such reductionism tends not only to neglect biological, psychodynamic, and social sources of distress, but it puts the onus of responsibility for personal well-being solely on personal righteousness, while failing to recognize the importance of corporate sin, the effects of being sinned against, or the effects of living in a fallen world.¹⁰⁶

He thus portrays and conceives of biblical counseling at least as how it is presented in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* as simultaneously scientifically defective and as theologically defective.¹⁰⁷ The lack of science is apparent on its

¹⁰⁶ Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity*, 201.

¹⁰⁷ The 1985 PhD thesis of Dr. Michael Firmin, "Behaviorism and the Nouthetic Counseling Model of Jay E. Adams," (professor at Cedarville College) hits both of these points in some detail. He argues Adams was not scientific but rather he was presuppositional:

First nouthetic counseling does not advocate methodological behaviorism. One reason is that Adams does not use the scientific method to derive or develop his theory. While he states he does not wish to "disregard science," Adams does not build his model on scientific data. He says forthrightly, "The conclusion in this book is not based upon scientific findings. My method is presuppositional" (236).

He concludes that Adams fails to meet the necessary criteria to be properly labeled a behaviorist. "An examination of Adams' model force. the conclusion therefore that Adams is not a behaviorist. His model does not subscribe to the necessary elements of ontological, methodological or applied behaviorism" (240).

Having established that Adams fails to meet the narrow requirements of a technical behaviorist, Firmin then proceeds to make the case that Adams developed a counseling to "include a behavioral orientation and outlook" (246). Firmin provides seven ways in which Adams show the influence of behavioral psychology. He later argues that Adams' model entails all 12 elements of an "applied behavioral focus" (251). Having made the interesting charge that Adams is both a behaviorist and not a scientific behaviorist, Firmin lays out the case that Adams has set forth a sub-biblical case, largely my contending that his (Adams's)

face: the counselors do not even have proper degrees.

The theological failing is perhaps less obvious. But Entwistle has described biblical counseling in Gnostic and Pelagian terms:¹⁰⁸ Gnostic in the understanding of a human being as a solely spiritual essence somehow divorced and segregated from the body; Pelagian in that what is required is bare moral obedience.¹⁰⁹

The criticism that biblical counseling is “unscientific” can be modified into the contention that biblical counseling is an uncritical thrall of outdated science. Jay Adams (one could argue) tried to baptize a slimmed down version of Mowrer’s behaviorism with Bible verses appended. Indeed, the recent argument by Brad Hambrick is that there have been two iterations of biblical counseling moving on from Adam’s behaviorism to Powlison’s recognition of the affections. Hambrick, and those with whom he works, are seeking to establish a third generation which will possess a better scientific basis, being grounded in verified clinical practice.

model is *the* not a biblical organization of the material: “he recognizes only behavioral methodology as legitimate Christian counseling. This focus causes him to neglect other equally important (yet non-behavioral) emphasis” (277).

Firmin thus makes a non-trivial case that Adams’s counseling model is both not sufficiently scientific and biblical. It is almost both but fails to achieve either end. Michael Wayne Firmin, “Behaviorism and the Nouthetic Counseling Model of Jay Adams,” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1988).

¹⁰⁸ By gnostic, I do not mean any developed theory of Gnosticism which “by means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system.” Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 315. Rather, the general hard cleavage between body and spirit, “For the Gnostics there were two realms: a realm of light and a realm of darkness. They judged the present material world, which included the human body, as evil.” Patrick J. Hartin, “Gospel of Thomas,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.)

¹⁰⁹ Nomism in its various forms, such as Judaism, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism Arminianism, Neonomianism, and Rationalism, deems the intellectual, moral, and æsthetic influence of the Word as the only influence that can be ascribed to it. It does not believe in a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word. The truth revealed in the Word of God works only by moral persuasion. In some of its forms, such as Pelagianism and Rationalism, Nomism does not even feel the need of a special operation of the Holy Spirit in the work of redemption, but in its more moderate forms, such as Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Neonomianism, it considers the moral influence of the Word insufficient, so that it must be supplemented by the work of the Holy Spirit Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 611.

The Third Place for Integrating Psychology

By ending with sufficiency in Christ, we come to sufficiency in Scripture. Either Scripture is sufficient or Scripture plus “psychology” is needed:

Psychology is no more a science than the atheistic evolutionary theory upon which it is based.¹¹⁰ Like theistic evolution, “Christian psychology” is an attempt to harmonize two inherently contradictory systems of thought. Modern psychology and the Bible cannot be blended without serious compromise to or utter abandonment of the principle of Scripture’s sufficiency.¹¹¹

I would certainly phrase my critique with a different nuance. But it is true that a model of the human being which denies the soul and God will have a rough fit with the Bible.

Sam Williams as editor of the most recent edition of the Southeastern Theological Review in an essay entitled, “Introduction: Cracks and Light in Christian Counseling” writes an effective (even if not deliberate) response to the broadside on “Modern psychology”:

The first article by Nate Brooks aims to fix a crack in some versions of biblical counseling that, according to Brooks, operate under a “maximalist” understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture. He proposes this can be repaired by a reappropriation of the many benefits of God’s common grace, applied by means of a “theologically robust theory of integration.” He contends, “Integration is no less reliant upon a theological method than is biblical counseling, and biblical counseling is no less reliant upon a method of integration than is Integrationism.” From our perspective, it doesn’t seem to be much of a theological stretch to assert that because both special grace or revelation and common grace or general revelation are divine, they are intended by God to be integrated, to cooperate with, and to complement one another. Yet we must preserve Scripture as our “first

¹¹⁰ Psychology as an academic discipline is often not explicitly based upon evolution. However, to constitute a “science” is to presume there has been no agency in the creation, and all things can be reduced to physical objects, however small.

¹¹¹ MacArthur, “Rediscovering Biblical Counseling,” 14; Powlison, *Biblical Counseling Movement*, 144–145.

truth discourse,” always granting it epistemic primacy and finality¹¹².

In other words, we should integrate the two disciplines, but not “too much.”¹¹³

A Tentative Assertion

It is impossible to know more than what is said. I am not the God who can see the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The Neo-integrationists or “clinically informed” or “redemptive” biblical counselors expressly state these CGTs (Common Grace Tools) will permit us to properly address matters which hitherto have lain beyond our competence:

However, the reality of the real world means that there is a great need for church-based counselors to continue to help those in need of compassionate care and counsel that might not otherwise seek out care else-where or that have struggles that are more spiritual in nature. Christians across the spectrum of counseling and care need to remain sapiential in their practice of caring for those in need of Christ’s care. Licensed counselors need to remain grounded in the truth of Scripture and be conversant with theological literature on a variety of topics such as anthropology, pneumatology, and soteriology. The church-based counselor needs to recognize that being practically wise in their care and counsel involves recognizing the relevant “clinical” research and evidence-based practices that are used to treat individuals with the assortment of afflictions people will face.¹¹⁴ Finally, being sufficiently sapiential in our practice of counseling also means we all need to recognize our limits and collaborate with others when we find ourselves overwhelmed and underwater. In the end, it is Jesus

¹¹²Sam Williams, “Introduction: Cracks and Lights in Biblical Counseling,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 15, no. 1 (2024): 1–6, <https://doi.org/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Updated-15.1.pdf>.

¹¹³A great deal of the neo-integrationist movement appears to be operating on an ad hoc basis of what is useful and why. This is misplaced enthusiasm. Careful consideration of the relationship between disciplines and anthropologies requires more than proof that Mower was problematic and a couple of PET scans.

¹¹⁴The entire concept of “evidence based” practice does not present much evidence supportive of effectiveness. Jeffrey Lohr, Bunmi Olatunji, and Grant Devilly, “Threats to Evidence-Based Treatment of Trauma: Professional Issues and Implications,” *International Review of Victimology* 15, no. 2 (2008): <https://doi.org/10.1177/026975800801500204>.

who calms the storms, pulls us out, and holds us all together.¹¹⁵

Such contentions raise direct questions about science and the incorporation of such research in biblical counseling. If I knew that this counselee was the child of war refugees, how would my counseling change in the manner I approached them? How much or what “secular” research must I have to be gracious and a good biblical counselor?

Do I lack compassion for the sorrow and pain of this counselee if I simply do not “educate myself” on not just the personal history of this person but also the manner in which epigenetic factors express gene expression in subsequent generations? For certainly such is science. Every day seems to provide new discoveries on the nature of gut bacteria and the nervous system.

And if we are truly going to render a comprehensive integration, should we not require positions on the host of philosophical issues concerning the nature of the human being? I could contend that the neo-integrationists are woefully ignorant of the position of Henry of Ghent on intellect and will (which has unquestionable affect upon the method and content of counseling).

The Common Grace debate is driven by the contention that at the very least we must make use of neurology (LaPine also argues for Thomas) as a scientific addition to our biblical counseling.¹¹⁶ But observation can only reach so far. I ask these not as trivial “gotcha” questions but as real inquiry. If I need neurology, *on what principle do I exclude metaphysics of Thomas or the existentialism of Kierkegaard?* In 100 years, our science will be outdated, but the Dane (Kierkegaard) will still be current. Merely calling what I like “common grace,” as if that solved anything, is logically indefensible, even if it is rhetorically satisfying. To put the matter with

¹¹⁵Alex R. Wendel, “Sufficiently Sapiential Soul-Care: A Working Paper in Therapeutic Theology,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 15, no. 1 (2024): 21–31, <https://doi.org/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Updated-15.1.pdf>; Kristin L. Kellen, “Generational Dysfunction and Fulfillment in Christ (Matt 1:1),” *Southeastern Theological Review* 15, no. 1 (2024): 21–31, <https://doi.org/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Updated-15.1.pdf>.

¹¹⁶“As just suggested, the first step in my argument is to get a more nuanced psychological language or conceptual system on the table, that of Thomas Aquinas. I wish to demonstrate how Aquinas’s psychology is holistic, involving plasticity, and tiered.” Matthew A. LaPine, *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 41.

more clarity: philosophers coming from a Christian position (even as diverse as a medieval theologian or Kierkegaard) have a better claim upon our practice of soul care than a contemporary neurologist.

To begin with the contention that biblical counseling requires “science” is not a door which can be easily closed. In fact, what do you propose to say when psychedelic use is standard scientific practice (which it will soon be)? To turn the contention on its head, if I train someone in a biblical understanding of their condition based upon the “heart” rather than brain-body, I am uncompassionate?¹¹⁷

HOW THE “UNSCIENTIFIC” CHARGES LEAD TO THE UNCOMPASSIONATE CHARGE

As noted above, there are two primary criticisms which are made against biblical counseling. One argument is that biblical counseling is unscientific. I have addressed that charge above. There is a second charge which follows: biblical counseling is uncompassionate. The two are intimately related. If the purpose of “counseling” is to change thoughts and feelings by changing behavior (alone or first), then a counselor may run roughshod over feelings to reach behavior. “Do this and live,” you’ll be fine in the end.

It must be admitted that far too many people who claim to be practicing biblical counseling do talk like this. They give directions and insist on behavior. Their counsel is devoid of love. Their counsel sounds far more like Moses in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* than Christ weeping at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35).¹¹⁸

The charge that biblical counseling is “uncompassionate” can be rephrased to, “it is uncompassionate” because it ignores “science.” A related claim is that it is uncompassionate because it relies upon an outmoded behavioristic science. But how do I rate compassion on a scientific scale? It would take little work to show

¹¹⁷ As I have wrestled with these various issues and sub issues and arguments, I have come to genius of the “heart” as a manner of discussion the interiority of human life. An argument in favor of the “heart” over gut bacteria and epigenetic generational affects will have to wait for a subsequent essay.

¹¹⁸ “That man that overtook you was Moses. He spareth none; neither knoweth he how to shew mercy to those that transgress the law.” John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), 89.

horrors of science in psychology.¹¹⁹

Too many people who claim the name biblical counselor (often without any formal counseling training) are behaviorist and unkind. The church is filled with parodies of Jay Adams.¹²⁰ I and many people I know can testify to callousness infecting the mind and practice of many. I will stipulate, that there are truly unsympathetic men in the pastorate who are not elder qualified, much less compassionate. (And plenty of women are capable of callous behavior in the name of “biblical counseling.”)

The criticism of nouthetic counseling on this ground is so common it is even cited in the topic’s Wikipedia page.¹²¹ The charges which hinge upon biblical counseling’s faults—that is unscientific and (thus) uncompassionate—are not hard to obtain.¹²² A search engine will do just fine if you would like to find more examples. A more subtle version of this critique has been made by Brad Hambrick:

Here’s one answer. An emphasis on character formation and narrative reframing can easily result in the neglect, or sometimes even the denigration, of relief-oriented strategies in counseling. It can be construed that pursuing relief is to neglect, or even rebel against, pursuing Christlikeness. That is what critics of biblical counseling hear in David’s quote: medical relief from a sleep disorder is tangential

¹¹⁹ “Mystery Solved: We Now Know What Happened to Little Albert,” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, last modified January 2010, accessed May 20, 2024, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/01/little-albert>.

¹²⁰ Powlison, *Biblical Counseling Movement*, 43, 113, 175. I did not have the honor ever meeting Mr. Adams. Those I know who knew him, speak well of him and do not accuse of personal unkindness. I have had friends of mine whom I know to be remarkably gracious be accused of unkindness which is untrue. I have spent myself on behalf of counselees who have been unkind. As a friend warned me, the person whom you give yourself most to and most for will accuse you of being loveless.

¹²¹ “Nouthetic Counseling,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified June 9, 2024, accessed August 24, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouthetic_counseling#CITEREFClintonOhlschlager2002.

¹²² Again, a number of examples could be provided. But the discussion about sin (1) can be spoken of in a manner which is harsh and judgmental of the sort, “Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou” (Isaiah 65:5 KJV. You should learn the context for that verse). Yet, allowing for such misuses of the Bible, we must be clear: “There those who could rationalize their behavior on the basis of low self-esteem or of unconscious responses to hidden victimization.” Jim Owen, *Christian Psychology’s War on God’s Word* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers), 30.

to the work God did in David's soul.¹²³

He does not phrase this in terms of an accusation or a deliberate unkindness. There is nothing of a tone of judgmentalism. Rather, he couches his offer as providing a more therapeutic concern for ease of the counselee:

As just one example, where in our biblical counseling literature do we teach how to recognize the signs that a sleep disorder may be contributing to someone's struggle with emotional regulation and resilience? Our theology clearly teaches that the body has profound influences on the soul, but our assessment and intervention literature does not equip us to minister the implications. We acknowledge these realities, but do not offer instruction on how they impact our approach.¹²⁴

HOW THE WORD "COUNSELING" HAS CHANGED

Next, I will take a brief look at the evidence to show the factors which seem to drive the push toward integration. One of which is the changing nature of the word "counsel/ing." The word itself has a long history in the English language wherein counsel was a good word to describe what a pastor does with a congregant when he counsels.

The word was adapted by secular psychologists to describe what they do with clients. The psychologists then took over the space occupied by pastors to give

¹²³ "The next Generation of Biblical Counseling: A Tribute to the Legacy of David Powlison," Brad Hambrick, accessed August 28, 2024, 6, https://bradhambrick.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/A_Tribute_to_the_Legacy_of_David_Powlison.pdf.

¹²⁴ "The Next Generation of Biblical Counseling," Brad Hambrick, 90. I will admit to a substantial question about legality is raised by this contention. It is true that most (I have not confirmed with every state) have a statutory exemption for psychotherapist licensing for those engaged in religious work. When one's "counseling" entails advice about "gastrointestinal systems" (or other instances he provides in his essay), one is engaged in behavior which is not likely to be considered by a hostile administrative agency to be "religious" work and rather to be "psychotherapist/medical" work. I am not saying such concerns lie beyond the terms of Christian life. The Mosaic Covenant contains instructions on what to eat/not eat. I would defend Mr. Hambrick against a charge that he has violated the law. There is also the constitutional defense. But we must admit there appears to be a difference between eating advice and "You become what you worship."

“counsel”. However, what psychologists did was similar to pastoral counsel. When Jay Adams sought to retrieve the pastoral work of counseling, he also retrieved the word.

But by the time Adams had retrieved the word, its meaning had shifted. I contend that the change in meaning over time causes a not-quite articulated draw upon some biblical counselors to “counsel” like a therapist, not counsel like a pastor.¹²⁵ For instance, Alex R. Wendel, in his recent essay, “Sufficiently Sapiential Soul-Care: A Working Paper in Therapeutic Theology” writes:

Because of this great need to demonstrate the dignity of people and their dire need for God, there is an apologetic register to Christian counseling, especially in the “secular” or licensed arenas. Rather than pursuing a conflictual stance with regard to “secular counseling” there is a need for Christians to inhabit and help to shape the broader world of counseling.¹²⁶

My only purpose for this example is to demonstrate that the word “counseling” comes (now) embedded with the concept of “therapy” (or “counseling” as the word is used by a clinical psychologist). When we say, “biblical counseling,” we implicitly say, “biblical therapy” (whether we intend to or no). The word “counseling” seems to overwhelm the modifier “biblical”. The pressures of “science” and “empathy” have the effect of modifying “biblical”.

CONCLUSION

What Does this Prove

As stated above, this essay aims to prove the existence of criticisms which are sufficiently forceful to encourage one to search elsewhere, beyond the Bible, for solutions for counseling which would be both more scientific and more compassionate.¹²⁷ The subtle pressure of the title biblical *counselor* moves our

¹²⁵ An industrious graduate student might take up for project evidence and show how the change in meaning of the title “counselor” affects Christian “counselors” in terms of their self-conception.

¹²⁶ Wendel, “Sufficiently Sapiential Soul-Care.”

¹²⁷ Lest anyone which counter an argument I am not making, I will make this point plain. The phrase “common grace” is used in any number of ways. To use the phrase in its most expansive

thinking toward therapy.

I will stipulate that biblical counseling is not scientific. It does not aim to be scientific. The scientific criticisms may at times be hard to follow (“He is not a behaviorist, but sure acts like a behaviorist without the science”), but it is real and persistent.

While the talk is in terms of “science,” the intellectual “air” is run about the premise that to do a thing correctly is to use the right *technique*.¹²⁸ Another way to understand the draw toward various “common grace” clinical methods and analysis can be found by analyzing the debate as a matter of “technique.” The concept of “technique” is related to the desire for “science.” “Technique” is the most efficient means to make use of scientific knowledge. As I said, this is a more fundamental issue than even the criticism of “science” or a lack of compassion. The *right* technique is “scientific,” it is “compassionate” (or more correctly, empathetic), and makes one a proper “counselor.”

Having read, communicated, and considered these matters at length, I believe the debates over common grace and the “tools” from common grace which we should use are a proxy war. During the Cold War, the Soviets armed one side and the Americans the other. The sides fought one another, but never directly. We debate over common grace, but the real conflict lies elsewhere.

manner, the use of any language is “common grace.” Any coherent thought, indeed, any thought could be “common grace.” If I read the original text of the Scripture in the original language straight from Paul’s hand, the Greek and the parchment and the ink are all common grace. No one is objecting to the use of words. The disagreement is over epistemology and methodology and purpose. That there are similarities between the method of modern therapy and historical Christian soul care practice is not explained by modern “science,” but by the imitation of modern therapists taking from Christian practice. Freud was none too secret about his purpose. I also fear the use of the word “grace” in the phrase seems to entail some super added help by God for certain people (beyond restraint of sin). I have been pondering an explanation which may be more workable (at least for our work). When one discusses how to build a bridge, he will face different questions than one asking, “How does the soul function?”

128 An entire essay could be devoted the concept of “technique” driving felt need for integration. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (Vintage Books, 1964, New York: Random House, 1964); Jeffrey P. Greeman et al., *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 1st ed. (The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 22. See, e.g., Robert L. Leathy, *Cognitive Therapy Techniques: A Practitioner’s Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017).

I will stipulate that biblical counsel can be direct and even painful. For example, the public element to call one who is unrepentant to repent can be painful.

I will stipulate that the criticism is real and often valid (I am personally struck by how Mowrer was a deeply troubled man whose influence upon Adams was likely complex in ways that Adams was not fully aware).

My disagreement lies not with the assertions that biblical counseling as practiced by the contemporary church is often lacking. I do not reject the criticism, but I do see the solution of a move toward therapeutic aims or means as compromising. The “faults” of biblical counseling post-Adams lie not with common grace but with being *insufficiently biblical*. Part of solving problematic thinking is to first identify the error. I am not critical of Adams’s contention that the we behave has profound cognitive, emotional, and spiritual value and effect. I can even agree with Hambrick that there is more to do. We have neither ransacked the Bible nor the enormous reflection of centuries of Christian work and mediation on relevant matters.

However, I do believe that the biblical counseling movement has been harmed and distracted by its attraction to the “scientific-kindness” of secular therapy. Our fault lies not in “failing” to sufficiently ape “common grace” theories or techniques.