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THE THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT
FROM 1988

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Heath Blane Lambert

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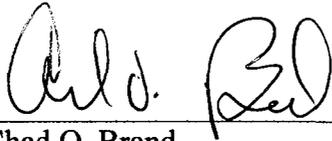
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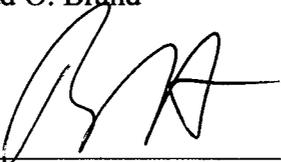
Read and Approved by:



David Powlison (Chairperson)



Chad O. Brand



Randy L. Stinson

Date 12/1/09

To Jay Adams,
who reawakened generations
to the sufficiency of Scripture,
and to
Lauren,
my wife, partner in ministry,
and dearest friend (Prov 31:28).

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PREFACE

A dissertation always represents the work of many persons. This reality is certainly the case in my situation. I am deeply indebted to many who have contributed in countless ways to the completion of this project.

First, I am thankful to the many students that I have had in class at Southern Seminary and Boyce College. Their questions, criticisms, and comments in many classes have helped me think through much of what is written here. Their reflections spurred me to make many improvements to the ideas presented here.

Second, I wish to thank Stuart Scott. Though not involved in the writing process of this dissertation, over the last three years he has become a treasured mentor, guide, and friend. In our numerous conversations, he has been a source of wisdom and encouragement as well as an example of how true and loving conversation should happen in the Christian community. This dissertation would look very different were it not for his influence on me.

Of course, I must also thank the members of my committee. Dr. Chad Brand and Dr. Randy Stinson have given of their time and wisdom, and I am profoundly thankful for each of them. My supervisor, Dr. David Powlison, has walked with me every step of the way through this project. Without his wisdom and care, this dissertation would never have been written. Without his living example of Christ-likeness, I would be much less than what I am. These three men—apart from helping

me to improve this project—have encouraged me greatly. In my life up to this point, I have never worked under men who were so interested in my own excellence and success. Working with each of them has been an honor.

Fourth, my dear and precious wife, Lauren, is more responsible for the completion of this project than any other person under heaven. During my work on this project, she has cooked 1,000 meals, changed a million diapers, given birth, and cared for me day-in and day-out. She is God's most precious gift to me, and I love her more than I could communicate in a work 100 times this long. Now that this project is completed, I will be called "doctor," but I will rise up and call her "blessed" (Prov 31:28).

Finally, I am supremely thankful for the sustaining grace given me by God. The completion of this project is one more demonstration that his strength is truly perfected in weakness.

Heath B. Lambert

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2009

CHAPTER 1
THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT
FOR DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Counseling is fundamentally a theological task. Whether or not practitioners and recipients are aware of it, the activity of counseling is always and in every way done with-respect-to-God.¹ Whether the persons involved in the practice of counseling realize the theological nature of counseling and whether their theology is good or bad will all be open questions but one thing is certain: counseling, by definition, is theological.

During most of the last century counseling has not been appreciated as a theological task or, when it has, the theological basis of counseling has often been inconsistent with core orthodoxy. Two very different groups have been guilty of the first error of cutting the theological foundations away from the counseling task. The first group is secular psychotherapists who attempted to help people solve their problems in living while ignoring Christ and his Word. Their diagnoses of and their attempts at “curing” people and their problems have been humanistic. They have rejected the

¹David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 13, no. 2 (Winter): 35-50.

Godward dimension of counseling moving in the opposing direction to claim that God and his people should have little or no role to play in the counseling task.²

A second group that has been guilty of severing theology from counseling are conservative, Bible-believing, Christ-exalting Christians. These conservatives misunderstand the theological nature of counseling. The misunderstanding is demonstrated every time they behave as though counseling is—at best—an ancillary activity in the church, best done by secular professionals, and should take a back-seat to important ministries such as preaching and missions.

As mentioned, ignoring the theological nature of counseling is not the only error. It is also possible to attempt to appreciate the theological basis of counseling and yet formulate it incorrectly. It is here that the so-called integration movement enters the discussion. Integration is, arguably, the dominant approach to counseling for Christians today and, as a movement, integrationists attempt to accomplish the counseling task in a way that is theologically faithful. The theological foundation of the integration movement, however, has not been articulated in a way that makes core doctrines of redemption integral. Because of wrong emphases on the importance and value of secular psychology, misunderstandings regarding the sufficiency of Scripture, confusion regarding what constitutes general and special revelation, and the apparent inability of integrationists to integrate, the movement cannot be regarded as theologically viable.³

²See the discussion on Sigmund Freud below.

³It is impossible to make that argument here, but it has been made elsewhere: David Powlison, "Critiquing Modern Integrationists," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 11, no. 3, (Spring, 1993): Douglas Bookman, "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling," *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 63-

By the middle of the 1900s, either through the absence of theology or the presence of bad theology, the task of counseling was in a state of doctrinal confusion. It was into this confusion that the biblical counseling movement, as it would come to be called, attempted to bring theological order and reclaim a biblical vision of counseling. The founder of the movement was a pastor and seminary professor named Jay Adams. Adams founded the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) in 1968 as a center for equipping counselors with biblical tools for counseling. Two years later in 1970, Adams began publishing numerous works attempting to relate the truths of Scripture to the task of counseling. By 1977 he had also founded a professional journal, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, meant to address counseling and other issues of concern to local church pastors. It was in this way that Adams became the leader of a new group of people seeking doctrinal fidelity in counseling. Twenty years later, however, Adams's role as leader of the movement would be eclipsed by a new group of men. In addition to continuing the work done by Adams it was the goal of this new group to balance and develop some of his key emphases.

Adams and his successors in the contemporary biblical counseling movement have written widely exploring the principles and practices of a distinctly biblical approach to counseling. It is, however, often overlooked that the biblical counseling movement is not monolithic. The positions and practices of Adams and those following him often differ in significant ways. Furthermore there is, at present, no secondary work that evaluates the changes in the movement over the last twenty years. Such an evaluation is necessary in order to evaluate the nuances between the position of Adams

97; Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 87-106.

and his successors. This evaluation will allow for accurate understanding of the biblical counseling movement. One of the most common questions addressed to biblical counselors is “How are contemporary biblical counselors alike and different from Jay Adams?”⁴ There are differences but because no work has documented the differences, the answers given to this question have been only anecdotal.

Thesis

Jay Adams, as the founder of the biblical counseling movement, brought an initial theological proposal to a counseling environment that in terms of doctrine, was murky and shallow. The theological order brought by Adams was of critical importance but was also incomplete. The work begun by Adams stood in need of clarification, elaboration, more fine distinction, and—in some cases—correction. These tasks of clarification, elaboration, distinction, and correction were elements that were addressed by Adams’s successors in the leadership of the contemporary biblical counseling movement. The thesis of this dissertation is that the theological proposal brought by Adams from 1968 to 1988 has experienced substantial conceptual, methodological, and apologetic development over the last two decades.

From 1988 to 2008 the biblical counseling movement has seen conceptual development. In the pages that follow it will be necessary to explore four specific areas of development. The first two issues that must be addressed fall under the area of counseling concepts and include (1) the balance between human responsibility and human suffering, and (2) the issue of human motivation. The third area to examine

⁴In my work as a professor at Southern Seminary and Boyce College, I have been asked this question more than any other single one.

regards advancement in the area of counseling methodology and has to do with the nature of the counselor/counselee relationship. Finally, the movement has developed apologetically as the biblical counseling community has further articulated an understanding of biblical counseling vis-à-vis secular psychological models and those committed to competing philosophies of counseling.

The purpose of this work is not to chronicle history, but to show development in the thought of leaders in the movement.⁵ The goal of this dissertation will be to argue that in the last two decades biblical counselors have improved the movement with their more intense theological reflection on these four issues. This dissertation will also include an effort to note that the movement has not “arrived.” There is still a need for further development in each of the three areas so that the counseling movement might experience increased faithfulness. Mindful of the need to be “ever-Reforming” there is still a need to clarify, elaborate, nuance, and correct in order to ensure the continuing

⁵In order to locate the work of this project most precisely it is important to be aware of two previous works, both of which are cited later in these pages. The first work is E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1983). Holifield traces the history of pastoral care from the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. Holifield’s work chronicles the historical shift in pastoral care from a uniquely biblical approach to an integrationist approach. As Holifield reflected on the state of pastoral care in the 1960s he was aware that things were change (see page 348 of his work) but was not able to evaluate it from his vantage point. This leads to the next work important for understanding the context here, David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of the Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Glenside, PA: Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1996). Powlison picks up where Holifield could not go, and chronicles the historical development of the nouthetic counseling movement that began in the 1960s. Powlison follows the movement through the 1980s. The present work thus picks up where Powlison left off but is different in that it does not chronicle history, but, instead, evaluates the thinking behind the movement. The present work and Powlison’s deal with similar subject matter but from a different perspective. Whereas Powlison’s work is topographical, the present work is developmental.

strength of the movement into the future. Just as the biblical counseling movement is stronger today than yesterday, so it is important to ensure that the movement is stronger tomorrow than it is today.

Background

This dissertation arises at the intersection of two narratives; one personal, the other historical. The personal narrative includes experiences both of growing up and as a young pastor. In family life, I was confronted with the hard reality of parental alcohol abuse by the age of four. Sitting in on many meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, I overheard a great deal of talk about “the disease of alcoholism” and statements like, “it wasn’t me who did those things, it was my disease.” At a very young age I remember thinking simply, “It doesn’t seem like a disease.” When my grandfather died of cancer I thought, “Now *that* seems like a disease.” The point here is that even before I became a believer, I was dubious about the application of the “medical model” to moral problems in living.

One of the first books I bought after becoming a Christian was Jay Adams’s *Competent to Counsel*. I was totally convinced of his vision to reclaim counseling as a theological task and of his mission to make counseling an enterprise that was centered on Christ, based on his Word, and located in the local church. From that point I was a whole-hearted believer in the biblical counseling movement and wished its members well in their endeavors. I only wished them well, however. I certainly did not want to *be* a counselor. I wanted to be a pastor and, by that, I meant that I wanted to be a preacher. Years later during my first week of pastoral ministry three separate groups of people requested meetings with me. The first was an elderly couple who were having marriage

problems and wanted advice; the second was a mother with her daughter who had been molested by a cousin and wanted help they had not received from their secular therapist; and the third was the aunt of the girl who had been molested (the mother of the perpetrator), and she needed help in figuring out how to handle the situation.

I realized in the span of three days that I could not only wish biblical counselors well but needed to figure out what they were saying. I realized that there was no arbitrary distinction between the public ministry of the Word in preaching and the personal ministry of the Word in counseling. I realized that being a faithful pastor and preacher meant also being a faithful counselor. That is when I began to study the biblical counseling movement very carefully. It was that study that has led to the pursuit of a doctor of philosophy in the subject. That is the personal side.

The other narrative is the historical one. The biblical counseling movement did not occur in a vacuum. Indeed the movement together with its development is a study in theological drama. It is a drama of theological neglect, theological recovery, and theological development. The purpose of this project is to examine the theological development of that movement. It is not possible to examine the development without examining the theological recovery and theological neglect that preceded it. It is an understanding of those issues that will be examined presently.

Theological Neglect

Historically the church of Jesus Christ has often been characterized by careful attention to the theological underpinnings of the counseling task. The Puritans, for example, initiated a particularly rich period in personal ministry or counseling. These men wrote hundreds of works to help people deal with their problems in living. It is

impossible to survey all the literature here but a few examples are appropriate. Richard Baxter wrote *The Christian Directory*⁶ outlining in exhaustive detail the spiritual problems Christians face; John Owen wrote, among other things, *The Mortification of Sin*⁷ as a practical guide for dealing with the flesh; *A Lifting up for the Downcast*⁸ was intended by William Bridge to be an encouragement to Christians struggling with all manner of life's difficulties. Writing in the Puritan tradition in America, Jonathan Edwards wrote *A Treatise Concerning The Religious Affections*⁹ to deal with the pastoral issue of judging true works of the Spirit from false ones.¹⁰ One of the last thoughtful works was Ichabod Spencer's *A Pastor's Sketches* in the 1850s.¹¹ In this work, Spencer recounted his conversations with many troubled souls and showed—in the context of nineteenth century case studies—how ministers might talk with troubled persons about their problems. Spencer's work was not perfect. He was often guilty of a rationalistic emphasis and ignored psychic realities that contributed to an assessment by secular

⁶Richard Baxter, *The Christian Directory*, 4 vols. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997).

⁷John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004).

⁸William Bridge, *A Lifting up for the Downcast* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).

⁹Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision, 2007).

¹⁰Many more works could be cited here but the point is that it was the burden of those writing in the tradition of the Puritan authors to apply the truths of Scripture to the sins and sufferings of God's hurting people.

¹¹Ichabod Spencer, *A Pastor's Sketches* (Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground, 2001).

thinkers that Protestant reflection on these matters was a wasteland. Still, in many respects, it represented the end of careful and uniquely Christian reflection about the task of interpersonal ministry.¹² Nothing like it would appear again for a century.

There are multiple explanations for the absence of manifestly Christian thinking in the effort to help people with their problems in living. It is important now to address nine of the most important causes behind this absence. Two kinds of causes will be examined here. The first three addressed here are those causes that are immutable and transcend time. They include those elements that make counseling difficult in any period of history. The last six causes will detail specific historical reasons for the decline in theological reflection as history advanced from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

People are interested in understanding other people. Books written by psychologists thought to explain people and their problems typically dominate the best seller lists; talk-show hosts often serve the role of folk/pop-psychologist to their viewers (when they are not professionally trained as such); with increasing frequency, news programs invite psychologists to explain the inner-workings of news-makers or the public that observes and responds to them; psychology is the most popular undergraduate degree program. People love to know how they and others function. When people begin to discover how others function, they discover problems and want to help. This is where

¹²This statement is worded very carefully. The point advanced here is not that Christians were not involved at all in the task of thinking about interpersonal ministry. The point is rather that this involvement was not as careful and uniquely Christian as it had been. Before this, Christians were thinking inside their community and using their resources to think through counseling issues (though they would not have called it counseling). After this, Christians were taking their lead from secular thinkers and bringing in biblical principals almost as an afterthought.

counseling and therapy come in—when you understand, you see trouble and try to give aid.

This reality ensures that what David Powlison calls “the Faith’s psychology”¹³ will always have competitors. That competition will come both from within and without the Christian camp but this drive to know about people will mean that many different philosophies of helping people with their problems will always be present and in need of critique and correction. This fact means that Christians must always be vigilant to be strengthening their own understanding of the problems people have and always be aware of alternative positions so that they may be critiqued. When this fails to happen, the faith’s psychology will recede and a faithless psychology will ascend.

The invisibility of personal ministry. Another perennial element of counseling that makes theological reflection on it intrinsically susceptible to erosion is its hidden nature. Preaching is a public ministry; it is visible to the masses. This is not the case with the interpersonal ministry of counseling. Very often, those who are in the room at the time are the only ones who are aware that counseling is happening. This is a problem for counseling because people tend to be captivated by a charismatic preacher who is seen addressing massive crowds. The problem here is the one of being out of sight and therefore out of mind. People do not generally give much thought to that which they never see. Because this is true, it is critical that Christians be vigilant to use the public ministry of the Word to exhort other believers toward the importance of the personal ministry of the Word.

¹³David Powlison, “A Biblical Counseling View,” in *Psychology and Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 219.

The difficulty of personal ministry. Another timeless difficulty of personal ministry is that it is hard. That is not to say that the public ministry of the Word is easy. It is to say, however, that the challenges of personal ministry in counseling are on display in a way that the challenges of public ministry—in preaching, for example—are not. Both the audience and the content of public ministry are general. The preacher preaches to the crowds addressing no particular person or particular problem. Because this is true, the sermons of a preacher could potentially fail to produce change in the lives of his hearers for quite some time before anyone caught on.

But personal ministry is the exact opposite. Both the audience and the content of personal ministry are, by definition, specific. The counselor counsels specific people with names, faces, and stories. Because this is true counselors cannot fail to address problems and pursue change with their counselees. Failure in this area would become immediately apparent to real people with real problems who need real grace from a real God. Counselors cannot hide behind crowds but are always under scrutiny from the others in the room.

The difficulties of counseling are, therefore, more difficult to obscure than the difficulties of public ministry of the Word. Because this is true, there may be people who are less inclined to engage in this activity. Quite frankly, the level of scrutiny present in counseling is likely to make it an undesirable locale of ministry for many people. This reality makes it incumbent on those who would be faithful ministers of the Word in all its forms to be diligent to practice the personal ministry of the Word as well as proclaiming its necessity to anyone who would be an authentic servant of Christ.

Having examined some critical elements that make theological reflection on counseling difficult at all times and in all places it is now important to consider how those difficulties took specific historical shape in nineteenth and twentieth century America. These historical forces came both from within the church and from the envioning culture. The specific internal forces will be addressed before moving to the external ones.

Revivalism. In the 1700s a religious phenomenon began to grip Christianity. That phenomenon was revivalism. In discussing the history of revival, Iain Murray quotes eighteenth century theologians Jonathan Edwards and Solomon Stoddard saying, respectively, that revival is “a surprising work of God,” and is “some special season wherein God doth in a remarkable manner revive religion among his people.”¹⁴ A century or so later, things were much different. Murray says,

[By the close of] the nineteenth century . . . a new view of revival came generally to displace the old, and a distinctly different phase in the understanding of the subject began. A shift in vocabulary was a pointer to the nature of the change. Seasons of revival became “revival meetings”. Instead of being “surprising” they might now be even announced in advance, and whereas no one in the previous century had known of ways to secure revival, a system was now popularized by “revivalists” which came near to guaranteeing results.¹⁵

Revival, historically seen to be the unilateral work of God, had given way to *revivalism*, which was seen to be based on the engineering of people.

¹⁴Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994), xvii.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, xviii.

There is much to say about the phenomenon of revivalism but for the purposes of this project only two elements demand attention. The first is the focus among revivalists on drawing a crowd. The camp meeting was so-called because spectators would travel long distances to the meeting and then camp there for several days. This ability to camp-out in one location made it possible to have bigger crowds since persons in attendance could travel from long distances and attend for long periods of time. The crowds could often be quite large. One revival, the largest ever, in Cane Ridge, Kentucky had anywhere from 30,000 to 100,000 persons in attendance.¹⁶ Though this meeting was larger than most, crowds were typically in the hundreds and thousands—much larger than any single-day event could ever be.

The second element of revivalism that is important to address regards the purpose of drawing a crowd—conversion. The revivalist's motivation in drawing a crowd was to preach the gospel so that sinners would become saved. While other things like religious education would sometimes happen such things were secondary to the primary goal, which was to preach sinners out of hell and into heaven.

Revivalism has been rightly criticized for much of its excesses¹⁷ and yet it must also be said that with regard to the elements addressed here, there is nothing wrong in principle with drawing a crowd and seeking the conversion of those in that crowd. Revivalism's emphasis on these two things, however, did, over time, have a devastating impact on the interpersonal ministry of counseling. In many ways counseling and

¹⁶Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York: Garland, 1992), vii.

¹⁷See the following, Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 255-74; Samuel J. Baird, *A History of the New School, and of the Questions Involved in the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church in 1838* (Philadelphia, 1868), 19.

revivalism have opposite emphases. First, whereas revivalists concern themselves with drawing huge crowds and preaching to the masses, counselors are concerned with individualized ministry and conversation. Second, where revivalists have conversion as the goal, a minister seeking to counsel biblically will have that same goal at times but is just as likely to be focusing on discipleship. Third, revivalists tend to focus on instantaneous change that is measured in a moment of decision; counselors tend to work in the details of change that happen in a process and over time. Given these emphases it is not difficult to see how a Christian culture that was consumed with revivalism for many decades had trouble reflecting upon and emphasizing the activity of interpersonal ministry.

The fundamentalist-modernist controversy. The church confronted another significant challenge by the end of the nineteenth century. The problem was what came to be called modernism. In this controversy higher criticism and Darwinism worked to undercut the confidence that many ministers and rank-and-file Christians had in the authority of the biblical text. The Bible's teaching on the origins of the world, its understanding of the problems of people, even the words of Scripture itself all came under fire.

George Marsden addresses this issue saying,

The publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 had sparked an intellectual crisis for Christians that no educated person could ignore. Darwinism focused the issue on the reliability of the first chapters of Genesis. But the wider issue was whether the Bible could be trusted at all. German higher criticism, questioning the historicity of many biblical accounts, had been developing for more than a generation, so that it was highly sophisticated by the time after the Civil War when it became widely known in America. It would be difficult to overstate the crucial importance of the absolute integrity of the Bible to the nineteenth-century American evangelical's whole way of thinking. When this cornerstone began to be

shaken, major adjustments in the evangelical edifice had to be made from top to bottom.¹⁸

The church was in crisis and its leaders sprang into action. Leaders of the so-called Princeton school were the first ones to deal with the crisis. The Princeton theologians famously addressed the issue of biblical authority in works like *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*¹⁹ by B. B. Warfield. Years later, *The Fundamentals*²⁰ was published which was meant, as the title indicates, to defend the fundamentals of the faith against liberal attacks.

Such defenses of the faith were necessary. It was a critical work to defend the faith against liberalism. Such critical fights, however, have a way of marginalizing other important activities. *The Fundamentals* was a defense of important issues like the authority of Scripture and a biblical defense of the origins of the universe, however, a biblical defense of theology that was pastoral and practical was not included in its pages. Counseling was ignored. As mentioned above, it was ignored for all of the right reasons but it was ignored all the same. This left an opening for the modernists to come in and take over counseling within the church. With conservative minds focused on defending the Bible, modernists began to be consumed with secular approaches to counseling in

¹⁸George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 12-13.

¹⁹Benjamin Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948).

²⁰R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, eds., *The Fundamentals* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

their excitement over the social gospel.²¹ This modernist connection with counseling only made it more difficult for conservatives to reflect on the topic.

The psychological revolution. While the church was grappling with revivalism and modernism on the inside, there were also big changes happening in the culture. One big change was a revolution that occurred in the field of psychology towards the end of the nineteenth century. To understand the psychological revolution it is necessary to understand two of its most important leaders, Wilhelm Wundt and Sigmund Freud.

Wilhelm Wundt founded the world's first psychological laboratory and is regarded as the father of experimental psychology.²² Wundt is responsible for what he called physiological psychology. According to Wundt, all of a person's psychological processes were rooted in some element of their biology.²³

For Wundt, then, psychology and physiology were intrinsically inter-related. Wundt is a seminal figure in the history of science because he is credited with rounding out the scientific revolution, bringing it into the field of psychology. He was among the first to bring the scientific method to psychology using experimentation and was the first to urge his students to find physiological correlates for the psychic realities of people.

²¹A fuller discussion of the modernist's affinity for counseling is not possible here. For further discussion, see Donald Capps, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981); Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 214-15, 280; Seward Hiltner and Lowell Colston, *The Context of Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961).

²²E. G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), 317, 322, 344-45.

²³Wilhelm Wundt. *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, trans. Edward Bradford Titchener (New York: Macmillan, 1904), 2.

Wundt is critical to understand for this project because he took the first steps in making psychology a respectable scientific discipline based, at least in part, in a study of the human body.

Sigmund Freud is perhaps the most famous (and infamous) figure in the history of psychology. Here it is only necessary to draw out one main element regarding Freud's stated goal. He initiated the "talking cure" or the activity of psychotherapy. As has been argued above, historically pastors provided the guidance and wisdom for helping people with life's problems. Freud thought the church had failed. In his work, *The Question of Lay Analysis*,²⁴ Freud argued for a class of "secular pastoral workers" with the goal of secularizing the counseling task. Freud makes clear that his burden was to remove counseling from the ministerial context and place it in a secular one.

It is essential to understand the work of Wundt and Freud to appreciate the decline in theological reflection on counseling. Once psychology began to be defined in secular scientific terms (Wundt), it became possible to argue that psychotherapy should be the prerogative of secular professionals (Freud). The emphasis on each of these elements resulted in a massive decline in ministers reflecting on this same subject. During another time such a decline might not have happened but at this peculiar period of history, as has already been mentioned, the church was focused on other things.

A changing American economy. The transition from the 1800's to the 1900's was not only a critical period in the church and the scientific community but also for the

²⁴Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, (New York: Norton and Company), 1950. Also see Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalysis and Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 104.

American economy. The change happened in two respects. On the one hand, Americans began to move from rural areas and into urban areas. On the other hand, and contiguous with the first change, Americans began to move from agrarian work to more white-collar work.

The Industrial revolution created a new category of person—the titan of industry. The titan of industry served to stoke a kind of tough masculinity that the culture found desirable at that point.²⁵ It highlighted the kind of strong-willed man that could hold the masses in his sway. As the culture became enamored with this type of individual the effects carried over into church-life as well and stoked the flames of desire for the larger-than-life character that was accentuated in revivals.²⁶

This move from small towns to big cities and from farm work to factory work had another impact on the church's theological reflection regarding counseling. In the old agrarian economy, workers had to be experts with *things*—soil, farm equipment, knowledge of the seasons and crop rotations, etc. In the new industrial economy, the barons of industry had to be experts in, among other things, *people*. The larger a company became, the more employees it hired. The more employees a company hired, the larger was the necessity to keep those employees happy, cooperative, and productive.

[The new American] working as members of staffs, faculties, committees, and management teams . . . needed to be adept at handling people and manipulating abstract symbols. Their task was to maintain the morale and high motivation of people who worked under them, adapting themselves to the expectations of superiors who valued “well-rounded personality.” . . . [This kind of economy] could

²⁵The reasons this kind of masculinity were desirable will be discussed below.

²⁶E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 167-68.

not have been better designed to stimulate interest in the nuances of “personal relations.” . . . Large corporations began to value good scores on “personality tests” as much as experience or intellectual ability . . . [On the other hand], churches presented themselves as preservers of the family or as havens of friendliness.²⁷

As the church was focusing its efforts on a revivalistic effort at soul winning and a defense of the fundamentals of the faith, secular psychologists were gaining ascendancy employing the scientific method with cutting edge work in understanding people in their relationships with others. As it turns out, this was information that a changing American culture found useful while the church sat on the sidelines. Christians were simply not involved in these activities. Psychology came into vogue and the church was behind the times.

The Civil War. A neglect of theological reflection was brought in part by changes in the church and culture was compounded by major wars. The first was the American Civil War. Between 1861-1865 America was involved in the deadliest war it had ever fought or would ever fight up to the present day. The American Civil War called upon countrymen to fight against one another; brother against brother. The war consumed the country leaving no segment of the population untouched. The war also toughened the country. A brutal and bloody war served to emphasize only certain masculine virtues like strength and toughness. In the aftermath of the war, there seemed to be no time for activities like conversation and discussion. Such activities were seen to be effeminate with more masculine activities being prized. E. Brooks Holifield refers to this phenomenon saying,

²⁷Ibid., 268-69.

By promoting a cult of masculinity in intellectual circles, the war raised a question about the cure of souls: Was the whole enterprise perhaps unmanly? The question implicitly equated pastoral care with genteel and refined conversations that proceeded delicately in parlors and sitting rooms. Such an image of pastoral labor embarrassed ministers who had come to admire the “bold virtues.”²⁸

Ministerial embarrassment regarding the “gentility” of pastoral counseling is one element behind a decline in pastoral counsel. The American Civil War coarsened the country, emphasizing a certain kind of toughness over and against biblical reflection on the practice of interpersonal conversation.²⁹ Theological impoverishment was a direct result of this unhappy reality.

World Wars I and II. Wars bring trouble and catalyze social change.

Psychology was introduced to the military during World War I in the form of placement tests to properly locate the vast numbers of manpower in the work force. By the end of the war, the problem of “shell shock” presented an urgent need for the military to help those who disintegrated under the intense pressure of battle.³⁰ By World War II, the United States government enlisted thousands of men as chaplains to assist those psychologists in counseling soldiers with their problems stemming from prolonged exposure to the violent and volatile battlefields of war. The involvement of chaplains in the war effort helped address the problem of effeminacy that came about in the wake of the American Civil War but interestingly, created another problem.

²⁸Ibid., 167.

²⁹See, Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics* (New York, 1982), 479, 495; Washington Gladden, *Ruling Ideas of the Present Age* (Boston, 1895), 294.

³⁰What was called shell shock in the World War I came to be called combat fatigue in World War II. Presently this identical problem is known as posttraumatic stress disorder.

Upon returning from the war, many chaplains involved in the effort expressed chagrin at their lack of preparation for the work. Many simply felt unqualified to help battle-torn soldiers deal with the complex problems they were facing. Holifield observes,

When the service people began to talk to the chaplains, something often seemed awry. A study of veterans after the war revealed that their complaints about the wartime clergy returned almost invariably to one issue: The chaplains too frequently lacked the skills appropriate to the cure of souls.³¹

This new problem was one of competency. For years secular psychology had been on the rise while biblical reflection had been on the decline. Now, when placed on center stage in the war effort, the bareness was beginning to show. When this failure was placed along-side of the relative success that psychologists had coming out of the war effort,³² it resulted in more lost ground for those committed to a biblical philosophy of helping people.

Pressures from within the church and from without all played an important role in the decline of biblical reflection on how to care for people experiencing problems in living. Just as Christian reflection on these matters was decreasing, secular reflection and practice was on the rise. The work of Sigmund Freud led to the work of dozens of others until, by the middle of the twentieth century most Christians who were taking seriously the responsibility to care for people with life-problems had adopted the methodology of Carl Rogers. Christian thinking had given way to secular thinking in the ministry to

³¹Ibid., 269-70.

³²There is a brief discussion of this in Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 260-63.

persons. Christian reflection that was original and distinct was not happening.

Regarding counseling, the church had experienced a devastating theological loss.

Theological Recovery

The absence of theology in counseling was the order of the day when, in 1970, Jay Adams published *Competent to Counsel*.³³ In that book and a spate of others in the 1970's Adams sought to alert Christians to their failures in the area of counseling and began pointing the way to the resources laid out in Scripture for helping people with their problems. It was the role of Adams to begin to restore to the church an understanding that they had before the American Civil War, namely, that counseling was within the realm of the church, every bit as much as its counterpart in public ministry, preaching.

Adams believed that counseling was intrinsically theological. He claimed,

All counseling, by its very nature (as it tries to explain and direct human beings in their living before God and in a fallen world) implies theological commitments by the counselor. He simply cannot become involved in the attempt to change beliefs, values, attitudes, relationships and behavior without wading neck deep in theological waters. . . . These theological commitments may be conscious or unconscious, biblical or heretical, good theology or bad, but—either way—they surely are theological Thus . . . the relationship between counseling and theology is organic; counseling cannot be done apart from theological commitments. Every act, word (or lack of these) implies theological commitments.³⁴

Adams's conception of the counseling task was deeply rooted in Scripture and, therefore, intensely theological. This conviction was the basis of Adams's work. This theological approach to counseling, however, brought a problem into focus for Adams. As he looked

³³Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

³⁴Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 13.

over the counseling landscape, he saw a field full of compromise in the counseling arena. Theological reflection on counseling that had been in place at earlier points of history had given way to a thoroughly secular approach to counseling in modern psychology. When persons in the world conceived of counseling, their categories of thinking were not shaped by biblical presuppositions but secular ones. While this was perhaps to be expected, another reality that Adams needed to confront was that these secular categories of thought had infiltrated the church. Adams's theological recovery of counseling logically operated in two modes: a destructive mode and a constructive mode. On one hand, Adams needed a critical/analytic phase with the goal of discrediting secular approaches to counseling. On the other hand, Adams would need to build a positive biblical model. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Critiquing secular approaches to counseling. Adams believed that secularists had commandeered the domain of counseling which rightfully belonged to Christians. Because he believed this to be true and because the secular model for counseling was the dominant one, it was critical for Adams to make the case against it. Adams said,

Biblically, there is no warrant for acknowledging the existence of a separate and distinct discipline called psychiatry. There are, in the Scriptures, only three specified sources of personal problems in living: demonic activity (principally possession), personal sin, and organic illness. These three are interrelated. All options are covered under these heads, leaving no room for a fourth: non-organic mental illness. There is, therefore, no place in a biblical scheme for the psychiatrist as a separate practitioner. This self-appointed caste came into existence with the broadening of the medical umbrella to include inorganic illness (whatever that means). A new practitioner, part physician (a very small part) and part secular priest (a very large part), came into being to serve the host of persons who

previously were counseled by ministers but now had been snatched away from them and placed beneath the broad umbrella of “mental illness.”³⁵

There are several elements of Adams’s view to note here. First, Adams denies the existence of inorganic “mental illness.” The operative term here is inorganic. Adams never denied the existence of physical (i.e., organic) problems and diseases even in the brain. What he explicitly denies is the notion of mental illness that is disconnected from pathology. Adams argues,

Growing numbers of authorities have begun to object to the concept of “mental illness,” and the vigorous propaganda campaign, which has been conducted under that misleading misnomer. The fact is that the words “mental illness” are used quite ambiguously. . . . Organic malfunctions affecting the brain that are caused by brain damage, tumors, gene inheritance, glandular or chemical disorders, validly may be termed mental illnesses. But at the same time a vast number of other human problems have been classified as mental illnesses for which there is no evidence that they have been engendered by disease or illness at all. As a description of many of these problems, the term mental illness is nothing more than a figure of speech, and in most cases a poor one at that.³⁶

Second, Adams argues that psychiatrists, as counseling practitioners are illegitimate. Because inorganic mental illness is a non-entity, when psychiatrists attempt to help people with their problems in living they are actually engaging in the work of the ministry (As Adams says, they are functioning as “secular priests.”) Adams further says, “Psychiatry’s legitimate function is to serve those who suffer from organic difficulties. The psychiatrist has reason for existence only when he specializes as a physician to treat

³⁵Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 9-10. Though I am in fundamental agreement with Adams as he advances his case here, it is not the purpose of this project either to commend or to condemn his argumentation. The purpose here is much more neutral and is to understand Adams’s position. All of the commentary that follows will be aimed at comprehending the position, analysis will be reserved for later.

³⁶Adams, *Competent*, 28.

medically those persons whose problems have an organic etiology.”³⁷

Third, as Adams argues against the existence of inorganic mental illness and against psychiatrists as “separate practitioners,” he does so standing on the authority of God’s Word. It is Adams’s reading of Scripture that helps him to see three legitimate problem sources (e.g., demonic activity, personal sin, and organic illness) and one illegitimate source (e.g., inorganic mental illness). It is Adams’s further reading of Scripture that leads him to rule out-of-bounds, the psychiatrist’s efforts at secular ministry. Adams’s worldview was thoroughly biblical. God’s Word stood as his standard and he viewed it as a fundamentally faithless act to evaluate counseling—or anything else—by another standard. He said,

The Bible itself provides the principles for understanding and for engaging in nouthetic counseling and directs Christian ministers to do such counseling as a part of their life calling in the ministry of the Word. . . . Therefore, those who develop other systems, based on other sources of information, by which they attempt to achieve these same ends, by the very nature of the case *become competitive*. It is dangerous to compete with the Bible, since all such competition in the end turns out to be competition with God.³⁸

Adams, therefore, believed that secularists in the field of counseling were illegitimate. Their theories compete with God’s Word. They engage in work reserved for Christian ministers. They misunderstand the problems that people have. Their solutions are false gospels.

³⁷Adams, *Manual*, 11. Adams goes on to say that even in such an instance as this, there will be a need to work together with a biblical counselor to help alter sinful life patterns.

³⁸Adams, *Theology*, ix. Original emphasis.

While it was true that Adams had strong disagreements with those practicing psychotherapy, it would be going too far to say that Adams believed psychological science had no role to play. Adams believed that psychological science did have value when used rightly. Indeed at the beginning of Adams's very first book on counseling he said,

I do not wish to disregard science, but rather I welcome it as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling in generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong human interpretations of Scripture, thereby forcing the student to restudy the Scriptures. However, in the area of psychiatry, science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and gross speculation.³⁹

In other words, Adams believed psychology⁴⁰ could be useful when appropriately understood and rightly applied. When psychology stayed on its own turf and dealt with organic issues, Adams believed they could be helpful and beneficial. What Adams ferociously objected to, however, was the atheistic worldview of psychology as well as his perception that they were meddling in the domain of the Christian ministry. It was crossing this line—not their existence in general—that earned them the ire of Adams.

Constructing a biblical approach to counseling. Adams's fundamental task was positive. His critique of secular psychology and its encroachment into the church

³⁹Adams, *Competent*, xxi. See also, Adams, *Manual*, 9-11. Jay Adams, *What about Nouthetic Counseling?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 31. Jay Adams, *Counseling and the Sovereignty of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1975), 12.

⁴⁰Adams was inconsistent in his use of the terms psychology and psychiatry, often using them interchangeably. In this dissertation the term psychology will serve as a general, catch-all category, which encompasses medicine (i.e., psychiatry), theorizing, and counseling according to secular worldview commitments.

served to clear the ground so that he and others could construct a biblical approach to counseling and helping people with their problems.⁴¹

Adams's construction of a biblically-based theology of counseling began with theology proper. An understanding of God's existence, power, and authority was central both to Adams's critique of psychology and to his own positive understanding of counseling. Adams says,

God is around us, in us and with us. He knows (and cares) about every word on our lips and every thought in our minds. He knows us—indeed has known all about us from all eternity past! The omniscient, omnipresent God is our environment, inescapably so! And though most people rarely recognize it, they are deeply influenced—in all their thoughts and actions—by their environment (I am not speaking about that truncated, superficial and distorted view of the environment that is so much a part of various counseling systems like Skinner's or Glasser's. Rather, I refer to nothing less than God Himself, and a creation that serves and honors Him). In this sense, every unregenerate man, and every system he designs, is influenced by his sinful failure to describe the environment properly and, as the necessary consequence, his inability to develop a counseling system (or counseling method) that corresponds to the reality of the environment as it truly exists. A false view of the environment, there, can lead to nothing else but a counseling system that is askew, and that rebelliously misrepresents man and the rest of creation because it misrepresents God. Indeed, because it is in such basic error—a system designed to promote life apart from God—it is in competition with God, and at odds with His creation.⁴²

Several things are clear here. Adams wanted to restore a thoroughly theistic framework to counseling because he believed that God is the inescapable reality with whom all persons have to do. Secular psychology's failure to grapple with this fundamental reality

⁴¹A comprehensive accounting of Adams's theology is impossible to provide in these pages. For a more thorough discussion see, David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of the Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Glenside, PA: Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1996), 170-255. The following is meant to provide only a concise summary of those most important elements of Adams's theological recovery.

⁴²Adams, *Manual*, 40-41.

led Adams to argue that such approaches to counseling were fundamentally wrong and, therefore, unhelpful. But Adams argued much more strongly than this; the atheistic worldview of those in secular psychology not only rendered their counseling systems “askew,” they themselves were “rebellious,” “competitors” with God. For Adams, the only counseling model that could be helpful in any meaningful sense, was the one that had a firm grasp on the God of the Christian Bible.

Since, for Adams, God is the “air” people breathe, all of the problems people have are directly related to him and their failure to reach his perfect standard. Adams argued therefore, for an understanding of problems in human living that was grounded in the doctrine of sin. Adams addresses his understanding of the problem of sin in his typically clear manner,

Corruption of the whole person, but especially of his inner life, is a dominant and essential theme for every counselor to know, to teach and upon which to base all his work. Clearly, he cannot bring about biblical change by means of the old heart, since from it flows only sin. He will counsel, then, only believers . . . he will evangelize unbelievers. But, conversely, he also will recognize the tremendous potential of the new heart. He will not give up on truly regenerate persons (or those who through profession of faith he must presume to be so); in them is the capacity to understand and obey God’s counsel (Ezek. 36:27). The indwelling Spirit makes this a genuine reality.⁴³

Adams believed that the most basic problems people face are their separation from God because of sin and this understanding held numerous implications for Adams’s counseling model. To begin, Adams did not believe counseling was possible for an unbeliever because counseling aimed for the fruit of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ This belief underlines an important reality that for Adams the counseling task was an activity that

⁴³ Adams, *Theology*, 143.

⁴⁴ Adams, *Manual*, 29.

had specifically to do with issues of sin and righteousness in a person's life. Because an unbeliever did not have the resources to obey God's counsel and to put off their sin, the only option for such a one was problem-centered evangelism with the hope that true counseling would then become possible.⁴⁵

This understanding brought great optimism regarding the counseling task. Since believers do possess God's resources to stop sinning and learn love, the counselor and counselee could have great hope in God that enduring change would ultimately come about in counseling.⁴⁶ It is clear then that Adams believed the most basic counseling problem was sin and the goal, by exhortation, was to see the counselee put away their sin.⁴⁷

This reality leads to another key tenet of Adams's counseling system. If the basic problem that human beings have is sin, then their basic solution is found in the person of Jesus Christ and in his saving work of redemption. Adams says,

How, then, shall we approach the Bible's teaching about salvation in its relationships to counseling? To begin with, it is important to restate the fact that salvation is what makes Christian counseling possible; it is the foundation (or basis) for all counseling. This is the positive side of the coin mentioned earlier about the impossibility of counseling unbelievers. When doing true counseling—i.e., working with saved person to enable them to make changes, at a level of depth that pleases God—it is possible to solve any true counseling problem (i.e., any problem involving love for God and one's neighbor). Such assurance stems from the fact that all the resources necessary for change are available in the Word and by the Spirit. No counseling system that is based on some other foundation can begin to offer what Christian counseling offers. How tragic, then, to see purely human ideas

⁴⁵Adams, *Theology*, 177.

⁴⁶Adams, *Manual*, 39.

⁴⁷It will be necessary to return to this point later in examining how the movement developed.

and resources. They offer little hope and have no good reason to believe that they will succeed; yet (sadly) many Christians lap up (and follow) such advice.⁴⁸

This quotation is worthy of careful analysis for several reasons.

In the previous discussion regarding sin, reference was made to God's "resources for change." In this passage, Adams makes clear that *the* resource for change is the salvation that Jesus Christ accomplishes for his people and applies to them by his Spirit. Adams states that counseling systems based on any other foundation offer "little hope" and have "no good reason to believe" that success will be the outcome of their efforts. Adams was clear that success in counseling (i.e., change) is possible only because of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Adams did not believe that the transformation that the gospel brings happens in a mystical or instantaneous way. Rather, it occurs through a *process* of biblical change. Adams believed that change occurs in a two-part process of habituation and dehabituation. Adams grounded his teaching on habituation and dehabituation in places like Ephesians 4 with its exhortations to "put off" unrighteous behaviors (4:22) and to "put on" righteous behaviors (4:24). Adams illustrates this point with a dialogue,

Q. "When is a liar not a liar?"

A. "When he is something else."

Very good, but *what* else? When he *stops* lying and what must he *start* doing? By what does the Bible say that lying man must be replaced? (That is the kind of question that counselors continually should be asking and answering.) Well, what does Paul say? Look at [Ephesians 4:25]:

Therefore [he is now applying the principle of change] laying aside falsehood [putting off], speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another [putting on].

⁴⁸Adams, *Theology*, 177.

There you have it.

Q. “When is a liar not a liar?”

A. “When he has become a truth teller.”

Unless he has been “reprogrammed” or rehabilitated, when the chips are down, when he is tired, sick, or under great pressure, a counselee’s good resolves and temporary cessation of lying will not last. He will revert to his former manner of life because he is still programmed to do so. The old sinful patterns have not been replaced by new ones. Until that occurs, he will remain vulnerable to sinful reversion. Dehabituation is possible only by achieving rehabilitation. The counselee must be repackaged. New patterns of response must become dominant. It is to these instead that he must learn to turn habitually under life stresses.⁴⁹

Adams’s counseling model was not mystical but involved a process. This process was not passive but instead active and involved not only the task of putting a stop to sinful practices but beginning to practice righteous behaviors as well.

In Adams’s system, God is the fundamental reality, sin is the fundamental problem, and redemption in Christ is the fundamental solution. Therefore, the Christian minister operating in the context of the local church is called to the task of helping people with their problems, of mediating God’s truth to people, and of walking along side them in the struggle to put off sin and put on obedience. Adams says,

Counseling is a work that every minister may, indeed must, perform as a faithful shepherd of Jesus Christ. He must plan to do counseling, must learn how to do counseling and must make himself available for counseling. Referral, except to another faithful shepherd, is out of the question. Better than referral is personal growth on the part of the pastor through discovering and ministering God’s answers to the problems encountered in pastoral counseling.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Adams, *Manual*, 178. Original emphasis.

⁵⁰ Jay Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 174.

Adams believed that all wise, growing Christians were *competent* to counsel⁵¹ but he also believed that the ordained, Christian minister had the unique *mandate* to counsel.⁵² Because of that conviction Adams railed against those mental health professionals outside of the church who attempted to seize the counseling task of the church. He also railed against those inside the church who accepted their message either referring to secular “experts” or joining them.⁵³ For Adams, the only place true counsel could be found was within the church. The Christian minister must counsel, not as an optional, but as an essential element of his ministry.

Adams’s four major books on counseling were published between 1970 and 1979.⁵⁴ During that decade, Adams made a vigorous and thorough proposal for restoring theological reflection to the counseling task. As a result of Adams’s ministry, much progress was made in recovering uniquely Christian reflection on the counseling task. After the initial work of theological recovery, however, the task of theological development still lay ahead.

Theological Development

Adams continued to publish books throughout the 1980’s but none were as seminal as his major works in the previous decade. He also continued his work of editing *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* (JPP). All of this effort made Adams the uncontested

⁵¹ Adams, *Manual*, 11-13.

⁵² Adams, *Shepherding*, 172-76.

⁵³ Adams, *Competent*, 17-19

⁵⁴ *Competent to Counsel* (1970), *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (1973), *Shepherding God’s Flock* (1974), and *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (1979).

leader of the biblical counseling movement. Indeed, his name was equated with the movement.

In 1988 David Powlison, a member of the faculty and counseling staff at CCEF, wrote “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling” that was published in JPP.⁵⁵ This article, written 20 years after the creation of CCEF, highlighted six issues in the biblical counseling world that demanded attention. Powlison used the occasion of the anniversary to “take stock” and ask questions regarding, “Where have we come from? Where are we? What issues that now face us will determine our future?” Powlison made clear, “These six are not the only issues. They are, however, the issues I believe merit the adjective ‘crucial.’”⁵⁶

Powlison began by addressing what he called, “The same old issues.” He said, “The problems that animated biblical counseling at its start twenty years ago remain live problems today. Counseling in the Christian church continues to be compromised significantly by the secular assumptions and practices of our culture’s reigning psychologies and psychiatries.”⁵⁷ Thus, Powlison began his article standing firmly on the foundation laid by Adams. He described the same basic problem saying, “Secular psychologies remain major enemies of the church in the late 20th century” and adding,

⁵⁵David A. C. Powlison, “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol 9, No 3, 1988.

⁵⁶Ibid., 53.

⁵⁷Ibid., 53-54.

“Secular psychological modes of thinking continue to inhabit the church of the living God.”⁵⁸ He also described the same basic solution,

Biblical counseling must reaffirm and finely tune its distinctive intellectual content. We must continue to ‘think biblically,’ letting biblical categories lead our understanding. We must continue to reject secular categories from a self-consciously presuppositional standpoint.⁵⁹

In “Crucial Issues,” Powlison was clearly indicating that he was a member of the same biblical counseling tradition as Adams. There would be no fundamental departure from the beliefs that secular psychology was an interloper into the work of the church of Christ to help people with their problems in living. Powlison went on to raise five areas of necessary development.

First, Powlison dealt with the question of human motivation. Powlison began by addressing Adams’s emphasis on behavior change.

Nouthetic counseling has comprehended uniquely that the goal of counseling should be nothing less than visible obedience to the Lord. No other counseling system perceives that this is the central issue facing troubled, sinful, and suffering human beings. The counseling world around us . . . is agog with speculations about human motivation. Biblical counseling rightly has stressed behavior (love and good works) as the simple and accessible evidence of true change.”⁶⁰

Powlison once again stressed common cause with his predecessors in the biblical counseling movement, but here he sought to develop Adams’s theological formulation.

He added,

⁵⁸Ibid., 54.

⁵⁹Ibid., 54.

⁶⁰Ibid., 56.

We depart from the Bible if we ignore motives and drift towards an externalist view of man. The caricature that we are “behavioristic” indeed may be true more often than we would like to admit. The Bible itself tells us behavior has “reasons.”⁶¹

This was the first criticism Powlison put to the counseling movement as he urged them to improve upon the model as presented by Adams. This idea of motivation is one that would appear repeatedly in the works of biblical counselors for the next twenty years.

Second, Powlison discussed the need to elaborate on the biblical understanding of the counselee’s experience of suffering. In his typical fashion, Powlison started out discussing the strengths of the nouthetic movement in stressing human responsibility before he went on to urge further development of the model. He said,

We have been wary of any emphasis on man as victim, for every version around is tainted by sin’s aversion to acknowledging sin. All this said, we still need to appreciate and clarify the many ways people are sufferers and fully responsible if we are to be faithful to the perfect fit between the Bible and human life. We have made a strong affirmation of human responsibility: the role of “the flesh.” We have not discussed as fully the impact of the world and the devil as they master and shape human life. We have mined and processed certain biblical riches; there are other riches, which we have not scrutinized as closely.⁶²

As much as Powlison appreciated the attention biblical counselors had given to personal responsibility, he noticed an over-emphasis that stood in need of correction. According to Powlison, biblical counselors needed to become as sensitive to suffering as they were to responsibility. This, too, is a theme that the counseling movement would revisit time and again over the next two decades.⁶³

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 62.

⁶³This point will be developed in chapter 2.

The third critique Powlison raised involved counseling methodology. Nouthetic counselors had developed a reputation for being firm and authoritative—even harsh. Powlison wanted to urge balance in how counselors approached counselees. He advised biblical counselors to rethink their approach, arguing that the role of “authoritative shepherd” who invokes church discipline should be the last resort for the biblical counselor. Instead, “The most characteristic biblical counseling relationship is a long-term friendship, consisting of mutually invited counsel and generating dependency on God as a well as constructive interdependency on one another.”⁶⁴

The fourth area for development raised by Powlison regarded the audience to whom biblical counseling spoke. Adams had addressed pastors and the “grass roots” of American Christendom. Powlison first affirmed this, saying, “The grass roots always will and always should be the primary constituency for biblical counseling.”⁶⁵ Once again, however, Powlison urged the movement to correct an imbalance saying, “We need to reach out to the educational wing of the church of Christ. If we neglect Christian academia, the development and spread of biblical counseling will be hindered seriously.”⁶⁶

Finally, Powlison urged the biblical counseling movement carefully to think through and define its relationship to secular psychology. He pointed out that even though Adams spoke about a legitimate role for secular psychology, “Biblical counseling

⁶⁴Powlison, “Crucial Issues,” 66

⁶⁵Ibid., 71.

⁶⁶Ibid.

has never developed in any detail what that properly constructed relationship would look like or do.”⁶⁷

This article was significant in the theological development of the biblical counseling movement for several reasons. First, nothing like it had been written before. The foremost thinker in the movement had always been Jay Adams. Though he wrote voluminously over many years, he presented his thoughts with a certain finality and was never self-critical in print. A reader never gets the impression that there was an “early Adams” and a “later Adams.” There was just “Adams, *period.*” This is not to say that Adams did not broach new subjects or ever nuance his views (he did both). It is to say that until Powlison’s article there had never been a time of critically evaluating where the movement had been, considering some problems in the movement, and charting a positive way forward in the years ahead.

Second, the article was a critical step as Powlison began to emerge as the recognized source for intellectual leadership of the biblical counseling movement. Another key step of this emergence came in 1992 when Powlison replaced Adams as the editor of JPP, in the process renaming it as *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (JBC). Such a position gave Powlison an extraordinary amount of discretion to shape the counseling conversation along the themes laid out in his article.

Third, as it turns out, the biblical counseling movement has experienced theological development largely along the lines that Powlison stated in his article. During the next twenty years, other leaders such as Edward Welch, Paul David Tripp, Wayne Mack, and Michael Emlet have also entered into the discussion to bring about further

⁶⁷Ibid., 74.

richness, clarity, and nuance.⁶⁸ While there have been areas of development that Powlison did not sketch out, and areas he did sketch out that still need much more attention, the article was perspicacious in charting the trajectory of the movement from that point until the present.

These categories which Powlison sketches are the ones traced in this dissertation. For the sake of clarity, however, it is necessary to have a clear organizational structure in which to arrange them. This organization is provided by arranging the material here into three different components that are fundamental to any counseling approach. Those three counseling components will be concepts, methods, and apologetics.⁶⁹

Counseling concepts are the fundamental set of beliefs that structure every counseling model. A model answers questions like: Who are we? What is wrong with us? How do we fix it? Who is God? *Is* there a God? What is the change process? All counseling systems answer such questions either overtly or covertly.

Counseling methods are the second component and have to do with how a given counseling model goes about the counseling task. What is the counselor's role in counseling? What is the role of the counselee? How does the change process transpire?

⁶⁸It is the burden of this dissertation to document this development and the contributions of these men.

⁶⁹Powlison sketches out these concepts as belonging to any counseling system whether biblical or otherwise. See David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 3-7. Powlison also discusses a fourth category, institutional arrangements, which will not be covered in this project. The reason for this is that beginning with Jay Adams in 1968 all those involved in the biblical counseling movement have agreed that it was important for biblical counseling to expand institutionally. Because this is the case there has not been development in this area as in the other surveyed in this project. See Jay Adams, *The Big Umbrella and Other Essays and Addresses on Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972) for examples of Adams's efforts to persuade institutions of higher learning of a vision of biblical counseling.

Whether clearly stated or not, all approaches to counseling have a theory of how to proceed in the counseling relationship.

The final component, apologetics, has to do with how a counseling system engages other, competing counseling systems. What is good in other counseling systems? What is not good? How much time will counselors spend investigating other systems? How will they use and interact with other systems? How can a counselor advocate for the superiority of their own system? The existence of numerous, competing counseling systems necessitates that counselors seek to defend their own approach.

The discussion that follows is organized under these three headings. Chapter two will examine the conceptual development of the biblical counseling movement. It is necessary to address two issues in the development of counseling concepts. The first issue to address regards the understanding of sin and suffering in the life of the counselee. The second issue addressed is the important issue of human motivation.

Chapter three traces the methodological development of the biblical counseling movement. Adams's methodological work was characterized by an authoritative style. The last two decades have seen a shift from this approach to more mutuality in counseling. It is critical to chronicle this shift.

Chapter four addresses the apologetic development that has taken place in the biblical counseling movement. This chapter examines the apologetic efforts of Adams and those succeeding him in the movement's leadership. As those efforts are examined several key changes will come into focus.

Chapter five examines the work of Eric Johnson in his book, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal*. Excepting the present work, Johnson's is the

only other one in print that seeks to examine the development of the biblical counseling movement. Is Johnson's analysis accurate or inaccurate? Answering this question will provide a critical comparison to the work presented here.

Chapter six revisits the critical issue of motivation first addressed in chapter two. This chapter analyzes and nuances the development of the biblical counseling movement in this key area. Given the importance of motivational issues, more work needs to be done in articulating a biblical understanding of human motivation. This work of articulation is a focus of the chapter.

Chapter seven concludes this dissertation. How should biblical counselors evaluate the development that has occurred over the last two decades? How should they not evaluate it? The concluding chapter will be concerned with answering these questions.

A Concluding Word on Nomenclature

Those who are a part of the biblical counseling movement operate within a context of fundamental agreement on certain issues. Issues such as the sufficiency of Scripture, progressive sanctification, the centrality of Christ, the importance of the church, and concern over secular psychology. These core presuppositions have always united and will continue to unite those in the biblical counseling movement.⁷⁰ However, as the thesis in these pages makes clear, there have been specific instances of development and change within this common core since 1988.

⁷⁰At present no work catalogues the areas of similarity among the members of the biblical counseling movement. The commonalities referenced here seem to be held by all those in the biblical counseling movement, but the necessary work of documenting those commonalities will need to be the work of another project.

It is necessary therefore to use terminology that refers to the movement as it existed in the period before 1988 and to the movement in the time after 1988 that rightly expresses the fundamental consistency of the movement while also capturing the distinctions that will be discussed in the pages that follow. For the purposes of this project, the period before 1988 which was characterized by the leadership of Adams will be referred to as the first generation. The period after 1988 which follows Adams and is characterized by an effort to nuance his views will be called the second generation. Such generational language captures the idea of change occurring, but in the context of family union. This language rightly captures the distinctions within larger unity that has characterized the biblical counseling movement.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT

Introduction

Every counseling approach has a core set of beliefs. These core beliefs include understandings of the ideal of human functioning, of what is wrong with human functioning, and theories about how to fix those things that go wrong. In discussing the concepts that are indigenous to any counseling model David Powlison says,

Every theory defines its version of human nature and the dynamics of human motivation. Every theory defines or assumes an ideal of human functioning by which problems are named and solutions prescribed: right and wrong, value and stigma, true and false, good and bad, sound and defective, healthy and pathological, solutions and problem. The various personality theories and psychotherapies differ from each other—and from the Bible—in the ways they explain people and in the solutions they offer.¹

These concepts may be spoken or unspoken, right or wrong, and helpful or unhelpful; all approaches to counseling, however, operate from a conceptual core.

The biblical counseling movement, from its inception has been united around several key concepts. These concepts include an understanding of the nature of man as created and dependent, an appreciation of the deleterious effects of sin in human living, a biblical view of progressive sanctification, the necessity of faith in Christ for true and lasting change, the importance of daily repentance and faith which leads to

¹David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 3.

love and obedience, and, the necessity and sufficiency of God's inscripturated Word.² While there has been broad conceptual agreement there have been two specific areas where the biblical counseling movement has witnessed development over the last twenty years. There has been conceptual development in the biblical counseling movement in the area of sin and suffering and in the area of human motivation. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Development Concerning Sin and Suffering

A crucial issue in proceeding through a counseling situation is the counselor's understanding of what is wrong with the counselee. Is the counselee beset by sin, by sickness and suffering, or by some combination? One of the main areas of development for the biblical counseling movement has been the degree to which a counselor should deal with a counselee according to their sin, according to their suffering or some combination. From Adams's emphasis on dealing with counselee's sin there has been clear development towards seeing the counselee in a more nuanced way as both sinner and sufferer.

Adams's Focus on Sin

One virtue of the writing and teaching ministry of Jay Adams is that he is quite clear. From the very beginning of the movement he founded, Adams was clear that the foundational problem that people have in living is their sin. At the very beginning of

²These concepts form the epistemological core of all of those committed to biblical counseling and demonstrate that though there has been development from the first to the second generations of biblical counseling, there is a fundamental and broad cohesion that unites both generations.

Competent to Counsel Adams described his summer helping mental patients at two hospitals in Illinois. Adams is unambiguous as he describes his opinion of what was wrong with those patients. Adams argued,

Apart from those who had organic problems, like brain damage, the people I met in the two institutions in Illinois were there because of their own failure to meet life's problems. To put it simply, they were there because of their unforgiven and unaltered sinful behavior.³

Adams went on in that book to ground this idea in the ministry of the Apostle Paul saying, "Paul thought of bringing God's Word to bear upon people's lives in order to expose sinful patterns, to correct what is wrong, and to establish new ways of life of which God approves."⁴

In a chapter in the *Christian Counselor's Manual* entitled "Sin is the problem." Adams develops this point.

Sin, then, in all of its dimensions, clearly is *the* problem with which the Christian counselor must grapple. It is the secondary dimensions—the variations on the common themes—that make counseling so difficult. While all men are born sinners and engage in the same sinful practices and dodges, each develops his own styles of sinning. The styles (combinations of sins and dodges) are peculiar to each individual; but beneath them are the common themes. It is the counselor's work to discover these commonalities beneath the individualities.⁵

This passage from Adams reiterates what has been observed but also develops it.

Adams's belief that sin was the main problem in living was not simplistic. Rather he explains here that sinful people display remarkable ingenuity in their ability to create new

³Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), xvi.

⁴Ibid., 51-52.

⁵Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 124-25.

sinful patterns. Adams admits that sorting this out in the individual cases will be complex and difficult work.

One of the hallmarks of the thought of Adams in his discussions of sin is the analysis he provides of the mentally ill (an expression with which he generally took great exception). Adams understood the so-called mentally ill to have the same root problems as other people, namely, he believed such persons were primarily sinners in need of forgiveness. This one was Adams's understanding even with such extreme diagnoses as manic-depression and schizophrenia.⁶ Adams concludes one discussion on this topic saying,

So whether the problem is chemical or moral, the answer to the question which heads this chapter (What's wrong with the "mentally ill"?) seems clear: there may be several things wrong with the so-called "mentally ill," but the one cause which must be excluded in most cases is mental illness itself.⁷

Adams strongly emphasized that people were hurting and in need of counseling precisely because they were sinful people living in a sinful world. This one is an unmistakable emphasis of his work. The reality of this fact, however, does not mean that Adams paid no attention to the reality of human suffering. He did indeed. In fact, in *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, Adams took great pains to correct his reputation for ignoring suffering. He said in one of the chapters about sin,

Now, let me say one thing at the outset and be done with it. The notion that is so widely spread abroad (sometimes by those who ought to know better), that nouthetic

⁶Adams, *Competent*, 26-36.

⁷*Ibid.*, 40. Adams did have a place (as he mentions in the footnote of the reference cited here) for organically-based problems that caused difficulties. He was also clear, however, that people experiencing such problems were responsible to God even in the midst of their difficulties. Failure to do so was sinful.

counseling considers all human problems the direct result of actual sins of particular counselees, is a gross misrepresentation of the facts. From the beginning (cf. *Competent to Counsel*, 1970, pp. 108, 109) I have stated clearly that not all problems of counselees are due to their own sins. In *Competent*, I cited the cases of Job and the man born blind (John 9:1ff.). Those who persist in attributing to me views that I do not hold are culpable. Either they ought to know better before they speak and write (by reading the material available—nouthetic counseling has not been done in a corner!), or they should have investigated on their own what they accepted as fact (but was actually only gossip).

While all human misery—disability, sickness, etc.—does go back to Adams's sin (and I would be quick to assert that biblical truth), that is not the same as saying that a *quid pro quo* relationship between each counselee's misery and his own personal sins exists. That I as quickly deny. It may be true in one given instance, but not in another. Neither is it true that all the suffering that some deserve they get in this life. Nor is true that all the suffering that others receive in this life they bring upon themselves. Suffering, in a world of sin, comes to all in one way or another in the providence of God, but before investigating each case, that is all that may be said about it.⁸

Adams did acknowledge suffering.⁹ As with the other areas in Adams's thought, his mentioning of the issue is not the point. The topic at hand is the *degree to which* Adams addressed the issue and how his thought *stood in need of development*. There is good evidence that his thought did need to be developed in understanding and appreciating human suffering. Several facts bear this out.

First, Adams did not have a reputation for addressing suffering in his work. This reality is shown to be the case by the passage above. Why is it that both his opponents

⁸Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 139-40.

⁹Adam even wrote two books on the topic. See Jay Adams, *How to Handle Trouble* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), and idem, *Christ and Your Problems* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999).

and his friends found his treatment of suffering wanting?¹⁰ There must be some reason. Indeed, in this reference where he chides his critics for misunderstanding his position, he only provides two (very brief) references from a book written ten years before. His reference of such scant evidence seems to beg the question and point to at least some basis for the criticism.¹¹

Second, in Adams's early work he made efforts to describe the various sources of people's problems in living. He did this twice and in both places a biblical understanding of suffering was glanced over. In *Competent to Counsel* Adams said,

To put the issue simply: the Scriptures plainly speak of both organically based problems as well as those problems that stem from sinful attitudes and behavior; but where, in all of God's Word, is there so much as a trace of any third source of problems? . . . Until . . . a demonstration is forthcoming, the only safe course to follow is to declare with all of Scripture that the genesis of such human problems is twofold, not threefold.¹²

In this particular citation Adams is concerned to refute that mental illness is a legitimate cause of problems in living. In the process he describes problems springing from two

¹⁰The critique that came from Adams's friends will come in the pages to follow. For examples of criticism from Adams's opponents see, Larry Crabb, *Understanding People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 7-10; Tim Clinton and George Ohlschlager, *Competent Christian Counseling: Pursuing and Practicing Compassionate Soul Care* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook), 44-45.

¹¹For examples of criticism against Adams in this regard, see David G. Benner, *Psychotherapy and the Spiritual Quest* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 46. Bruce Narramore, *No Condemnation: Rethinking Guilt Motivation in Counseling, Preaching, and Parenting* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 129. Gary R. Collins, *The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration of Psychology and Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1977), 182. Gary R. Collins, *The Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling for People Helpers* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 110-12. Larry Crabb, *Inside Out* (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1988).

¹²Adams, *Competent*, 29.

potential sources including biological problems and spiritual/sin problems. It is interesting that in a critical passage like this one Adams does not include various other sufferings (e.g., betrayal at the hands of others; the inculcation of false values by socialization; the experience of physical pains; death and dying; etc.) as significant problems in living that counseling would address.¹³

Adams makes a similar argument in the *Manual*. He says,

There are, in the Scriptures, only three specified sources of personal problems in living: demonic activity (principally possession), personal sin, and organic illness. These three are interrelated. All options are covered under these heads, leaving no room for a fourth: non-organic mental illness.¹⁴

As above, Adams is here arguing against the category of mental illness. Once again he attempts to sketch out the biblical sources of problems over and against the supposed secular understanding. This reference shows some development in Adams's own thought. In the three years since his first work was published Adams found room for a third biblical source of problems. Still missing in Adams's list, however, is a robust and nuanced appreciation of suffering and how to engage it in the life of the counselee. Adams believed that this kind of suffering existed.¹⁵ Again, however, what Adams believed is not the issue. The concern here is the degree to which his thought needed elaboration.

¹³Of course Adams would admit that an organic illness would cause suffering but unfortunately never develops this idea.

¹⁴Adams, *Manual*, 9.

¹⁵See references above.

A third source of evidence regards Adams's treatment of suffering on those occasions when he did address it. Adams has published over 100 books.¹⁶ Those books include Bible commentaries, counseling topics, Christian living, and pastoral ministry. But none of these books unfold a philosophy of suffering, or captures the experience of suffering, or discusses at length how to counsel suffering people.¹⁷ When, however, Adams did engage suffering he did it in a way that did not fully appreciate the dynamics and complexities of suffering people. It is not possible to examine all of the examples of this; one representative example will suffice. In *Counsel from Psalm 119*, Adams addresses Psalm 119:67 which says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Your Word." This passage provides a clear opportunity for Adams to engage the problem of human suffering. In commenting on it, Adams says,

¹⁶Internet. <http://www.nouthetic.org/jay-e-adams/bibliography.html>. April 18, 2009.

¹⁷This fact can be seen when one focuses on the three counseling books by Adams that have been the most influential and sold the most copies. As a rough gauge consider, for example, *Competent to Counsel*—the book where Adams sought to lay a foundation for nouthetic counseling—there are 2 citations for suffering in the index totaling 4 pages. By contrast there are 38 citations for sin totaling approximately 97 pages.

In *The Christian Counselor's Manual*—Adams's unfolding of the process of biblical counseling—there is 1 reference each for suffering and misery totaling 2 pages. There are 8 references for sin totaling 35 pages in addition to countless references to specific sins and an engagement of those issues. In the entire book there is no discussion of how to minister to the sufferings of a hurting person.

A Theology of Christian Counseling includes Adams's most thorough treatment found in any of the three books. There are a combined 12 references for misery and suffering in the index. This work contains Adams's first chapter-length treatment. In that chapter he unpacks such important themes as the inescapability of suffering, the hope that the cross brings to suffering, the temporary nature of suffering, as well as mentioning some purposes behind suffering. Such a treatment is helpful. That said, there is still much more attention given to sin with 19 references for sin and transgression in the index and at least six chapters dealing largely with sin.

Here is a verse that sings the praises of affliction! It is not often that you hear counselees join in the chorus. But it is a song that every counselor must teach his counselees to sing. Affliction may come in order to purify. It may be sent in order to turn one back to the proper pathway. When we go astray (and we all do from time to time) we often need affliction to wake us up to what we have done and where we have gone. Affliction is to the erring Christian as an alarm clock is to one who is apt to oversleep. Moreover, in addition to awakening us to our sinful ways, it often stops us and provides time for thought. When one is engaged in the hustle-bustle of life, he may take little time to think about this life. When he is stopped in his tracks by the loss of a job, by the onset of a debilitating illness, and the like, it can be a blessing to give him time to think seriously about his ways. There are many ways in which afflictions of all sorts may become a blessing by returning a counselee to the Word. This is, therefore, a key verse in the Psalm for every counselor. He should remember it and use it often. It is the answer to much of the whining that he hears. “What have you learned from God’s Word during this time of trouble?” is a first class question for you to ask of those who complain.¹⁸

This passage represents a typical way Adams handled the issue of suffering and affliction. There are three things to mention about it.

First, Adams moves straight to a discussion of the benefits of suffering without considering—in dynamic and detailed ways—the personal pain and turmoil of those who are experiencing difficulty. Adams is of course correct that there is a benefit to suffering. The Bible is clear about this truth. However the Bible is also clear that affliction is difficult, hurting those to whom it comes, and that is a frequent topic of biblical counsel. Though the Psalms expand upon this, even in Psalm 119 (cf Pss 119:22, 23, 25, 28, 42, 50, 61, 69, 71, 78, 85, 86, 87, 92, 95, 107, 110, 115, 120, 134, 141, 143, 147, 150, 153, 157, 161), Adams never does.

Second, Adams majors on the moral strenuousness of turning to the Word. Obviously, it is important to turn to the Scripture in times of difficulty since it is the only thing that can reorient hurting people to God’s gaze. However, when the counsel is, “Turn to the Word” before the counselor has appreciated the extent of the counselee’s

¹⁸Jay Adams, *Counsel from Psalm 119* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1998), 59.

pain; when this exhortation comes as a mere moral imperative disconnected from the tender promises of grace from a God who cares and desires to minister help—then it will not be comforting. It will seem legalistic, rote, unhelpful, and perhaps even cruel.

Third, in this passage, Adams refers to those struggling under the weight of pain as “whiners” and “complainers.” Is it possible for sinful people to turn their suffering into a sinful pursuit of pity? Absolutely. This passage of Scripture, however, is not about whiners and it is wrong to label strugglers as whiners in general. This talk represents an unbiblical rigidity and insensitivity that critics have been right to condemn and that the second generation of biblical counselors has sought to correct.

The final, and perhaps clearest evidence, of Adams’s inattention to the themes of suffering is his own words on the topic. In his book, *Compassionate Counseling* Adams observed

Because so little has been written about compassion in counseling, I have undertaken to fill the gap. Since compassion is an essential component of all truly biblical counseling, it is essential to understand its nature, place, and effects upon counselees, counselors, and the counseling that they engage in.¹⁹

In a footnote on this passage, Adams states, “You can read through the indices of book after book—even those about biblical counseling—and find no reference to compassion.”²⁰ This one is a revealing admission. No person alive has written on,

¹⁹Jay Adams, *Compassionate Counseling* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2007), 1. This work, while an effort on the part of Adams that should be appreciated does not cover new ground. Rather it takes themes that Adams addressed for years (e.g., the importance of counseling in the church, the importance of confronting people with their sin, the significance of showing counselees new ways of living, etc.) and argues that those things *are* compassionate. There is little development, therefore, in Adams work in this book.

²⁰Adams, *Compassionate Counseling*, 1 n. 1.

spoken about, or otherwise addressed biblical counseling themes more or longer than Jay Adams. Yet, by his own admission, the theme of compassion is one that has hardly been touched in counseling circles. It is not going too far to say that Adams himself bears some responsibility for this lack.²¹

After making such observations it is important to say two things. First, the goal here is not to find fault with Adams's work. Adams had a good reason to focus on sin the way he did. He was writing in a counseling context that had wholly been given over to secularism. The specific counseling models that Adams critiqued all located the cause of personal problems outside the person's responsibility. Adams was deeply concerned to restore to counseling the responsibility for one's actions that the secular psychologies had removed. For example, Adams argued regarding Freud, that

his views have encouraged irresponsible people to persist in and expand their irresponsibility. He has sanctioned irresponsible behavior and made it respectable. His views are iatrogenic (or treatment-engendering) only in that they can cause secondary complications. Freud has not made people irresponsible; but he has provided a philosophical and pseudoscientific rationale for irresponsible people to use to justify themselves.²²

In light of this problem Adams makes clear the responsibility of Christian counselors,

It is difficult for some to acknowledge personal sin as the root and cause of most of the day-by-day counseling problems that arise. This is particularly true in an age deeply steeped in Freudianism. As Rogerianism has taught us to put feeling first, so Freudianism has declared blame-shifting legitimate. More recently, Skinnerianism has gone on record as opposing the very concept of responsibility *per se*. If, therefore, in ordinary activities it is hard for some to see the place of personal responsibility, this becomes still harder for them whenever they consider special

²¹It should be pointed out that, as will be demonstrated below, more recent authors in the counseling movement do give much more attention to themes of suffering and compassion though Adams does not credit their work in his statement.

²²Adams, *Competent*, 17.

cases. The Christian counselor must be firm at this point about his insistence upon human responsibility.²³

Adams believed that it was critical to restore a sense of responsibility to the counseling task.

Seeing this evidence shows that Adams was writing not as a man who did not understand human suffering, still less as a man who did not understand the Bible's teaching on human suffering. Adams was writing as a man in a specific historical context that had overthrown personal responsibility in the counseling context. Adams was concerned to restore a biblical sense of responsibility to the counseling room and nothing accomplished such a restoration like a focus on sin. Here was the ground on which Adams needed to fight because a focus on sin highlighted the importance—not only of responsibility—but also of God and his Word, all of which had been discarded by secular approaches to people-helping. It was Adams's attention to sin and responsibility that was one of the main elements separating his project from every other counseling model. Adams's work made it possible for others to build on what he started.

The Second Generation on Sin and Suffering

And it was necessary to build. Adams's work on sin was a critical first step but it had become important to do more work in the area of suffering for several reasons. First, paying proper attention to suffering in the counseling context is biblical. The biblical

²³Adams, *Manual*, 136.

understanding of suffering is equally as profound as the biblical understanding of sin.²⁴ Counselors will be less than biblical if they avoid paying attention to the multitude of ways in which people (even sinful people) experience suffering.

Second, paying proper attention to suffering will make for counselors that are demonstrably more loving. It is loving for counselors to listen carefully to the problems of their counselees and develop nuanced ways of helping them. Whether Freudian erotic and aggressive drives,²⁵ Skinnerian behaviorism,²⁶ or Adlerian inferiority complexes,²⁷ it is secularists who artificially reduce the problems of people. Biblical counselors can distinguish themselves by their ability to minister in multifaceted ways to people as both sinners and sufferers.

Finally, paying proper attention to suffering will allow for counseling that is most effective. The problems and struggles of people are not limited to sin alone. On the one hand, if the biblical counselor truly desires to help those to whom they minister, he must understand what the Bible says about both sin and suffering—this requires developing a model of each. On the other hand, if a counselor wants to earn the trust and respect of a counselee he must earn credibility by dealing with all of the relevant issues. Deftness in

²⁴See, Job 1-2; 23:10; Ps 94:12; Prov 3:11-12; 5:12; 10:17; 12:1; 13:24; Jer 31:18; Matt 5:11-12; Luke 22:31; John 9:1-3; 11:1ff; 21:19; Rom 5:3-5; 8; 12:3; 1 Cor 11:29-32; 2 Cor 1:3-7; 8:13-15; 12:7; Phil 1:12; 3:10; 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 12:7-11; Jas 1:2-4; 2:17; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:13-14; 5:6-7; Rev 5:12.

²⁵Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Lund Humphries, 1933), 107-43.

²⁶B. F. Skinner, *About Behaviorism* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 9-20.

²⁷Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature* (New York: Greenburg, 1946), 69-90.

dealing with sin and suffering will allow for greater counseling instruction and a better response from counselees.

Perhaps it was similar observations that led Powlison to make a case for such development in his article “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling.”

Powlison states, “The relationship between human responsibility and human suffering needs a great deal of clarification.” He continues,

[This issue] . . . challenges us to rethink our vision of the counselee and the counselee’s situation. How do we see and understand the people whom we counsel? What kind of attention do we pay to the kind of world the counselee inhabits? How important are the counselee’s past and present circumstances?²⁸

Powlison justifies this rethinking saying,

There is a *biblical* view of man as a sufferer. We can say it even more plainly: There is a biblical view of man as a victim. Biblical counseling has been repeatedly misunderstood to say that all problems are a result of personal sin. Why this misunderstanding? . . . Some of the misunderstanding of biblical counseling is caricature, from people who know all too well that ‘man is responsible’ would undermine their whole counseling theory and practice. . . . But other misunderstanding highlights a problem, a crucial issue for contemporary biblical counseling. Our treatment of the victim side of the biblical portrayal of man has been anecdotal and occasional, not systematic.²⁹

Powlison sees an oversight here in the biblical counseling movement. It is important to note, however, that while Powlison sees the importance of expanding and developing the thought in the biblical counseling movement he is not seeking to separate from the thought that has come before. Instead, Powlison is trying to strengthen the movement by adding to previous thought. He says,

²⁸David Powlison, “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 61.

²⁹Ibid. 62. Original emphasis.

Biblically comprehending man-as-sufferer is never meant to answer “Why do I sin?” It does answer “When? Where? With whom? Under whose influence?” It describes the situation in which one is tempted and tried. With new eyes, the situation of suffering becomes the “when, where, with whom and against what” within which he will learn faith and obedience. We have said loudly, “responsible!” The biblical balance, “responsible amid hardship,” has been more understated and assumed.³⁰

Powlison wanted to develop the biblical counseling movement by adding to the focus on sin and responsibility a focus on suffering and understanding. His desire was to have counselors that understand the situation of the counselee as much as they understood the culpability of the counselee. Powlison developed this idea a bit more in his chapter in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* entitled, “God’s Grace and Your Sufferings.” There Powlison says,

Often the biggest problem for any sufferer is not “the problem.” It is the spiritual challenge the problem presents: “How are you doing in the midst of what you are going through? What are you learning? Will you learn to live well and wisely within pain, limitation, weakness, and loss? Will suffering define you? Will faith and love grow, or will you shrivel up?” These are life-and-death issues—more important than “the problem” in the final analysis. They take asking, thinking, listening, responding. They take time. Other people are often clumsy and uncomprehending about the most important things, while pouring energy and love into solving what is often insoluble.³¹

Here Powlison begins to do what he urges in the “Critical Issues” article and looks at the situation of a suffering person.

Powlison is not alone in this effort, however. Following his lead others expressed a desire to correct the overemphasis on sin. One such example is Edward Welch in his

³⁰Ibid., 63.

³¹David Powlison, “God’s Grace and Your Sufferings,” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 157.

article, “Exalting Pain? Ignoring Pain? What do we do with Suffering?” Welch observes the dilemma,

Human life entails misery and woe. Broken relationships, agonizing illness, the prospect of one’s own death, depression, injustice and atrocity, quiet yet paralyzing fear, memories of sexual victimization, the death of a child, and many other painful problems leave non unscathed. It would be impossible to minimize the breadth and depth of suffering both in the church and the world. But this proposition sits at a juncture where Christians are pulled in one of two directions. Some exalt pain, others deny pain. Some are bleeding hearts, others are stoics. Some are “pain counselors,” others are “sin counselors.” Pain counselors are expert at having people feel understood; sin counselors are expert at understanding the call to obedience even when there is pain. Pain counselors run the risk of overemphasizing pain to where the alleviation of suffering becomes the thing of first importance. Sin counselors run the risk of rendering personal pain of little or no importance. Pain counselors can be slow to lead sufferers in responding to the gospel of Christ in faith and obedience. Sin counselors can run the danger of breeding stoics whose response of obedience is unaware of God’s great compassion. Pain counselors might provide a context that enhances blame-shifting and counselee’s sense of innocent victimization. Sin counselors may be so concerned about blame-shifting that they have a poorly developed theology of suffering. There are pitfalls of each.³²

Welch understands the problem well and, while he does not name names in his article he actually references a significant area of development in the biblical counseling movement. The so-called “pain counselors” are the ones that Adams had spent decades trying to defeat. Likewise the “sin counselors,” as it were, are people like Adams himself. Adams devoted his ministry to correcting the error of the “pain counselors” but now Welch wants to provide a corrective for the Adams model. Welch says,

Those who lean in the direction of minimizing pain, or calling for a stoic acceptance of it, are often more precise in their theological formulations. But they may be guilty of ignoring important biblical themes and thus do not offer the full counsel of God to those who suffer. For example, if suffering is a result of being sinned against by another, those who minimize suffering might immediately think about the call to forgive the perpetrator. This theme is critical, so it certainly is no mistake to

³²Edward Welch, “Exalting Pain? Ignoring Pain? What Do We Do with Suffering?” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 12, no. 3 (1994): 4.

make forgiveness part of the counseling agenda. Yet it is a problem when forgiveness is made the only counseling agenda. Too often, the first and last advice given to a severely victimized woman is to forgive the perpetrator.³³

It is clear then that more recent biblical counselors were aware of a need to balance the attention given to sin with a focus on suffering. How though would this balance be established? In answering this question it is possible to isolate three sources of development in this regard. First, biblical counselors systematized suffering. Second, biblical counselors enriched an understanding of the sources of suffering. Finally, biblical counselors have demonstrated how to work out the more robust understanding of suffering in the context of actual counseling.

Systematizing suffering. A heading that refers to suffering being systematized can sound a bit sterile, inorganic, and something that is otherwise undesirable. Such is not the intention here. Rather, the purpose is to show that more contemporary biblical counselors have worked to have an understanding and appreciation of suffering be a standard part of counseling. In their book *How People Change*, Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp seek to provide a systematic theology of biblical counseling. Their work lays out a systematic and practical theology of the change process. In their treatment, the practical process of change contains four parts. Three elements mirror Adams's emphases. Lane and Tripp offer a theology of ungodly behaviors and heart dispositions on the part of individual sinners;³⁴ they describe the presence and power of

³³Ibid., 5.

³⁴Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch, 2006), 133-65.

Christ as making it possible to change such ungodly behavior and motivations;³⁵ they works towards the godly behaviors and attitudes that flow out of an encounter with the grace of Jesus.³⁶ But their fourth element—and the first one addressed in the book—is a theology of suffering. Lane and Tripp refer to this as “heat.” Heat is a person’s life situation. It is the collection of sufferings and difficulties that people face. They discuss the heat (i.e., the situational suffering of the counselee) saying,

On this side of heaven, we all live under the Heat of trial in some way. Mark has a boss who never seems satisfied. Anne’s husband is more committed to fishing than their marriage. Sarah endures chronic pain. Tim’s teenage son has been in trouble since he turned thirteen. Rachel’s church has been through a gut-wrenching split. Jerry struggles with the burdens that accompany his promotion. Brooke lost most of her retirement money in bad investments. Fred is battling heart disease. Jennifer can’t control her weight. Bob longs for the simpler days before he got his inheritance. Jason does all he can to avoid his angry father. Old age has ravaged Alex’s body.³⁷

That sample of a dozen troubles has no parallel in Adams’s work.

Lane and Tripp comment further,

You and I always react to things that happen around us. Whether it is the scorching heat of difficulty or the unexpected rain of blessing, you are always responding to whatever comes down on you. The Bible is honest about the things that happen here.³⁸

The relevant thing to note is that Lane and Tripp make room up front in their systematic practical theology for the situation of the counselee. The counselee is responsible for how they respond to their situation, they are responsible to repent, trust Christ, and bear

³⁵Ibid., 167-92.

³⁶Ibid., 193-223.

³⁷Ibid., 99.

³⁸Ibid., 105-06.

fruit in keeping with repentance. All that was emphasized in the first generation of the biblical counseling movement is in place—and even developed to a fuller extent. In the model presented by Lane and Tripp, however, there is an effort to understand carefully the context in which the counselee exists. In so doing, they systematized a doctrine of suffering in their theology of change and showed how it fit together with other elements in the change/counseling dynamic.

Exploring the sources of suffering. Biblical counselors, having placed suffering in a theological context that is both systematic and practical, also sought to think through the issue of suffering in yet other ways. In his work on the subject, Welch sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of the sources of suffering in the Christian life than had previously been articulated in the biblical counseling movement.

In fact, Welch made a major contribution to the biblical counseling movement when he articulated five different, possible causes for suffering. The first source he addressed was other people. “We are sinned against by other people and it hurts deeply.”³⁹ Second, the individual struggler is a cause of suffering. “I suffer because I have sinned.”⁴⁰ Third, persons suffer as a result of the presence of sin in the world due to the curse of Adam. “It was Adam himself who sinned and brought misery and death to all his progeny. Because of his sin we experience the curse on all of creation.”⁴¹ Fourth, the work of Satan causes suffering in person’s lives. “Satan is the appropriate, although

³⁹Welch, “Exalting Pain? Ignoring Pain?,” 6.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 7.

elusive, target [of human suffering].”⁴² Finally, we suffer at the hands of the sovereign God. “By the time suffering gets to us, it is God’s will.”⁴³

Welch develops the biblical counseling movement by placing sufferers in a larger context. The biblical picture of persons is more multifaceted than simply seeing sinners. Sinners are also sufferers. Welch’s work does more than simply noting the *presence* of suffering. He goes on to identify the multiple sources of suffering in the lives of individual strugglers. Such work had never been done in the counseling movement before. When one considers the scant treatment that Adams gave to this issue it becomes clear that Welch makes a critical addition to biblical counselor’s understanding of the task of personal ministry.

Suffering and the counseling task. Tripp’s book *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* provides yet another layer in the efforts of contemporary biblical counseling to develop a more robust understanding of suffering. In his work, Tripp acknowledges the danger of approaching personal ministry with a set of truths about sin and responsibility, but with little apprehension for the situation of the counselee.

It is wrong to approach a struggling brother or sister with a condemning, self-righteous spirit. This puts you in the way of what the Lord is doing in their lives. You must grant them the same grace and love that you received from the Lord.⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid. Welch is also careful to point out here that Satan is not behind all suffering. His care in this is apparent even in his multiple listings of sources for suffering.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 158.

This one is an important theme that he develops when he says,

If you are alive . . . you are a sufferer who has been called by God to minister to others in pain. Suffering is not only the common ground of human relationships, but one of God's most useful workrooms. As God's ambassadors, we need to learn to identify with those who suffer. We do this by learning from the example of the Wonderful Counselor. . . . We are with Christ in the family of those who suffer. We must not forget that we serve a suffering Savior. We do not seek help from someone who cannot understand our experience. Jesus is compassionate and understanding.⁴⁵

Adams's emphasis on the authoritative counselor rarely expressed such identification between counselor and counselee. Tripp urges counselor's to work to identify with a counselee's suffering and situation. He does this based on two critical realities. First, Jesus Christ is a suffering Savior. Second, Jesus relates to his people as sympathetic co-sufferer. Tripp therefore argues that an understanding of the counselee's situation is grounded in nothing less than the gospel activity of Jesus as discussed in Hebrews 2:10-12.⁴⁶ In this passages the brotherhood that exists between Christ and his people is founded on the sufferings they share together.

Welch adds to this when he says,

A brief study of the compassion of Jesus is a profound rebuke to [the problem of ignoring suffering]. The incarnation itself was the dramatic example of God entering into the lives of His people. Jesus was characteristically moved with compassion for those who were leaderless, oppressed, destitute, or bereaved. As Jesus counsels us to mourn with those who mourn, he points us to His own life as the example. The stoic avoids or ignores these clear themes in Scripture.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ibid., 145.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Welch, "Exalting Pain? Ignoring Pain?," 5.

The second generation consistently developed the biblical importance of understanding the counselee's situation. That raises another question of how they thought counselor should balance the truths of the earlier and later generations of biblical counselors. The second generation did not abandon the teachings of Adams regarding the responsibility of the counselee even as they sought to apprehend the situation of the counselee. If the balanced truth is that the counselee is a sufferer who is responsible what is the way to keep them in balance without favoring an understanding of one over the other? These are methodological questions of which Tripp also feels the weight.

What does it mean to comfort those who suffer? How do we come alongside them with compassion? Often we are unsure of what to say. We struggle with how to comfort someone who has lost a loved one, or who faces past experiences that can never be undone. We do not want to communicate truths in a ways that are cheap and platitudinous. We want to anchor the person in what is true as he deals with this suffering, but in a way that shows him that we understand the intensity of his trial. We want to show him that the truths we share are robust enough to carry him through. Most of all we want him to know that he is not alone, because Christ is present as his Helper in times of trouble. The question is, "How do we avoid these pitfalls and accomplish these goals?"⁴⁸

Tripp understands the dilemma. He seeks to avoid the pitfalls. On the one hand, there is the desire to "communicate truths." On the other there is the desire to avoid doing that in ways that are "cheap and platitudinous." On one side there is the goal to "anchor a person in truth." On the other side is the goal of doing so in "a way that shows we understand the intensity of his trial." Tripp's answer to this dilemma is for the counselor to tell personal stories about their own suffering and what they learned in the midst of it. Tripp grounds this in Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul says that he does not want the Corinthians to be uninformed about his suffering in Asia. He wants his story to result in deeper hope,

⁴⁸Tripp, *Instruments*, 150.

strengthened faith, and renewed worship among them. Paul's experiences put flesh and blood on the promises of God. In them you see God in action, doing exactly what he promised to do for his children. As people see God in Paul's story, they are given eyes to see God in their own, and they are comforted by this. This is one of the most personal and powerful methodologies of offering comfort. It presents realities that are deeply theological in the context of circumstances familiar to anyone in a fallen world. Our stories take God's truth to the struggles of life and present strong reasons not to give up.⁴⁹

It is stories, Tripp argues, that put "flesh and blood" on the bones of truth and bring personal comfort to struggling people. Telling stories presents the truth of God's Word in a context that is understandable and relevant to anyone. Telling stories of lessons God taught them in their own suffering allows counselors to communicate truth in a personal way that shows its effectiveness. Tripp's work keeps the "responsible sufferer" in balance by identifying with the suffering counselee in listening to his story and sharing the counselor's own. Such a strategy balances the identification of suffering with responsibility and truth by relating the lessons learned from the counselor's struggle which are grounded in Scripture. The principle could be articulated as listen, share, teach. Tripp teaches the importance of listening to the counselee's struggle, sharing the counselor's own struggle, and then teaching the truths of Scripture (responsibility, sovereignty, God's good and wise purposes, etc.) that the counselor learned in their struggle.

This methodological strategy, as Tripp notes, is only one way of keeping the two truths in balance. Another option would be to deal with the counselee in a "Psalmic" way. After listening to the counselee, the counselor would find a Psalm (or other passage of Scripture) that resonates with the counselee's struggle. They would then work through

⁴⁹Ibid., 155.

the Psalm showing the way Scripture identifies with their struggle but also shows a biblical way to respond to the suffering in a way that honors God. Psalm 55 is one example that might be used. This Psalm resonates with sufferers because David has been wrongfully treated (Pss 55:3, 10-15, 20-21) and is in deep agony over it (Pss 55:2, 4-8). This element is the one that underlines identification with suffering. In the Psalm, however, David also cries out to God and begs for help from him (Pss 55:1-2, 16-19, 22-23). This element is the one that underlines the counselee's responsibility to turn to God for help in their suffering and honor him in their pain. This element of the Psalm serves as a springboard into many other rich truths in Scripture that can equip strugglers to deal with their sorrow.⁵⁰

Adams's work underlines the important biblical truth of man as a responsible sinner. This truth is of critical importance in a counseling context that sought (and still generally seeks) to avoid assigning moral responsibility to the counselee for problems.⁵¹ That work needed balance, however. The new generation of biblical counselors seeks to provide that balance by applying the truth of responsibility to the lives of particular persons who struggle, hurt, and suffer. They developed the movement in this way by systematizing suffering in the change process, by elaborating on the sources of suffering, and by giving a methodology of how to work this out in counseling. This more balanced

⁵⁰Powlison demonstrates something of this idea in *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 91-108.

⁵¹There are exceptions of course. Mowrer's emphasis on responsibility awakened Adams to this crucial reality. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy includes an emphasis on responsibility. Even Dr. Phil (Phillip McGraw) has popularized the notion of taking responsibility for a person's problems. The problem is that when unbelievers urge the taking of responsibility they always do so without reference to God.

perspective calls upon counselors to understand the biblical teaching on people and the context in which they live, as they understand the truths of Scripture about individual responsibility for sin. This reality is where personal ministry lives; understanding Scripture—not generally—but specifically in the lives of particular persons who are, of course, responsible but who are sufferers as well.

In the counseling context, effective ministry of the Word will mean understanding the situation of the counselee. Understanding the situation will take a counselor who is willing to listen, ask, probe, and walk with the counselee in their struggle. Effective counseling in this regard will mean seeking to understand what a counselee is experiencing so that the critical themes of sin and responsibility can be communicated with love, specificity, care, grace, and the utmost relevance. It is the understanding of the context of the counselee that will make themes of sin and responsibility come alive. Counseling in this way will also facilitate those themes being taught with love, grace, care, sensitivity, and a sense of what the person is going through.

Development Concerning Human Motivation

The relationship between sin and suffering is not the only area where the biblical counseling movement has experienced development. Another important area is the one of motivation. To discuss motivation is to discuss why people do the things they do. This area has been a place of deep change in the biblical counseling movement, as the leadership of the movement has shifted from Adams to the second generation. This issue of motivation has received more attention than any other in the area of biblical counseling theory. It is critical to unpack this development with some detail.

Adams on Motivation

As has been demonstrated, Adams believed that the primary reason people do what they do is because of sin. But Adams's view of the dynamic of sin is unusual—a theological innovation that the second generation would eventually repudiate. According to Adams, living such a lifestyle of sin creates sinful *behavioral habit patterns* that are very important to understand. Adams says, “The place of habit in Christian thought and life is significant, and the Scriptures recognize this fact.”⁵² In Adams's model habit is critical to understand because it is behavioral habits that condition sinners to sin. Adams states,

Sinners, perverted from birth, will begin to develop sinful response patterns from the beginning of their lives (they cannot do otherwise before regeneration). Because of the great importance of habit in our daily lives, these patterns set up formidable barriers to growth in Christian living, with which counselees struggle, and with which counselors must deal.⁵³

For Adams, then, it is sinful habits formed over the course of a life lived apart from God that is the controlling factor in explaining why people sin.

In fact, Adams goes further and argues that it is these sinful habit patterns that the authors of Scripture have in mind when they use the term “flesh.” Adams argues,

For years, theologians and exegetes have puzzled and argued over the sixth to eighth chapters of Romans. Numerous questions have been raised, among which is the meaning of the word flesh, which has a specialized use in this place. . . . I wish to try to contribute something (at least) to the discussion. Other passages—Romans 12, Galatians 5, Colossians 3, Ephesians 4—pertain to the question of flesh and habit in the sinner; Romans 6-8 must not be studied apart from them. In all of these places, Paul considers the problem of sinful habits (or behavior patterns) acquired

⁵²Adams, *Theology*, 163.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 161.

by the response of our sinful natures to life situations, and the difficulties that these raise for regenerate persons who seek to serve God.⁵⁴

Adams thought it was the process of sanctification—made possible by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit—that makes it possible for sinners to change from their previous life of the flesh to a new life in the Spirit. It is in the process of sanctification that the habits of sin—the flesh—are done away with and the Christian, slowly and over time, begins to look increasingly like the Christ in whose righteousness they have been declared to stand. For Adams, this change from being motivated by the flesh to being motivated by the Spirit happened in a two-part process of dehabitation and rehabitation.

Adams grounded his teaching on dehabitation and rehabitation in the biblical instruction of “putting off” and “putting on.” In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul says,

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become calloused and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (cf. Col 3:1-17).

The processes of putting off and putting on are each taught by Paul and both are central to the change process. Adams says, “These two factors always must be present in order to effect genuine change. Putting off will not be permanent without putting on. Putting

⁵⁴Ibid., 160-61.

on is hypocritical as well as temporary, unless it is accompanied by putting off.”⁵⁵

Adams continues,

Unless [a sinner] has been “*reprogrammed*” or *rehabituated*, when the chips are down, when he is tired, sick, or under great pressure, a counselee’s good resolves and temporary cessation of [sinning] will not last. He will revert to his former manner of life because he is still *programmed* to do so. The old sinful habit patterns have not been replaced by new ones. Until that occurs, he will remain vulnerable to sinful reversion. Dehabituation is possible only by achieving rehabilitation. The counselee must be *repackaged*. New patterns of response must become dominant. It is to these instead that *he must learn to turn habitually* under life stresses.⁵⁶

What is perhaps most important to note about Adams’s understanding in this regard is that the whole scheme had a very practical element for counseling. Adams believed that true change would never occur if a person only focused on what they needed to *stop* doing. There must also be a focus on replacing the bad behavior with a good behavior. In other words, liars must not only stop lying but also start telling the truth. Thieves must stop stealing but also start working and giving. This, for Adams was the hard work of counseling—over time dehabituating the sin of lying, stealing, and a million others, and rehabilitating truth-telling, hard-work, and other righteous counter parts of behavior. This was all brought about through discipline and total structuring.⁵⁷

Another element to notice about Adams’s understanding is how focused on behavior it is. There is little discussion of what stands behind this behavior. There is hardly any focus given to asking the question of “why?” that most people have in mind

⁵⁵Adams, *Manual*, 177.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 178. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷For Adams, this meant that the process of change through dehabituation and rehabilitation was hard work and needed to be a comprehensive task—not limited to helping a counselee work through just one problem but showing how problems in one area relate to problems in another area. See Adams, *Competent*, 153-55, 156ff.

when they consider issues of motivation. This neglect of “why” with a focus on behavior was intentional for Adams and was done with a specific pastoral purpose in view. In *Competent to Counsel* Adams discusses the sin of the sons of Eli in 1 Samuel 2 and condemns Eli for two things. First, he argues that Eli was wrong to avoid confronting his sons earlier. Second, he laments that when Eli finally did approach his sons he began with “The fatal word, ‘Why.’”⁵⁸ Adams argues,

Eli’s stress upon “why” may indicate one of his failures as a father. It was not his business to speculate about the causes of his sons’ wicked deeds beyond the fact that he already knew—they were sinners. It was his task to stop them. Too great an emphasis upon “why” may indicate an attempt to find extenuating reasons for excusing conduct which otherwise must be described as sinful. . . . Eli would have done better to have emphasized the word “what” instead. If he had compared the behavior itself to God’s standards, he might have been able to help his boys.⁵⁹

Adams continues,

Usual counseling methods recommend frequent long excursions back into the intricacies of the whys and wherefores of behavior. Instead, nouthetic counseling is largely committed to a discussion of what. All the why that a counselee needs to know can be clearly demonstrated in the what. What was done? What must be done to rectify it? What should future responses be? In nouthetic counseling the stress falls upon the “what” rather than the “why” because the “why” is already known before counseling begins. The reason why people get into trouble in their relationships to God and others is because of their sinful natures. Men are born sinners.⁶⁰

For Adams a focus on behavior is the most biblical and the most practical approach. A nebulous focus on “why” could lead away from taking responsibility. This is not necessary given the fact that we already know the ultimate why: “men are born sinners.” Sinners sin because they *are* sinners. This fact was enough for Adams. But it

⁵⁸Adams, *Competent*, 47.

⁵⁹Ibid., 48.

⁶⁰Ibid.

turned out to be a problem for the second generation of biblical counselors seeking to evaluate their movement as founded by Adams.

The Second Generation on Motivation

With Powlison in 1988, the biblical counseling movement began to assess whether there had been enough attention given to motivational issues. Powlison stated,

Behavior flows “from within, out of men’s hearts” (Mark 7:21). There is an internal cause of interpersonal conflict (James 4:1f); the varied works of the flesh express inner cravings (Galatians 5:15-21); every kind of evil roots in misplaced affections (I Timothy 6:10). This we all know and affirm. But both our theory and practice have not given this area the attention it needs. We must become as familiar with the practical, everyday details of faith and idolatry as we are with the details of those acts of sin and righteousness which flow from our hearts. The changes for which biblical counseling must aim are both internal and external.⁶¹

Powlison made this assessment not because of any “fatal defect” within the movement but because there was a need for increased “emphasis and articulation.”⁶² That is to say, as far as Powlison was concerned, the need to address motivational issues grew out of a desire to *develop* the biblical counseling movement, not to abandon the foundation. This development has occurred over the last twenty years in two principal ways. First, authors critiqued and modified Adams’s views on motivation. Second, they attempted to articulate a more biblical understanding of motivation.

Critiquing Adams. The most open critique came out in two articles in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, “How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adams’s View of the Flesh and an Alternative” by Edward Welch, and “Critique of ‘Habituation’ as a

⁶¹Powlison, “Crucial Issues,” 12.

⁶²Ibid.

Biblical Model of Change” by George M. Schwab.⁶³ Both Schwab and Welch demonstrate in their articles that Adams’s understanding of the flesh is untenable given the understanding of the expression in the New Testament as well as the history of the term’s interpretation. Welch states,

Scripture consistently teaches that sin has its ultimate source in our heart, our “mindset,” our spiritual substance, and it is expressed through the instrument of the body. . . . No text clearly teaches that the body of a sinful person is gradually programmed to sin to the point where the body can sin by itself, without the agency of the heart that is inclined to evil.⁶⁴

Schwab agrees with Welch’s view here but additionally shows that Adams’s view on habituation was not developed from an exegesis of specific passages of Scripture.⁶⁵

Scwhab says,

Adams’s theory that our moral habits (either faith or unbelief; either sins or love) operate according to habituation dynamics is not actually substantiated in any of his

⁶³Edward Welch, “How Theology Shapes Ministry,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (2002):16-25. George M. Schwab, “Critique of ‘Habituation’ as a Biblical Model of Change,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 1 (1995): 67-83.

⁶⁴Welch, “Theology Shapes Ministry,” 19-20. One significant theme of Welch’s article is that Adams’s view of the flesh is unique among interpreters and his assessment seems correct. See, Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 108-9, 151, 215-16. Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 303-94. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 411-96. Leon Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 243-342. John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 217-302.

⁶⁵Schwab interacts with all of Adams’s proof texts including Jer 13:23, Jer 22:21, Eph 4:22-32; Rom 7:22-23; Heb 5:13-14 and discounts all of them finally concluding, “Adams cites a host of other passages to illustrate his theory of habituation. But, as we have seen above, these citations are quoted out of context to mean something that has, at best, tangential relevance to the text.” Schwab, “Critique of Habituation,” 79.

citations. One must assume such a phenomenon before one comes to the verse, and then read it accordingly.⁶⁶

Schwab's statement that Adams's views did not come from Scripture is a strong charge. It raises questions regarding the true origins of Adams's motivational theory. In order to address these issues Schwab includes a discussion of where Adams's assumption was developed arguing that it came from the influence of William Glasser and O. Hobart Mowrer. He says,

The stimulus for Jay Adams's theory of habit also came from outside the Bible. Adams admits that what radicalized him—what set him free from Rogers and Freud—was the influence of particular secular psychologists, O. Hobart Mowrer and William Glasser. However, Adams claims that the Bible is sufficient for counseling and that all so-called psychological insights must stand the test of Scripture. Yet, some of his "Bible-based" theories and emphases seem almost identical to those of his secular predecessors. Was part of the "grid" through which Adams reads the Bible supplied by these secularists?⁶⁷

Schwab answers yes to his own question while being clear that—in an ultimate way—Adams found the models of Mowrer and Glasser "hopelessly inadequate because of their God-lessness."⁶⁸

So then Schwab and Welch each agree that Adams's model of habituation is unbiblical. In addition to this, Schwab establishes that the origins of Adams's thinking were found in secular psychological theories, not in specific texts of Scripture. In other words, Schwab shows that the problem—cited by Welch—of Adams's understanding of

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., 68.

⁶⁸Ibid., 69.

the term “flesh” was imposed by Adams on the biblical text, and actually derived from the influence of unbelieving people.

Having identified the biblical-theological problem of Adams’s understanding, Welch pointed out the practical difficulty that this error has on the task of counseling. Welch states that that Adams’s habituation theology necessarily impacts his approach to counseling saying, “As with all theological commitments, Adams’s view of the flesh is expressed in his counseling theory and practice.”⁶⁹ Welch then goes on to list twenty specific ways he thinks counseling will be impacted by an adoption of Adams’s model.⁷⁰ It is not necessary to list all of those here but three are of particular importance to this discussion on motivation. Welch observes,

Counseling will be similar to a consultation with a behaviorist. It will be a step-by-step, somewhat mechanical process. It will be a problem-solving task. Motivations will not be the target for change; overt behaviors will. Adams has often been accused of sounding like a Christian behaviorist. His view of the flesh is one theological commitment that leaves him vulnerable to such charges. The language of reprogramming, the emphasis on practice, the lack of a robust model of the inner life have analogies to present day behavioral and cognitive-behavioral approaches.

Without attentiveness to motives and the inner life, counselees might not feel understood. They will sometimes have a sense that a counselor did not go “deep” enough.

Counseling will not be alert to good behavior that has ungodly motivations because, since sin is embedded more in the body than in the heart, the model does not induce one to examine motivations. The body doesn’t have motivational patterns: beliefs, desires, hopes, trusts, aspirations, anxieties, identities, etc.⁷¹

⁶⁹Welch, “Theology Shapes Ministry,” 22.

⁷⁰Ibid., 22-23.

⁷¹Ibid.

It is important to add at this point that Adams himself ferociously denied the charge of being a behaviorist.⁷² In responding to Welch in particular, he wrote a letter to the editor of *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. In the letter, Adams responded to each of Welch's counseling implications as an improper understanding of his view. The editors of JBC abbreviated Adams's response, however, and did not publish his point-by-point rebuttal. The only available record of Adams's response is a statement saying, "Now, it is fortunate that Ed admits that I might "disavow" some of his conclusions. I certainly do! In fact, I disavow most, if not every one, of them."⁷³

In fact, it is not as though Adams never mentioned any realities behind human behavior. For example in discussing habituation, he said in *The Christian Counselor's Manual*,

Do not fail to note how plainly Paul speaks of more than the cessation of some objectionable actions; he calls for a change in the "manner of life." Paul calls for genuine change; change in the person. Not merely in his actions.⁷⁴

A bit later in the *Manual* he argued,

All of the stress that the Bible puts upon human effort must not be misunderstood; we are talking about grace-motivated effort, not the work of the flesh. It is not effort apart from the Holy Spirit that produces godliness. Rather, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit alone that one can endure. Of his own effort, a man may

⁷²Adams, *Theology*, 41-42. Jay Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 163-65.

⁷³Jay Adams, "Letter to the Editor," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 22, no. 3 (2003): 66. Both *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* and Adams himself have lost the original document. All that remains is the abbreviated response published in the journal.

⁷⁴Adams, *Manual*, 177.

persist in learning to skate, but he will not persist in the pursuit of godliness. A Christian does good works because the Spirit first works in him.⁷⁵

These are examples of Adams's early writing that demonstrate that he was certainly not a bald behaviorist. Having said that, Adams did not do a very thorough job of incorporating these thoughts into his model. He never spoke of *details* in heart change.

Adams's himself noted in *Critical Stages of Biblical Counseling*,

It is important to note that all those who think that they are pleasing God by keeping counseling assignments must be told to obey from the heart. It is not enough to line up the required actions and then do them *seriatim*. Neither is there merit in that alone, as some think. Rather, those who think that there is have the mind of the Pharisee at work within them. The Pharisee, Jesus said, washed the outside of the cup, but inside it was full of corruption. The Pharisee, He continued, was like a white-washed grave that looked good on the outside, but was full of death and corruption within. The Pharisee vainly tried to earn acceptance and approval by God through these outer works. In short, there must be reality, love, faith, and genuineness within, as well as proper action without. I have been accused of teaching behaviorism because in some of my earlier writings I did not explain this thoroughly enough. Wrongly, I expected the reader to know that when I spoke from the Bible about "action," I meant the one and only kind that God accepts—works motivated by faith and love. But some did not understand. Here, I want to make it explicit that the sort of action that [I am] talking about is action that not only conforms outwardly to God's commands, but conforms inwardly as well.⁷⁶

Adams does two things here that are very important to this discussion. First, he notes that the heart—that is, the biblical seat of motivation—is important to behavior. He further indicates that a focus on behavior is ultimately insufficient without a focus on the motivations behind the behavior. Second—and more importantly—Adams admits that this idea had been missing from his previous work. He even describes the motivation (!)

⁷⁵Adams, *Manual*, 186. There is also a reference to this in Jay Adams, "Change Them? . . . Into What?" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 17.

⁷⁶Jay Adams, *Critical Stages of Biblical Counseling* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2002), 136.

for not including it as a wrong assumption about what others would understand him to mean.

It is important to note this observation of Adams for two reasons. First, it does show the common cause that exists between the streams of counseling whether of the first or second generation. Second, it shows, by the admission of none other than Adams himself, that the movement he founded was in need of development and clarification. What was missing in Adams's model was an elaboration of all that was included in the idea of heart-motivation. It is this important work of elaboration that the recent leadership in the biblical counseling movement has tried to accomplish.

Constructing a more thorough understanding of motivation. After raising the need for more focus on motivation in the "Crucial Issues" article, Powlison expanded on his proposal in "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair.'" In this article, Powlison articulated motivational themes behind an individual's behavior in a fuller way than had ever been done in the counseling movement. At the beginning of his article, he states the issue,

Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken title to your heart's trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight? It is a question bearing on the immediate motivation for one's behavior, thoughts, and feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question. Who or what "rules" my behavior, the Lord or a substitute?⁷⁷

For Powlison, the key that unlocks the door of motivation is worship. It is worship that motivates human activity. The central feature here is not *whether* there is worship but instead, *what* is being worshiped. According to Powlison, there are two options: the living God in Christ or a substitute. In articulating what this substitute may

⁷⁷David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 35.

be, Powlison describes heart idols. Powlison says,

‘Idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God. . . . Interestingly (and unsurprisingly) the New Testament merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires. Idolatry becomes a problem of the heart, a metaphor for human lust, craving yearning, and greedy demand.⁷⁸

Powlison points away from idolatry as the worship of actual physical images and towards a more internal problem with the support of Ezekiel 14:1-8 and the statements there like,

Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. . . . Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols (Ezek 14:3, 4-5).

Powlison goes on to contend that these heart idols originate both from within and without,

Behavioral sins are always portrayed in the Bible as “motivated” or ruled by a “god” or “gods.” The problem in human motivation—the question of practical covenantal allegiance, God or any of the substitutes—is frequently and usefully portrayed as the problem of idolatry. Idolatry is a problem both rooted deeply in the human heart and powerfully impinging on us from our social environment.⁷⁹

Powlison’s point is clear: human beings are worshiping beings whose actions are motivated by the true God or idols. These heart idols are generated from inside or learned from outside the heart of man and can include anything from the love of money, to sex and power.

⁷⁸Ibid., 36. Powlison also states in this context that “desires” or “lusts of the flesh” is the summary New Testament expression for the same drift that idolatry addresses in the Old Testament.

⁷⁹Ibid., 38.

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence Powlison's contribution has had on biblical counselors. Indeed it could be fair to say that over the last twenty years the movement has been defined by the usage of Powlison's metaphor. The idols of the heart metaphor has been used extensively by any number of authors. Tedd Tripp has made great use of the metaphor for child-rearing saying,

Since there is no such thing as a place of childhood neutrality, your children either worship God or idols. These idols are not small wooden or stone statuary. They are the subtle idols of the heart. The Bible describes such idols using terminology such as fear of man, evil desires, lusts, and pride. The idols include conformity to the world, embracing earthly mindsets, and "setting the affections on things below." What we have in view are any manner of motives, desires, wants, goals, hopes, and expectations that rule the heart of a child.⁸⁰

Tripp's brother, Paul David Tripp invokes the metaphor as a central understanding in counseling methodology. In commenting on the Israelites in Ezekiel 14 he says,

God points out their idolatry, which is idolatry of a specific kind. They have *idols in their hearts*, a more personal and fundamental form of idolatry than ritual religious or cultural idolatry. An idol of the heart is *anything that rules me other than God*. As worshipping beings, human beings always worship someone or something. This is not a situation where some people worship and some don't. If God isn't ruling my heart, someone or something else will. It is the way we were made.⁸¹

Edward Welch has also made use of the metaphor and has done so in strikingly diverse ways. In his book, *When People are Big and God is Small* Welch engages in a lengthy discussion of heart idolatry. He says,

What is it that shame-fear and rejection-fear have in common? To use a biblical image, they both indicate that people are a person's favorite idol. We exalt them and their perceived power above God. We worship them as ones who have God-like

⁸⁰Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwollopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995), 21.

⁸¹Paul David Tripp, *Instruments*, 66. Original emphasis.

exposing gazes (shame-fear) or God-like ability to “fill” us with esteem, love, admiration, acceptance, respect, and other psychological desires (rejection-fear). . . . When you think of it, idolatry is the age-old strategy of the human heart. The objects of worship may change over time, but the heart stays the same. What we do now is no different from what the Israelites did with the golden calf.⁸²

Welch places his understanding of idols of the heart as a central element in his understanding of addictions.

One of the most common portrayals of the human condition, and one which captures both the in-control and out-of-control experiences of addictions, is the theme of idolatry. From this perspective, the true nature of all addictions is that that we have chosen to go outside the boundaries of the kingdom of God and look for blessing in the land of idols. In turning to idols, we are saying that we desire something in creation more than we desire the Creator.⁸³

Three years later in writing on the topic of depression, Welch relates that topic to heart idols when he says,

At some level, all people know God (Rom. 1:21). We don't just have a fuzzy idea that there is a god, gods or “higher power” out there somewhere. Within the human heart, there is a personal knowledge of the God who is, and we are either trusting him or something else. To use more religious language, we are either worshipping him, or we are worshipping idols such as pleasure, money, success, and love. Ultimately the heart is either/or.⁸⁴

In her book, *Idols of the Heart*, Elyse Fitzpatrick says,

Idols aren't just stone statues. No idols are the thoughts, desires, longings, and expectations that we worship in place of the true God. Idols cause us to ignore the true God in search of what we think we need.⁸⁵

⁸²Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 44-45.

⁸³Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 47.

⁸⁴Edward T. Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2004), 125.

⁸⁵Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 23.

It is apparent then that Powlison's theme of heart idolatry has earned a broad following in the biblical counseling movement. The notion of heart idolatry is one that addresses motivation and seeks to answer concretely the question "why" and explain the "because" of behavior. It attempts to describe the because of behavior by explaining the wrongly placed desires in the worship of things that are not God.

This motivational development brought critical change to the model first proposed by Adams. For starters, this teaching on motivation honors the biblical teaching that our behavior springs from motives in the heart. Jesus is quite clear in his teaching in Mark 7:20-23,

"Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

This teaching from the lips of Jesus clearly instructs that all behavior that humans engage in including their thinking (e.g., evil thoughts) spring from motives deep within the heart. In articulating this biblical truth the contemporary biblical counseling movement has strengthened the theology under girding their practice. When the Bible teaches that all behavior has its reasons that are grounded in the heart then affirming this reality in a confessional and practical way makes biblical counseling more *biblical*.

Another benefit of the idols of the heart metaphor is that it helps to understand people as worshipping beings. This is clearly at the center of Powlison's understanding of the expression. In Powlison's writings on "X-ray Questions" he seeks to give counselors (and counselees) guidance about how to understand the motivational issues. He said these questions,

Provide aid in discerning the patterns of a person's motivation. The questions aim to help people identify the ungodly masters that occupy positions of authority in their hearts. These questions reveal "functional gods," what or who actually controls their particular actions, thoughts, emotions, attitudes, memories, and anticipations. Note that "functional gods" in a particular situation often stand diametrically opposed to the "professed God." . . . As a Christian you profess that God controls all things, and works everything to his glory and your ultimate well being. . . . [When you sin] your functional god competes with your professed God. Unbelievers are wholly owned by ungodly motives—their functional gods. Yet true believers are often severely compromised, distracted, and divided by our functional gods as well. Thankfully, grace reorients us, purifies us, and turns us back to our Lord. Grace makes your professed God and functional God one and the same.⁸⁶

Powlison is correct here in his understanding that human beings are fundamentally worshipping beings. The idols of the heart metaphor highlights this worshipping nature as his X-ray question number thirty shows,

What are your idols or false gods? In what do you place your trust, or set your hopes? What do you turn to or seek? Where do you take refuge? Who is the savior, judge, controller, provider, protector in your world? Whom do you serve? What "voice controls you? This entire list of thirty-five questions pursues things that usurp God. Each of these can metaphorically be termed an "idol" to which you give loyalty. The voices you listen to mimic specific characteristics of God. Start to trace that out into the details of everyday life, and your ability to address the vertical dimension relevantly and specifically will mature.⁸⁷

Finally this emphasis on heart motivation that is always worship-oriented will have very practical benefits for counseling and will address the concerns raised by Welch above. When counseling is focused on the motivational issues behind behavior it moves biblical counseling beyond behaviorism and into counseling that is truly biblical, dealing with all the issues the Bible itself addresses. Also, focusing on motivation allows counselors and counsees to "go deep" together thus bringing about the true understanding of behavior. Such depth allows for change—not only at the critical level

⁸⁶Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 130-31

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 138-39.

of behavior—but at the level of the heart where life is always lived *coram deo*. Finally, a focus on motivational issues will be attentive to right behavior that is done for wrong reasons. This kind of counseling will be more equipped to root out pharisaism and legalism.

Adams would admit these benefits as his comment from *Critical Stages* indicates. This point here, however, is not to engage what Adams personally believed, but rather to engage those elements of Adams's thought that he stated. In this area, by Adams's own admission, his thought was in need of further development. Such development has occurred over the last twenty years in the areas of motivation and that development has been positive.

Conclusion

A great deal of ground has been covered in this chapter. This was necessary because of the importance of theoretical concepts in any counseling model and because of the space these issues have received in the biblical counseling movement. With regard to understanding the counselee as sinner and sufferer it has been demonstrated that the biblical counseling movement has taken significant steps developing the work of Adams. Rather than seeing counselees in a monolithic way as sinners, more contemporary authors have sought to add texture to this by showing how counselees are both sinners and sufferers and need to be engaged as such in the context of counseling ministry.

Motivational issues have also been developed within the last twenty years of the biblical counseling movement. The movement has advanced from Adams's outward focus on behavior to a more recent inward focus on motivation. There has been development from a true, but often simplistic, understanding of motivation in human

sinfulness to a more dynamic appreciation of all the factors in one's heart that motivate persons to behave in various ways.

CHAPTER 3

THE METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT

Introduction

Methodology refers to the manner in which counseling proceeds.¹ A counseling methodology is a counselor's understanding about how to navigate the counseling process and contains any number of issues, including how the counselee relates to the counselor, how the counselee will collect data, how much personal information a counselor provides, how much time the counselor should talk, how much time the counselee should talk, how the counselee will implement what they glean from counseling, how long sessions will last, how many sessions there will be, and more. A methodology provides the contours for counseling technique. All approaches to counseling have some kind of methodology but biblical counselors approach methodological issues differently than secular counselors by believing that the methodological commitments of the counselor should be theologically construed, growing out of the contours of Scripture. David Powlison argues,

Let us clarify what we mean by counseling methodology. A counseling methodology is a system of theoretical commitments, principles, goals, and appropriate methods. It is a set of interconnected things; it is not a collection of random and eclectic bits of observations or techniques. A counseling methodology is an organized, committed way of understanding and tackling people's problems. Do secular disciplines have anything to offer to the methodology of biblical

¹Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), vii-iii.

counseling? The answer is a flat no. Scripture provides the system of biblical counseling. Other disciplines—history, anthropology, literature, sociology, psychology, biology, business, political science—may be useful in a variety of secondary ways to the pastor and the biblical counselor, but such disciplines can never provide a system of understanding and counseling people.²

Powlison's remarks here make several things clear. First a counseling methodology is a systematic (organized) way of addressing (tackling) the problems people have when they come for counseling. Second, Powlison is clear that biblical counselors, using Scripture, have the resources to develop such a systematic approach. It is not necessary for counselors to rely on secular resources for this work. Standing firmly in the biblical counseling movement Powlison argues that Scripture is sufficient to inform a theology of counseling methodology.

Jay Adams agrees with this but adds another layer. Adams argues that a counselor's methodology reveals the extent to which he is committed to the Bible. He says,

Methodology and practice plainly reveal what is truly central to a theory. The consideration of a counselor's or therapist's actual practice enables one most incisively to slice through the extraneous to the core material. What is considered truly operative (regardless of rhetoric or theoretical trappings) will find its way into the basic everyday methodology of a practitioner. Other materials, though interesting, usually form a large residue of non-operative material. To say it the other way around, it is not in affirmations that one always may discover the fundamental presuppositions and foundational beliefs upon which a system is built; these may be dimly perceived, faultily stated, or even intentionally clouded. Again, what one does for his client in counseling or therapy most pointedly shows what he believes the client's real problem to be. Methodology then is where it's at. All sorts of people can agree upon noble goals, but when the question arises about how these goals may be attained, they soon begin to part company. Conflicts over

²David Powlison, "Frequently Asked Questions about Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur Jr. and Wayne Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 365.

methodology plainly expose the true differences between therapists and between counselors.³

Adams is clear that the ultimate test of a person's theory is found in his methodology. According to Adams, all counselors will ultimately reveal their true commitments at the level of methodology— that is, how they proceed in counseling. A biblical counselor will demonstrate his true commitment to the Bible when he engages with a counselee and seeks to help them. Methodology then is critical. It is a theological activity, growing out of the pages of Scripture. All counselors (whether biblical or not) possess it (and so have a theology that is either correct or aberrant). Finally methodology is the acid test of one's theoretical commitments.

When Jay Adams founded the contemporary biblical counseling movement his first written work, *Competent to Counsel*, was an initial effort at laying out the conceptual framework of biblical counseling. Three years later he followed that work with *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, which was meant to begin the work of constructing a biblical counseling methodology. In that work Adams argued, "I feel constrained to do something to meet the need (frequently expressed) for a 'how to' manual . . . in *The Christian Counselor's Manual* I have tried to fill that need to some extent."⁴ Biblical counselors have been concerned with the development of their methodology ever since.

³Jay Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 159-60.

⁴Adams, *Manual*, xi-xii.

Areas of Consistency in Counseling Methodology

It is the purpose of this chapter to explain how the biblical counseling movement has developed its methodology since 1988. Before engaging in a discussion of biblical counseling development, however, it is necessary to outline those areas where the biblical counseling movement has remained constant. Without proper care, a project like this one can create the appearance that the differences in the movement are more apparent than the areas of agreement. Such is not the case. Indeed, the biblical counseling movement has much on which to agree in the area of methodology. Three specific areas can be discussed.

Consistency in Information-Gathering

From the founding of the movement to the present, biblical counselors are unanimous in their understanding of the importance of gathering good, and accurate information about the counseling problem.⁵ Biblical counselors think that data gathering is important for at least three reasons.

First, data-gathering is biblical. Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.” Likewise, James 1:19 says, “Be quick to hear, slow to speak.” The biblical model for interpersonal engagement is to listen first and speak last. This is true for anyone but especially for the counselor who is charged with ministering to people in the midst of their difficulty. Paul Tripp grounds the importance of data gathering in the ministry of Jesus. After discussing the reality of Jesus’ sympathizing with the weaknesses of his people from Hebrews 4:14-16, he says,

⁵Of course this is a very strong statement but, as this section will demonstrate, there is simply no example of a biblical counselor in print who does not embrace the importance of data-gathering.

Since Christ is our model for personal ministry, we too want to understand people so that we can serve him in their lives. We too must be committed to entering their worlds. We can begin by taking the time to ask good questions and listen well. Our hope is that others would seek us out and share more of their true struggles, so that

they may find, through us, the Lord himself. Entering a person's world enables us to apply the truths of the gospel in a way that is situation- and person-specific.⁶

Second, data gathering is important for the counselor. There is a reason why it is biblical to listen before speaking. The reality is that a person (counselor or otherwise) needs information before they are equipped to say anything helpful to a person (Prov 18:13). Words spoken before a matter is understood will not be truly helpful. Wayne Mack discusses the disastrous counsel that Job received and identifies the problem as a failure to gather data on the situation. He says,

We must be careful that we do not make this mistake in our counseling. If we attempt to interpret people's problems before we gather adequate data, we will only add to their difficulty rather than relieve it. . . . The wise person seeks and acquires knowledge—not assumptions, speculations, or imaginations. And knowledge has to do with facts.⁷

If counselors are to be helpful they must know what is going on with their counselee and this requires information about their problem.

Third, data gathering is important for the counselee. In *Speaking Truth in Love* Powlison discusses two kinds of questions that counselors should always ask. First, Powlison says that counselors should always ask questions about the situation the counselee is facing. Second, Powlison urges counselors to ask questions concerning what

⁶Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 168.

⁷Wayne A. Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory: Collecting Data," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur Jr. and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 210.

God has to say about the situation faced by the counselee. He justifies these questions saying,

Both questions help us to work on the things that count. Ministry is always helping people make connections they haven't been making. It's always reinterpreting what's going on, identifying redemptive opportunities in what seem like the same old ruts. It traces out previously unseen practical implications of life in Christ. It's always remaking minds, hearts, and lifestyles that are still misshapen. These questions will help you to say the timely, significant, and appropriate words that encourage such a disciplining of lives.⁸

Counselee's are usually quite aware of the "what"—the brute facts of their situation.

They are, however, usually very poor interpreters of the "why"—the reasons behind their behavior, the significance (from God's point of view) of what is going on, the purposes and promises of God's redemptive intervention. Data gathering is important for the biblical counselor because it allows him to reinterpret the experience of the counselee back to them in a way that makes biblical and, therefore, better situational sense.

Without a thorough data gathering process, biblical counselors may be able to help a counselee understand the Bible but they will not be able to help them to see their life as God would have them to. In short, the biblical counseling movement has consistently seen the methodological importance of gathering data from counselees.

Consistency in Counseling Instruction

Another area where those in the biblical counseling community have consistently agreed is on the necessity of teaching in counseling methodology. Adams wrote that biblical counseling was the "Bringing of God's Word to bear upon people's lives in order

⁸David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch, 2005), 55-56. The questions he suggests are "What is this person facing in life?" and "What does the Lord say that speaks directly into what you are facing?"

to expose sinful patterns, to correct what is wrong, and to establish new ways of life of which God approves.”⁹ Adams believed this exposition of sinful patterns and establishment of new patterns came about but through teaching. He describes a critical element of biblical counseling saying, “Problems are solved nouthetically by *verbal* means.”¹⁰

Indeed the emphasis on counseling instruction is, historically, very significant in the biblical counseling movement. When Adams first appeared on the scene, the chief influence on the task of helping people with their problems was the person-centered therapy of Carl Rogers.¹¹ Rogers believed a counselor should never advise, teach, or direct, but should only elicit healing forces from within the counselee. Adams was interested in challenging Rogers’s notion of a passive therapist in favor of an activist one. Adams argued,

Quite contrary to the idea of the necessity of the expert, Rogers would contend that there is no need for an expert at all. . . . Rogerian theory (and therapy) is based upon the idea that all men have adequate knowledge and resources to handle their problems. . . . The therapist (or counselor) shares time with a client in order to help him to help himself. The therapist is a catalyst. . . . The counselee, by the process, himself is able to come up with the answers. . . . The counselor, therefore, becomes a wall or mirror off of which the counselee’s own resources are bounced or reflected back to himself.¹²

⁹Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 51.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 45. Emphasis added.

¹¹Carl Rogers, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts in Practice* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942). Carl Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

¹²Adams, *Manual*, 84-85.

Adams truly detested this understanding. It was fundamentally at odds with his understanding of the sinfulness of mankind and of the importance of Christians to walk together and instruct one-another.¹³

Though presently in a different historical moment, biblical counselors have continued to affirm the importance of instruction apart from situational concerns. Mack says,

Scripture makes clear that instruction plays a necessary part in every person's spiritual growth and that it is indispensable in the process of solving problems. So if we want to help people change, we must be skilled in biblical counseling instruction—and we must make it an important part of our counseling.¹⁴

Mack is clear then that instruction in counseling is not based on historical considerations but biblical ones. Because instruction is prescribed in Scripture it is an essential and enduring part of any biblical counseling ministry.

Consistency in Counseling Implementation

A final methodological area where biblical counselors have been consistent is in the area of counseling implementation. Biblical counselors are concerned about far more than giving their counselees truth from Scripture—even when it is meaningfully connected to the details of their specific situation. Biblical counselors are concerned to make their instruction come alive and bear fruit in the daily lives of their counselees as they become more and more like Christ. Mack says,

¹³Ibid., 86.

¹⁴Wayne A. Mack, "Providing Instruction through Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 250. Mack cites passages such as Prov 6:23; Matt 22:29; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 2:16-18; Titus 1:10-11 for biblical support.

Biblical counselors want to promote biblical change as a life-style; they want to foster the implementation and integration of biblical principles into the lives of people so that they will become consistently Christ centered and Christ-like in every area of life including desires, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and behavior.¹⁵

Because biblical counselors are concerned about this real-life change dynamic, they are concerned about the implementation of principles embraced in counseling. Whether it has been called homework,¹⁶ training,¹⁷ doing,¹⁸ or even dehabitation and rehabituation¹⁹ the biblical counseling movement has repeatedly and consistently emphasized the importance of counseling implementation. Counseling is not just talk, or even insight; change always involves doing something different that expresses trust in God's mercies and love for God and neighbor. If counseling is the personal ministry of the Word and preaching is the public ministry of the Word then implementation is to counseling as application is to the sermon.

It is now time to turn to an examination of those areas where the biblical counseling movement has experienced methodological development. It is important to see, however, that the movement has a large amount of consistency and homogeneity

¹⁵Wayne A. Mack, "Implementing Biblical Instruction," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur Jr. and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 2004), 297.

¹⁶Paul David Tripp, "Homework and Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 2 (1993): 21-25. Paul David Tripp, "Homework and Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (1993): 5-18.

¹⁷Jay Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 169-200.

¹⁸Tripp, *Instruments*, 239-76.

¹⁹See Chap. 2 of this work.

with regard to its methodology. As areas of development are considered it is critical to observe those areas that have remained constant.

Adams's Work and the Need for Methodological Development

As has been demonstrated, it was Adams that did the initial work in formulating a counseling methodology that grew out of Scripture. Because Adams was a pioneer doing work that no other person was doing it is expected that there were areas of his work that needed more attention. The most significant area in need of development in Adams's methodology was his understanding of the manner in which a counselee and counselor should interact. Adams's approach to the relationship between counselee and counselor was relatively formal and authoritative in nature.

For example, in *Shepherding God's Flock*, Adams stated,

Counseling is best carried on in the study, not in the home. While the pastor must be flexible, and must be prepared to counsel anywhere, he will endeavor to restrict all intensive counseling to formal sessions in the study.²⁰

Later he adds,

The average pastor to whom I speak tells me that he does not counsel in a systematic and organized way. This is a mistake; sloppiness in counseling brings sloppy results. A pastor must help the counselee to recognize by his efficient, business-like, take-charge (though not officious) approach and by his demand for a commitment to counseling (as well as his own willingness to make it), that the counseling relationship into which they are entering is a not a casual, take-it-or-leave-it matter.²¹

²⁰Adams, *Shepherding*, 105.

²¹*Ibid.*, 176.

In a note on this passage Adams says, “Everything possible must be done to establish among Christians the truth of the fact that by God’s ordination the pastor is the *professional counselor*.”²²

These ideas of counseling at a desk, having a counseling demeanor that is “business-like” and “take-charge,” assuming the role of the professional counselor all convey an approach to counseling methodology that is formalized.²³ In reality, however, there is no evidence that any such approach is commended in Scripture. Adams has his reasons for making these suggestions,²⁴ but at this point, biblical counselors should follow Adams’s own advice and be sure to make a careful distinction between the suggestion of the counselor and the commands of Scripture.²⁵

Another signature of Adams’s counseling methodology is its authoritative nature. Adams stated, “But notice that Christian counseling involved the use of authoritative instruction. ‘Authoritative instruction’ requires the use of directive, nouthetic techniques.”²⁶ Writing in the Rogerian context, Adams was eager to restore a concept of authority to counseling. Because this was true Adams was interested in inspiring in

²²Ibid., n. 15. Emphasis added.

²³One is thankful that Adams says counseling should not be “officious.” This exhortation, however, raises the question of what that means given the other language he is using in context.

²⁴Adams’s reasons for his approach will be addressed below.

²⁵Jay Adams, *Lectures on Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 251-52.

²⁶Adams, *Competent*, 55.

counselors an understanding of the authority that they possessed in the counseling context.²⁷

There is, of course, an authoritative element in biblical counseling as in all biblical ministries.²⁸ But Adams's emphasis on pastoral authority tended to obscure the importance of building loving relationships with counselees. In fact, some of Adams's emphases—beyond obscuring a loving relationship—actually seem to work against such a relationship.

Probably the chief reason why nouthetic counselors fail is because they sometimes become too sympathetic to the complaints and excuses of the counselee. Frequently when a counselee tells a very pitiful tale, there is the temptation for a counselor to decide that this indeed is a special case.²⁹

These words of Adams seem to present a false dilemma. Adams may realize this³⁰ but his language does not seem to take seriously the plight of the counselee.

Adams commends his approach of authority and formality for at least two very good reasons.³¹ First, Adams believed that because biblical counselors based their counsel on Scripture that their words—when derived from the Bible—came with the authority of God.

²⁷Adams, *Competent*, 41, 42, 45, 55-59. Adams, *Manual*, 15-17. Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 18-23. Jay Adams, *Teaching to Observe* (Hackettstown, NJ: Timeless Texts, 1995), 58-64.

²⁸This authoritative element will be addressed in more detail below.

²⁹Adams, *Competent*, 58.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Even his reasons for counseling in the office grow out of practical concerns that he intended to help the counselee.

There is need for divine authority in counseling. Only biblical counseling possesses such authority. The counselor, as an ordained man of God, exercises the full authority for counseling that Christ gave to the organized church (I Thessalonians 5:12, 13). To the extent that all Christians must counsel (Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14), they exercise the authority that Christ has conferred upon them as saints.³²

For Adams, whether a person was a pastor or a parishioner they had authority in counseling that derived from the Word of God. Such authority was critical because of the counseling context that had removed authority from counseling in general while removing God's authority in particular.³³

A second reason Adams had for emphasizing authority and formality in counseling was that without it the element of responsibility that Adams believed was so critical in a counseling situation was undermined.

Counselors fail when they become too sympathetic toward excuses and do not hold counselees responsible for their behavior, but they can never fail when they become truly sympathetic toward them. Perhaps the first attitude may be called sympathy and the latter empathy. When counselors simply become softhearted, they are most unmerciful toward their counselees. The most kindly (empathetic) stance is to tell the truth, help the counselee to face up to his own sin, and encourage him to make the changes necessary to rectify the situation.³⁴

In fact, there is no necessary connection between an honest, careful hearing of the concerns of a counselee and counsel, which is devoid of authority leading to an abdication of responsibility on the part of the counselee. The reality is that there can be an honest hearing, a deep and abiding relationship, *and* careful and confident teaching from the Scriptures. The Bible not only calls Christians to faithfulness in teaching but

³²Adams, *Manual*, 15.

³³See argument above and Chap. 1.

³⁴Adams, *Competent*, 58.

also to mutuality in their relationships.³⁵ The emphasis of Adams on a formal and authoritative style seems to miss this important element of biblical relationship.

In short, Adams was responsible for a strong emphasis on formality and authority in counseling. This emphasis was laudatory, biblical, and historically necessary. Adams's neglect in building an understanding on the importance of engaging with the counselee in a caring relationship, however, meant there was room for later biblical counselors to develop the movement in this regard.

Methodological Development

Powlison had these same concerns when he wrote his "Crucial Issues" article. He argued,

There is a 'danger to the left of us' in various secular constructions of the counselor-counselee relationship, which zealously avoid any overt authority (covert authority is, of course, present in every counseling system). But there is also a danger to the other side. The biblical view of the counseling relationship has non-authoritative elements, in which the 'counselee' sets the agenda, in which 'the relationship' is central to constructive counseling taking place! The Scripture demands that we probe the interplay between authority and mutuality characteristic of healthy biblical relationships. We must mirror the variety of counselor-counselee configurations, which the Bible portrays as vehicles for the Lord's authority. . . . In fact, the authoritative shepherd who decisively intervenes is only one of the modes of biblical counseling. It is not even the primary mode. It is the backup mode for when the primary mode fails. The most characteristic biblical counseling relationship is a long-term friendship, consisting of mutually invited counseling and generating dependency on God as well as constructive interdependency on one another. The authoritative, short-term intervention is the emergency, life-saving measure.³⁶

³⁵Rom 12:10, 16; 14:19; 15:7, 14; 1 Cor 6:7; 12:25; Gal 5:26; Eph 4:25, 32; 5:21; Phil 2:3; Col 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:18; 5:11, 13, 15; 1 Tim 2:1; Heb 10:24; Jas 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Pet 4:9-10; 5:5, 14; 1 John 1:7.

³⁶David Powlison, "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 65-66.

Powlison's words here point the way forward and are salient in analyzing where the movement has come and where it needs to go. Later, Powlison takes on Adams directly in a more critical way when says, "Adams tells me I need compassion, identification, and mutuality, but he teaches and models rebuke, proclamation, and authority. He calls me to balance, but doesn't teach me how."³⁷ Powlison made the initial call for methodological development in understanding and appreciating the relationship between counselor and counselee but other biblical counselors would join with him in the actual work of doing this. Six specific areas of development may be isolated.

Counseling That Is Familial

If the counseling emphasis of Adams was on the elements of authority-submission and shepherd-sheep then more contemporary work in understanding counseling methodology has sought to emphasize the family relationship that exists between counselee and counselor. Powlison and Mack have each done work in this regard. Powlison grounds his approach in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 which says, "We urge you brethren: admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." Powlison comments on this passage,

What paradigm for counseling relationships informs 1 Thessalonians 5:14? Who are these 'brethren' called to patiently admonish, encourage, and help? And who are these recipients of care, described as the self-willed, the disheartened, or the disabled? As we listen to 1 Thessalonians as a whole, it becomes clear that the letter portrays—and calls for—a familial paradigm for understanding the 'counselor-counselee' relationship. Older children help younger. Because the

³⁷David Powlison, review of *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, Jude*, by Jay E. Adams," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 15, no. 1 (1996): 64.

needy ones come with different sorts of problems, the wiser ones must be highly adaptable in their love.³⁸

Mack grounds his familial approach in 1 Timothy 5:1-2, “Do not rebuke an older man harshly but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.” Mack says,

Think of the counselee as a family member. . . . When I counsel, I deliberately try to imagine how I would treat one of my close relatives. I ask myself, how would I talk to them? How would I proceed if this were my mother or my father or my brother or my sister sitting across the desk from me? In reality, our counselees are our spiritual brothers and sisters, and our heavenly Father demands that they be treated as such.³⁹

These comments of Powlison and Mack provide critical balance to the counseling methodology of Adams. The counselor does possess the authority of God when speaking from God’s Word. When, however, the counselor speaks the Word to a counselee they are speaking to a brother or sister in Christ. They are still speaking authoritatively but authority has a different tone when done in the context of a brother-sister relationship than when it is done in a general-corporal relationship.

Counseling That Demonstrates Affection

Counseling that is done in the context of family, should be counseling that demonstrates affection to the counselee. Powlison says,

Real understanding—accurate, concerned, merciful, probing, gentle, communicated—matters a great deal in counseling. When a counselee, a friend, a

³⁸David Powlison, “Familial Counseling: The Paradigm for Counselor-Counselee Relationships in 1 Thessalonians 5,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 3 (2007): 2.

³⁹Wayne A. Mack, “Developing a Helping Relationship with Counselees,” in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur Jr. and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 178.

spouse, a child *knows*, “This person cares about me, this person knows me, and this person knows my world,” good things tend to happen.⁴⁰

Several things stand out about Powlison’s comment here. First, Powlison talks about the importance of real understanding being communicated. It is not enough that a counselor *intend* to be understanding. Instead, a *sense* of understanding must be *apprehended* by the counselee. In this same vein he describes a counselor appreciating the cares of the counselee. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” is a cliché for a reason that seems to capture a biblical point that Powlison articulates about the importance of demonstrating affection to counselees.

Tripp also contributes to this when he says,

I am deeply persuaded that the foundation for people-transforming ministry is not sound theology; it is love. Without love, our theology is a boat without oars. Love is what drove God to send and sacrifice his Son. Love led Christ to subject himself to a sinful world and the horrors of the cross. Love is what causes him to seek and save the lost, and to persevere until each of his children is transformed into his image. His love will not rest until all of his children are at his side in glory. The hope of every sinner does not rest in theological answers but in the love of Christ for his own. Without it, we have no hope personally, relationally, or eternally.⁴¹

Tripp overstates the case here. There is no reason to drive a wedge between love and theology to make the point he does here. Ironically, Tripp grounds his understanding of the primacy of love in a *theology* of incarnation, substitutionary atonement, justification, sanctification, and perseverance. Even more ironically, Tripp does this while articulating a *theology* of love. No, it is not necessary to drive a wedge between love and theology to

⁴⁰Powlison, review, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, Jude* by Jay E. Adams, 63. Original emphasis.

⁴¹Tripp, *Instruments*, 117.

appreciate the larger truth that Tripp discusses. Love is important in counseling. Love needs to be apparent if counseling instruction is to bear fruit.

Adams believed that his counseling approach was fundamentally loving. He believed it was loving to confront people with their sin and give them the resources to change. Adams is to be commended for this understanding. What he did not develop was the way to demonstrate care for the counselee so that the instruction he emphasized was most effective.

Counseling That Is Sacrificial

If counseling should be a demonstration of love to those in the context of familial relations then a main way that a counselor can demonstrate this relational love is by investing sacrificially in the lives of his counsees. Tripp says,

When we forget the call to incarnate the love of Christ, we take our relationships as our own. Soon they are governed by our pleasure, comfort, and ease. We get irritated at people who interfere with these things, and much of our anger is due to the fact that we are relationship thieves. People do not belong to us; they belong to God! Relationships are not primarily for our fulfillment. On the contrary, relationships between sinners are messy, difficult, labor-intensive, and demanding, but in that, they are designed to result in God's glory and our good as he is worshiped and our hearts are changed. Effective personal ministry begins when we confess that we have taken relationships that belong to God and used them for our own selfish purposes.⁴²

Tripp does something fascinating here in his conception of the counselee-counselor relationship in personal ministry. Clearly Tripp believes that counselors should invest in the lives of their counsees. Even more, he believes that they should invest in their counsees to the point of great personal sacrifice. His point is even more than that,

⁴²Ibid., 120.

however. Tripp goes so far as to say that people who do not invest sacrificially in those to whom they minister are “selfish” and “thieves.”

This idea of sacrificial investment captures perfectly the Pauline idea of ministry in 1 Thessalonians. Paul says,

We were gentle among you , like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess 1:7-8).

These ideas of being affectionately desirous and willing to share one’s own self are simply not addressed by Adams. The biblical counseling movement should be thankful for Adams’s emphasis on truth in counseling and even for his practical approach to counseling in a handful of sessions.⁴³ The counseling movement should also be thankful for the development that has added to all of this a biblical necessity of sacrificial investment in other people.

Counseling That Is Person-Oriented

As has been pointed out, when Adams founded the biblical counseling movement he did so in the context of a counseling environment that had embraced a Rogerian notion of person-centered counseling. His counseling model sought, in contrast, to emphasize the elements of counseling that dealt with sin in an authoritative way that stood on the truthfulness of God’s Word. In the process of developing such a model he tended to focus on problems above persons. Contemporary biblical counselors seeking to move beyond this limitation have developed the model in a way that avoids the excesses of

⁴³See, for example, Jay Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman’s Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1981) 24-31.

Rogarian counseling but still deals with the person in an appropriate biblical way. It is not person *centered*, but it is person-*oriented*.

Mack addresses the issue as frankly as anyone when he specifically engages Adams.

Biblical counseling is about solving people's problems. It is about discovering the causes of their problems and then applying biblical principles to those causes. Sometimes, even well-intentioned counselors err, however, by counseling without cultivating the key element of involvement. Consider the approach of this counselor described in *The Christian Counselor's Casebook* by Jay Adams:

Clara comes to you stating that she has filed for divorce on the grounds of mental and bodily cruelty. Clara returns for the third session. "I tried to get him here but he had other things to do," she begins. "You know what his other things are, of course. I told you all of them."

"I don't want to hear such charges behind Marty's back," you respond. "This continuing hostility toward him, even though you told him you forgave him, seems to indicate that you made little or no attempt to bury the issue and start afresh. I don't think that you understand forgiveness. You . . ."

"Forgive him! You know there is a limit. After he has beat me, and his drinking away our money maybe, but when I came home and found him in my bed with that woman, I can never bury that! He is just an immature, immoral, animalistic pig," she declares.

You tell her that it will be necessary for her to change her language about her husband and that you are here to help but not to salve her self-righteous attitude and listen to her ever-increasing charges against her husband.

"Why are you siding with him? I'm the one that belongs to this church!" She breaks into tears.

Why did that session deteriorate into near hopelessness before it had hardly begun? Although most of what the counselor said was probably true, the session turned sour because the counselor took, what I call, the auto mechanic approach to counseling. When someone leaves a car for repair, the mechanic pulls out the shop manual, puts the car through various diagnostic tests, then repairs the problem according to the manual. Some counselors, I fear, treat people this way. They are interested only in finding out what the problem is and what the book says to do about it. Then they

immediately try to fix the problem with little regard to their relationship with the counselee.⁴⁴

The example of counseling that Adams provides in this passage is cruel. Some important elements of counseling are clear (e.g., unchecked anger, unforgiven sin, etc.) but other important elements are completely passed over, for example, issues of suffering and struggle in the life of the counselee. Because of these missing elements the counsel offered is ultimately harsh even when it addresses some true things. This one-sided approach to counseling that only addresses sins and transgressions of the counselee ultimately fails the law of love and so fails at offering counsel that is truly helpful.

Tripp adds to this,

We can focus on the problems and miss the person in the middle of it. Biblical personal ministry certainly includes problem solving, but it must be person-focused. God's work of change certainly involves changes in situation and relationship, but it has radical personal transformation as its goal. When we have a problem focus as we listen to people, we will be like someone at the shooting gallery at the county fair. We will be hunting for problems like they are plastic ducks floating by, and when we hear them, our goal will be to shoot them down. We will listen for a problem word (adultery, doubt, fear, lust, stealing, greed, envy, conflict) and then fire away until we have said everything we know about the Bible's views on the topic. Not only does this do violence to the way God wants his Word to be used, it completely misses the heart struggles of the person with the problem.⁴⁵

Tripp and Mack commend an approach to counseling that deals with problems by engaging the person in the midst of the problem. They recognize that counseling deals with persons experiencing problems and not just problems alone. They point out that counseling must not only address sin but must engage with suffering persons as well. They understand that the Bible not only mandates the truthful content of speech but also

⁴⁴Mack, "A Helping Relationship," 173-74.

⁴⁵Tripp, *Instruments*, 126.

the loving context of speech (Eph 4:15). They emphasize dealing with persons who experience problems rather than addressing problems articulated by persons. They also provide some direction on how to do this.

Counseling That Sees the Counselor As a Fellow Sinner and Sufferer

Adams's counseling methodology which focused on authority in counseling did not address how to engage the counselee as a fellow sinner and sufferer in need of mutual grace. Powlison said, "Adams rarely adopts the stance of fellow sufferer and fellow sinner in need of identical mercy and grace."⁴⁶ Counselees can find in Adams a counselor who understands the biblical theme of sin and who knows how to rebuke, confront, exhort, and point the way forward to biblical change. Not so apparent in Adams's style is a counselor who can identify with the sins and struggles of the counselee.⁴⁷ Not so apparent is the approach commended by Mack,

When we become aware of sin in the counselee's life, we must always remember that we are not immune to sin ourselves; we can fall into it just as easily as anyone else. No one has done anything that we could not do, but for the grace of God. If we keep this in mind we will avoid becoming self-righteous or condescending toward those who sin. Instead, we will reach out to them in compassion . . .⁴⁸

Here, Mack urges humility on the part of the counselor. He reminds that no sin has befallen the counselee except that which is common to counselors (1 Cor 10:13). He

⁴⁶Powlison, review, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, Jude* by Jay E. Adams, 63.

⁴⁷Jay Adams does have an interesting discussion of this topic the early pages of *Ready to Restore* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1981), 7. He acknowledges that we are like those we counsel. The sense, in which he addresses it, however, is different from the second generation. Adams's approach is to say that the next time it might be me who needs one-way admonishment.

⁴⁸Mack, "A Helping Relationship," 179.

reminds of the prideful spirit of the Pharisee that can fall on the counselor who loses sight of this reality. Tripp expands upon the idea,

Our service must not have an “I stand above you as one who has arrived” character. It flows out of a humble recognition that we share an identity with those we serve. God has not completed his work in me, either. We are brothers and sisters in the middle of God’s lifelong process of change. I am not anyone’s guru. Change will not happen simply because someone is exposed to my wisdom and experience. We share identity, we share experience, and we are of the same family.⁴⁹

Tripp and Mack each call counselors to humility in the counseling task urging against the notion that they are somehow above their counselees. Whereas Mack, however, points out the negative reality of not identifying with counselee, Tripp points out the positive benefits of doing so. In fact Tripp argues that this kind of humble-identifying approach is essential to the counseling task for at least three reasons.

First, it appreciates that counselors are being changed in the process of Sanctification just as much as are counselees.⁵⁰ Second, this approach protects against an enmeshment on the part of the counselee where they begin to see the counselor as their source of help instead of God in Christ. Humbly identifying with their sin and suffering will demonstrate that counselors are “works in progress” just as the counselees are.⁵¹ Third, identifying with sin and struggle helps the counselor be an example in the life of the counselee. As long as counselees place counselors on pedestals they will be wary of believing that they can do what counselors do. When, however, they see that counselors

⁴⁹Tripp, *Instruments*, 146.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 146-47.

are sinners and strugglers in need of the same grace, counselees can have hope in the power of God to work in their lives as well.⁵²

Apart from the practical benefits that Tripp mentions, such an approach to counseling methodology also has the benefit of being biblical. Paul says, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Such a passage underlines the common sinfulness and tendency toward temptation that unites all people regardless of whether they occupy the role of counselor or counselee in personal ministry.

Counseling That Addresses Suffering Before Sin

The work done by the second generation of biblical counselors in understanding and identifying with the situation of the counselee has led to a very practical methodological strategy of personal ministry to those who are hurting and struggling. The strategy is to identify and engage the sufferings of counselees before engaging their sin. Mack says,

Consider again the case of Clara. She quickly concluded that her counselor was not sympathetic with her. All she sensed from him was condemnation. He needed to listen to her complaints and concerns before he tried to understand how she felt. Before responding, he could have asked himself, “What would it be like for me to come home to a wife who was wasting all of our money on alcohol? What would it be like to have a wife calling me names, scratching me, and throwing things at me? What would it be like to have a wife who didn’t care about what I thought or what I said? What would it be like for me to come home and find my wife in my bed with another man? How would I feel? What emotions would I be experiencing?” This is where the counseling must start. And although the sin problems must be addressed and solved, in most cases, effective counseling cannot occur until the

⁵²Ibid., 147.

counselor has shown the counselee the compassion of Christ by identifying with his or her struggles.⁵³

Writing in this same vein, Tripp discusses the idea of “entry gates.”⁵⁴ Entry gates are the doors in which counselors enter to go to a deeper level of ministry. Tripp argues that entry gates consist of the struggles that the counselee is facing in their life at the moment. In the midst of this discussion, Tripp poses the counseling problem of a woman who awakens in the night to find her husband gone. He has taken most of their possessions, and cleared out the bank account. Tripp considers what the greatest struggle is for such a woman and concludes the answer is fear. He says,

Fear is the most significant heart issue at this moment. It is where the war is taking place and where your ministry begins. This woman would not be helped by a recap of all the Bible has to say about marriage and divorce. If that’s all you offer, you will likely lose future opportunity to help her. . . . Helping her face her fears gives you a wonderful opportunity to show love and build a ministry relationship. When we speak to people’s real struggles, they respond, this person has heard me. This person understands me. I want more of this kind of help. This is the power of a loving relationship.⁵⁵

Tripp’s point here is that counselors will not be effective ministers of the Word until they engage their counselees in their struggles before engaging their sin. It is this approach that will gain respect and trust, will prove love, and will earn the opportunity of a further hearing.

⁵³Mack, “A Helping Relationship,” 178.

⁵⁴Tripp, *Instruments*, 126-27.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 127-28.

Conclusion

In sum, the second generation of biblical counselors are urging those who practice personal ministry to avoid the error of Job's counselors. These counselors had a monolithic view of Job as a sinner. They ministered to Job in a static and ultimately unhelpful way. Their counsel failed because they did not identify with Job as a sufferer or seek to minister to him in that way.

The counseling methodology of Adams provided necessary correction to the counseling models that were dominant at the time. However, it appears that Adams did over-correct so that his own model neglected important areas of the counseling relationship. This development has occurred in the work of biblical counselors over the last twenty years.

Such development has been critical. Early in this chapter Adams was quoted saying, in part,

Methodology and practice plainly reveal what is truly central to a theory. . . . What is considered truly operative (regardless of rhetoric or theoretical trappings) will find its way into the basic everyday methodology of a practitioner. . . . What one does for his client in counseling or therapy most pointedly shows what he believes the client's real problem to be. Methodology then is where it's at.⁵⁶

Adams's statement here is true and what can be learned from it about Adams's own theory could not be more relevant. Adams's lack of development in understanding the situation of the counselee (chapter 3) had implications in Adams's own treatment of counselees. Adams's counseling methodology was in need of development because Adams's understanding of counseling concepts was in need of development. Counseling concepts always effect counseling methodology and the biblical counseling movement

⁵⁶Adams, *Shepherding*, 159.

can be as thankful for Adams's work in the creation of counseling concepts and methodology as they are in the development of them to be more biblical.

CHAPTER 4
THE APOLOGETIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL
COUNSELING MOVEMENT

Introduction

The discipline of apologetics is a varied but indispensable field. It has mainly to do with making an argument for one's own position and defending it against attack from the positions of others. Apologetics is necessary in philosophy and Christian theology, and, as shall be seen, in counseling. The biblical counseling movement does not exist in a vacuum but instead in the context of numerous other models for understanding people and helping to solve their problems in living. It is just as necessary for biblical counselors to articulate and defend their model in a marketplace of other counseling options as it is for Christians generally to defend their faith in a religiously syncretistic society. David Powlison has said,

A model gives a standpoint from which to interact with others. We make the case for what we believe is true and good. We subject competing models to systematic questioning. We defend our own model against critics. We develop our model under the stimulus of criticisms by others. We seek to win others.¹

Powlison is talking about the nature and necessity of apologetics in the biblical counseling movement. But there has been a problem. The biblical counseling movement has been a relatively insular movement. Biblical

¹David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 6.

counselors have articulated a model to be sure. They have also engaged in substantial critiques of competing models.² The problem is that, for the most part, as biblical counselors have engaged in this work of articulation, defense, and critique they have been largely speaking to themselves in their books, journals, and conferences. In what follows, it will be important to observe the biblical counseling movement's effort at apologetic engagement and see how that engagement developed from the work of Jay Adams to the present day.

Eight Apologetic Moments

It is possible discuss eight apologetic moments in the life of the biblical counseling movement. This work will only consider those published efforts at engagement where biblical counselors have sought to defend their model and critique other models *to those* with whom they disagree.³ As has been the case with every area examined, this apologetic work began with Adams's efforts but has developed beyond his initial work as well. As this development is examined the great need for more work in the area of apologetic engagement will become clear.

²There have been many efforts at this, but several noteworthy examples include Powlison, *Seeing*, 171-252. Douglas Bookman, "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur Jr. and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 63-97. Ed Hinson and Howard Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient* (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2004). Alfred J. Poirier, "Taking up the Challenge," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 18, no. 1 (1999): 30-37. David Powlison "Critiquing Modern Integrationists," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (1993): 24-34.

³The many occasions where this work has been done "in-house" (see previous note for examples) will not be considered here. Those occasions where Adams presented his model to various schools in the context of lectureships are also not considered here. See Jay Adams, *The Big Umbrella* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972).

Beginning the Apologetic Task

When Adams wrote the *Christian Counselor's Manual* he began saying,

If . . . I should at places seem brash or appear to take too much for granted it is probably because I have tried to use bold strokes and vivid colors. After all, I am writing this book for my friends; for those who so enthusiastically responded to my previous efforts. I am not trying to sell anyone here; this is an instruction manual intended principally for those who have already bought the product and wish to make the most effective use of it. The apologetic and polemic notes, therefore, largely will be absent.⁴

These words were specifically penned to introduce Adams's work on methodology but there is something about them that rings true for Adams's entire ministry. Adams was mainly concerned to talk to those with whom he agreed. He was trying to build a model and pass it to those who would use it in local churches. He was not, primarily, trying to defend that model. Powlison observed this point when said, "Another noteworthy feature [of the counseling model founded by Adams is that little direct confrontation occurred between Adams and those theoreticians and institutions he opposed."⁵

This reality does not mean that Adams never engaged those outside his own movement.⁶ Indeed he did. In fact, the first five moments of apologetic engagement examined here involve Adams. It is necessary to examine those moments presently.

The airport meeting. The movement's first recorded effort at apologetic

⁴Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), xiii.

⁵David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Glenside, PA: Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1996), 8.

⁶*Ibid.*, 8-9 for further comments on this.

engagement happened between a small group of integrationists and Adams.⁷ The meeting took place at the International Airport Motel in Philadelphia on March 20-21, 1969.⁸ The National Liberty Foundation had given Adams funds towards the completion of *Competent to Counsel* and was interested in sponsoring a meeting with others for the purpose of evaluating Adams's work. Bruce Narramore from Narramore Christian Foundation and Donald Tweedie from Fuller Theological Seminary's Graduate School of Psychology were among those present to review Adams's work.⁹ The participants had been issued copies of the rough draft and presented their reactions to the book at the gathering. Though the participants at the meeting commended Adams for an attempt at constructing an orthodox model of counseling growing out of Scripture the response to his work was generally negative. Powlison records,

They charged him with diverse and serious failings. His version of presuppositional biblical counseling tended to be "biblicistic," and failed various particular tests of both Scripture and science. His model was superficial and simplistic in addressing the complexities of both the human psyche and the counseling task. They thought Adams guilty of at least an incipient legalism-moralism and compromised the graciousness of God's acceptance of people. He neglected motivational issues in the interests of stressing behavioral change. His ideal counselor projected an aggressive, impatient, and business-like stance towards counselees, rather than communicating a caring patient presence. His discussion failed to comprehend

⁷No attempt has been made in this project to lay out in a systematic way the positions of other Christian approaches to counseling. Suffice it to say here that the integration movement seeks to help people with their problems by using the Bible as a screen to filter meaningful material from secular psychology into one consistent, Christian model of people-helping. For fuller articulations, see Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 17-38.

⁸The information about this event is taken exclusively from Powlison, *Competent to Counsel?*, 86-88.

⁹Others in attendance included Maurice Wagner, William Donaldson, Fred Donehoo, Paul Walder, and Vernon Grounds.

other theoretical positions, and so misrepresented those he attacked. He failed to recognize the extent of Mowrer's heritage implicit in nouthetic counseling. His arguments were framed too polemically, and he had oversold the success of nouthetic counseling making unsubstantiated claims.¹⁰

In spite of such withering criticism, the meeting encouraged Adams because his central thesis that the Bible was sufficient for counseling had not been shaken. The first effort at engagement by a biblical counselor resulted in a generally critical view of the movement from outsiders but served to hearten Adams nonetheless.

The Krisheim symposium. Almost exactly ten years after the airport meeting, Adams met again with leaders in the integration movement.¹¹ John Bettler, Adams's close friend and co-laborer at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) arranged the meeting. Bettler was concerned that in the intervening decade a failure of the two groups to engage with one another was resulting in a failure of the groups to understand one another. Bettler was also concerned that without engaging other views the nouthetic movement would be marginalized and have no platform from which to engage the broader evangelical and academic community. The meeting, held March 7-8, 1979, where the participants were to debate "What is Biblical Counseling?" was hoped by Bettler to be an attempt at bridge-building.

Adams and Henry Brandt represented biblical counseling at the symposium. Bruce Narramore, John Carter, Gary Collins, and Larry Crabb—all significant leaders in their movement, represented the integration position. Debate at the conference quickly

¹⁰Powlison, *Competent to Counsel?*, 87.

¹¹The information from this event is chronicled by Powlison, *Competent to Counsel?*, 123-32.

coalesced around three issues. The first issue concerned the nature of sin, the second concerned the authority of Scripture and its relationship to secular psychology, and the third regarded that nature of the counseling relationship. The participants managed to reach broad agreement on the first issue and were divided about the other two.

What is important to understand here, however, is not the details of the debate but the result of the Krisheim symposium.¹² The result of the Krisheim symposium was not the hoped-for bridge building but rather more sustained division. The integrationists were deeply put off by Adams's vociferous tone during the debate. Carter, Narramore, and Crabb each expressed their total unwillingness to speak to Adams again because of his "irascible and sectarian" tone.¹³

Adams, for his part, was also disgusted by the event and had no desire to speak again to the integrationists. Powlison captures the division when he writes,

Bettler had come with high hopes. But his hope for a nouthetic counseling come into its intellectual maturity, engaging the wider evangelical counseling world, a party in significant dialogue, able to be both sharpened and to sharpen others, was dashed. Adams was a proclaimer of truth who endured but did not enjoy forums such as Krisheim. He was one to convert others, not one to converse with them. He was not one to listen quietly to those he suspected of using Bible words to pull secular wool over the eyes of the church. The Krisheim conference confirmed in Adams's mind that the evangelical psychologists promoted serious conceptual, methodological, and institutional errors dressed up in Bible words. He had come to Krisheim at Bettler's urging, having previously stated that he was not interested in dialogue with "the self-styled 'professionals.'" . . . [After Krisheim], he would never again dialogue with them.¹⁴

¹²Powlison explains the fault lines with some detail see *Competent to Counsel?*, 126-29.

¹³Ibid., 130.

¹⁴Ibid.

The Krisheim symposium had a devastating effect on the apologetic engagement of the biblical counseling movement. An interpersonal rift divided the leaders of the biblical counseling movement from the integrationists. Even with the extreme difficulty flowing from Krisheim Adams would still have one more opportunity, however, to address integrationists directly.

The Congress on Christian Counseling. In November of 1988, Gary Collins arranged a gathering of thousands of integrationists in Atlanta, Georgia. This gathering presented Adams with a plaque for his “pioneering” work in Christian counseling. In accepting the plaque, Adams gave remarks that he made clear were to provide an explanation as well as offering an invitation.

First, the explanation. Contrary to what you may think, I have not spent the last fifteen to twenty years trying to refute (or even irritate) so called Christian professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists) like yourselves. Had I intended to do so, I assure you I would have done a better job of it! No, I have not had you in mind. My efforts solely have been to help pastors who, according to II Timothy 3:17, are God’s professionals. That’s why the approaches and arguments in my writings are not tailored to you. Rather I designed them to expose to pastors the futility and dangers of attempting to integrate pagan thought and biblical truth. Moreover, while these negative measures are necessary to alert and inform pastors, my work is fundamentally positive.¹⁵

Adams thus made it clear that his effort was not fundamentally an apologetic one at all. His goal, as has been observed, was to develop a model that could be given to the pastors of local churches. He further indicated here that he was not trying to tear down the integration movement at all but instead was attempting to build the biblical

¹⁵Jay Adams’s, “Response to the Congress on Christian Counseling,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 10, no. 1 (1989): 3.

counseling movement. He would go on to state that when he offered criticism, he was critiquing ideas and not persons.¹⁶

Adams continued,

So much for the explanation; now, the invitation. With all that is within me I urge you to give up the fruitless task to which I alluded: the attempt to integrate pagan thought and biblical truth. In his latest book Gary Collins admits, "It's too early to answer decisively if psychology and Christianity can be integrated." Too early? Think of the millions of hours, the more than one generation of lives, already spent on this hopeless task! Why are there no results? I'll tell you why: because it just can't be done.

Remember God's words: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). What does God tell us to do to resolve this radical antithesis? Integrate? No! In that passage He commands us to forsake our thoughts and our ways and turn to His Word, which He promises will not return void.

Counseling has to do with changing people. But, you see, that's God's business. There are only two ways to change people: God's way and all others.

You simply can't build a Christian counseling system on a pagan base; nor can you incorporate pagan teachings and methods into Christian counseling. Pagan thoughts and ways are at odds with God's. God proposes to produce fruit (love, joy, peace, self-control, etc.) by means of His Spirit through His Word. Then others come along and claim they can produce love, joy, and peace apart from the Spirit and the Word. The two proposals and the methods that go with them are essentially competitive. That's why they can't be integrated. If the Old Testament teaches anything, it's this: God doesn't bless His competition. That's why integration won't work.

I invite you to abandon this useless endeavor. Instead, come join the growing number of those who are discovering that the way to construct a truly Christian counseling system is to begin with the biblical blueprints, use biblical brick and mortar, and find Christian workmen to construct it from the ground up. Steer clear of the 'me too' approaches of those Christians who emulate the world. Rather get out in front of the pack, showing the world what God by biblical counseling can do!¹⁷

In the same address Adams, ironically, managed to say it was not his business to do apologetics while engaging a body of adversaries in language that was pugnacious.

Adams's language at the congress would only serve to exacerbate his bombastic

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 3-4.

reputation with Christians outside of the biblical counseling movement. It would be twelve years before any more engagement would take place with integrationists.

Such bombast characterized Adams's engagement with Christian psychological professionals. Adams's efforts at apologetic engagement, however, were not limited to integrationists alone. Adams made a few efforts at engaging the secular world as well. Those efforts must now be examined.

The Christian approach to schizophrenia. In 1976 Adams was asked to contribute to a book entitled, *The Construction of Madness: Emerging Conceptions and Interventions into the Psychotic Process*. Edited by Peter Magaro the book included the views of contributors attempting to express various conceptualizations of schizophrenia. In introducing Adams's chapter Magaro said,

The positions expressed are not common themes in the current therapeutic discourse, but they stem from a focus of interest which has wielded a powerful influence throughout time—that of morality. . . . Making the spiritual explicit and bringing it into a relationship between treater and treatee is [Adams's] vision of the answer of what is commonly thought of as pathology. . . . [Adams's sincerity of belief] and his efforts to incorporate those beliefs into the usual conception of therapy deserves serious attention.¹⁸

Adams was asked to explain schizophrenia according to a Christian understanding, which he did in "The Christian Approach to Schizophrenia." In his contribution to this volume Adams demonstrated his usual clarity.

¹⁸Peter A. Magaro, *The Construction of Madness* (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon, 1976), x. Magaro had asked Kenneth Lux to contribute a "Mystical-Occult" understanding of schizophrenia and included this in the same "Spiritual" category as Adams. Magaro's words in this citation were intended to introduce both positions even though they bear no resemblance to one another.

The truth of the matter seems to be that the word “schizophrenia” has become a non-specific wastebasket term covering a multitude of problems (and often covering up a vast amount of ignorance) all of which appear to have but one common denominator: the inability of the counselee to function meaningfully in society because of bizarre behavior.¹⁹

Adams then went on to give the Christian understanding for this bizarre behavior saying,

As Christians look at it, the [schizophrenic] is a sinner, who, according to the Bible, has been subjected by God to vanity because of his rebellion against his Creator.

Sin, the violation of God’s law, has both direct and indirect consequences that account for all of the bizarre behavior of schizophrenics.²⁰

Adams went on to lay out how Christians should deal with schizophrenics.

The Christian counselor seeks to deal with schizophrenia in the same manner as he would in confronting those who have other problems occasioned by sinful living patterns. In this large measure of responsibility lies hope. What is due [to] sin can be changed; there is no such certainty if, as some think, schizophrenia is largely due to other factors.²¹

Adams clearly stated his usual themes here. Even “extreme” cases like schizophrenia traffic in the same themes of sin and responsibility that were the staples of Adams’s biblical model. Adams thus gave a faithful presentation of his counseling model in a secular context but with one major change. The edge was gone. The brisk edginess that characterized his engagement with integrationists was not present. Adams’s tone was much more patient and winsome. Adams would repeat this style in his other recorded engagement with secular psychologists.

¹⁹Jay Adams, “The Christian Approach to Schizophrenia,” in *The Construction of Madness* (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon, 1976), 133.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 136-37.

²¹*Ibid.*, 141. Adams said more about engaging schizophrenics in the pages that follow but the point here is that Adams dealt with an extreme case like schizophrenia according to his characteristic understanding of sin and responsibility.

Address to the University Psychiatric Clinic. In 1977, Adams was invited to address the faculty and students at the University Psychiatric Clinic in Vienna, Austria. In a sense, Adams's audience could not have been more unfriendly. He was an American, conservative protestant who believed that the secular mental health field was bankrupt in its ability to give ultimate help to people's problems in living. His audience was the secular mental health establishment that he opposed. In this context, Adams's rhetorical strategy to his audience is fascinating. There are at least three things to observe.

First, Adams began by creating a sense of doubt in hearers. Did secular mental health professionals truly have the resources to help hurting people with their problems in living? He raised three issues in order to suggest that they possibly did not including the vast number of different and competing personality theories,²² embarrassing "therapeutic failures,"²³ and pointing out the need for a standard.²⁴ Adams spent the most time addressing this last point of the need for a standard in helping people. Adams said,

Asking the question why there has been no consensus, particularly in this field in which people are trying to change the lives of other persons, many of us came to the conclusion that it was because there has been no standard by which this was attempted. You may say that society is the standard, or you may say pragmatically that what works is the standard, or that the counselee is the standard; but when you finally boil it all down and strip off the external, what you have left is this: the individual psychotherapist determines the standard. The problem of subjectivity is enormous. Something from outside of the counselor and counselee is needed; something far more solidly grounded than any limited and biased individual is

²²Jay Adams, "Change Them? . . . Into What?," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 13.

²³*Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 15-16.

required. Otherwise, the kind of splits and divisions that occurred at the very beginning right here with Freud are inevitable. . . . Why do we need a standard, a yardstick, a rule? Because we are dealing with the problem of changing human lives. What man has the right or the ability to say to another, "I know how you shall live"? What man will take it upon himself to say, "This is wrong in your life, this is right in your life, and this is how I want to change you"? Some think they can divorce themselves from the ethical issues. They think that values can be cast aside. But you can't; you continually get involved in the realm of values when you deal with people and their lives.²⁵

Second, Adams described to them the elements of his biblical counseling model. He described Jesus Christ as the standard that is so absent from other approaches to people-helping.²⁶ Additionally, he presented three key tenets of his model including the responsibility of the counselee, the verbal confrontation necessary to engage them, and the concern for the well being of the counselee.²⁷

A final element to observe about Adams's speech was the careful way he stated his remarks and the patient way he asked his audience to consider them. Adams said,

I want to do one thing here tonight. As an advocate (a very strong advocate) of this viewpoint, I have something to give to each one of you, and I hope you'll take it. I'm here to hand out some candy to each of you. This candy is not soft enough to swallow all at one, nor it is so brittle that you can bite down on it and crack it readily. I hope that it will be like good hard candy that you take into your mouth and that you'll suck on it for awhile when you leave.²⁸

Adams thus very eloquently and graphically asked them to consider his opinion in a prudent and patient manner. Adams concluded his remarks saying,

²⁵Ibid., 15.

²⁶Ibid., 16.

²⁷Ibid., 16-17.

²⁸Ibid., 16.

That is a glimpse of nouthetic counseling. Doubtless some of you have spit the candy out already. Some of the rest of you are having a little difficulty with it sticking to your teeth. Nevertheless, I hope that you will continue to suck on it because when you deal with that question of the standard, you're dealing with the fundamental issue in counseling. Only their Creator and Savior can resolve problems that have to do with people ultimately.

If you think seriously at all, after you've talked about everything else you will come back again and again to the issue of the standard. I ask you not to close the door on this matter too quickly. Until it is resolved you can do nothing. You are planning to help people; fine. But that means changing them. The question is not only how, but, most basically, into what? The Christian replies, "Into the likeness of Jesus Christ." Is there any other answer?

Thank you so much. You've been a deeply attentive group, and I appreciate it.²⁹

Adams's words here and in his contribution to thinking on schizophrenia demonstrate a much milder, more irenic tone than he displayed in his interactions with integrationists. Perhaps Adams was more patient with secularists because his Reformed tradition did not expect unregenerate persons to believe and behave differently than they did. On the other hand, he apparently had little time for Christians who should know better than to incorporate false teaching into the church. It is this understanding that apparently accounts for Adams's increased ire towards the Christian psychology professionals.

The preceding five moments of engagement by Adams have been arranged thematically. First Adams's apologetic engagement with integrationists was considered, then his engagement with secular thinkers. Looked at chronologically, Adams engaged a small group of integrationists near the founding of his movement in 1969 at the airport meeting. He interacted with secular thinkers towards the end of the 1970's. In 1979, he once again attempted dialogue with integrationists during the fateful meeting at Krisheim.

²⁹Ibid., 17.

Finally, Adams delivered his firm remarks at the Congress on Christian Counseling in 1988.

Developing the Apologetic Task

Now it is important to turn and see what efforts at apologetic engagement have transpired since 1988. In his “Crucial Issues” article, Powlison urged biblical counselors to broaden the horizons of those to whom they spoke. He said,

Biblical counseling must cultivate other audiences. We need to do so for our own edification as a truly biblical movement. We need to do so in order to edify others with what God has given us.³⁰

The more recent leadership in the biblical counseling movement has tried to follow this advice. Just as five published efforts at engagement with those outside the movement by Adams were isolated, it is possible to note three efforts by more recent biblical counselors.

Address at Hahnemann University. In 1995 JBC published the address of Edward Welch to doctoral students in clinical psychology at Hahnemann University. This opportunity, like Adams’s address in Vienna, was an occasion to speak directly to those in the secular mental health community. Also, like Adams’s engagement with secular psychologists, Welch’s words in this address were a demonstration of gracious

³⁰David Powlison, “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 70. Powlison pointed out that one particularly relevant new audience would be Christian academics. This point will be discussed below. His statement, however, would also be relevant for the opening up of new doors with integrationists and secular thinkers.

candor. There was no bombast in Welch's statement, but there was a demonstration of frankness.

Welch asked his hearers to consider four propositions regarding their discipline. First, Welch argued that psychologists are essentially clergy doing pastoral work from a secular worldview.³¹ Second, Welch said that psychological professionals do their work based off a worldview that is theoretical and, therefore, not verifiable. Their discipline is more one of faith, he argued than purely scientific.³² Third, Welch stated that secular mental-health positions most typical adopt their worldview (or faith) commitments in an uncritical way.³³ Finally, Welch urged, psychotherapists are looking to win converts as they engage in their work of people helping.³⁴ Welch ended his address by stating that though the Christian worldview begins with and takes God into consideration, it still speaks with profundity to issues of concern to modern psychology.³⁵ Indeed, he argued, that Christianity makes better sense of the psychological than secularist material and that psychological realities ultimately are nonsensical apart from Christian thought.³⁶

As has been observed, Welch spoke respectfully to his audience at Hahnemann. And yet, as true as that is, Welch's remarks in many ways were more stringent and

³¹Edward Welch, "A Discussion among Clergy: Pastoral Counseling Talks with Secular Psychology," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 23-24.

³²*Ibid.*, 24-25.

³³*Ibid.*, 25-27.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 29-31.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 31-34.

confrontational than Adams's remarks in a similar context. The clearest example of this is that where Adams asked his audience to mull and consider his claims—as with a piece of hard candy, Welch ended his address by calling his audience to repentance. Welch said,

This seems like a strange way to end a somewhat academic discussion. What began as some simple propositions led to something interpersonal. Abstract questions about knowledge have led to the very concrete. Essentially, the question throughout has been, “In whom will you trust?” It is inescapable. Our knowledge is ultimately a very personal knowledge. Will you trust in the God who has spoken, or will you trust in yourself and some of the cultural icons that provide little scraps of meaning?³⁷

Welch and Adams then share a lot in common regarding their styles of engagement with secular people-helpers. They are each kind, winsome, and respectful. Both are also firm believers in the truthfulness of the biblical counseling movement and in the futility of secular approaches. Development, however, does still take place from Adams to Welch and the development is chiefly historical. By the time Welch's address was published, it had been 18 years since biblical counselors went on record engaging in face-to-face discussions with secularists. Welch's address demonstrates that the biblical counseling movement was, once again, willing to take up the challenge of engagement.

The four views book. In 2000 Eric Johnson and Stanton Jones edited *Psychology and Christianity*, which examined four Christian approaches to psychology. David G. Myers represented the levels-of explanation approach, Gary Collins represented integration, Robert Roberts represented Christian psychology, and David Powlison represented the biblical counseling movement. There had been no record of such an

³⁷Ibid., 34.

interaction since the Krisheim symposium ended in a bitter statement in 1979. Each representative contributed a chapter outlining their own view and then issued responses to the chapters of the other authors.

Powlison's presentation of the biblical counseling movement articulated the kind of frankness that Adams and Welch had previously demonstrated. Powlison candidly stated,

We Christians have a distinctive and comprehensive point of view about our souls and the cure for what ails us. God's view of our psychology and his call to psychotherapeutic intervention differ essentially and pervasively from both the theories and therapies that have dominated psychological discourse and practice in the twentieth century.³⁸

Powlison's conviction regarding the sufficiency of Scripture and the fallaciousness of secular models comes out on nearly every page of his essay. There is no effort on Powlison's part to equivocate on his convictions or hedge on the issues at stake.³⁹

Powlison even issues a call to repentance saying, "When the Faith meets the psychologies, we must lead with our own psychology, calling all others to repentance."⁴⁰

In his responses to the other presenters, Powlison offered candid critique.⁴¹ He

³⁸David Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling View," in *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 197.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-01; 203-04; 208-09; 210; 213; 214; 216; 221; 222.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 224. Notably, Powlison uses a plural noun when referring to psychology. In fact, this is one of the hallmarks of his essay distinguishing between psychology (singular) and six different *psychologies* (plural), though the purpose here is not to spell out each of those.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 97-101, 144-46.

also, however, was kind and gracious freely admitting the strengths of other views.⁴²

Powlison also expressed common cause with the contributors in a number of areas.⁴³

Finally, he was able frankly to admit weaknesses in his own model.⁴⁴ The balanced approach presented by Powlison fiercely contends for the truthfulness and accuracy of his own view without being triumphalistic, divisive, and unkind toward interlocutors.

Likewise as the other contributors interacted with Powlison's work they found cause to commend him⁴⁵ and—as must happen in multi-views books—critique as well.⁴⁶

Perhaps the most interesting pair of comments, however, came from Myers and Collins.

In responding to Powlison, Myers scolded,

Whatever Powlison takes “secular psychology” to be, this much is clear: it is bad. He represents, I infer, what Gary Collins describes as the Jay Adams tradition of “vehement attacks on psychology.” Psychology, we are told, drains away the “lifeblood of humanness . . . leaving a figment, a beast, an automaton, a humanoid, a counterfeit, a corpse.” For those of us who have not previously encountered the Jay Adams tradition, these “psychophobic” words (Collins's phrase) will be puzzling.⁴⁷

⁴²Ibid., 96; 98-99; 141-43; 190-91.

⁴³Ibid., 146-47, 190, 192.

⁴⁴Ibid., 192-93.

⁴⁵Gary R. Collins, “An Integration Response,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 232, 234. Robert C. Roberts, “A Christian Psychology Response,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 238-39, 242.

⁴⁶David G. Myers, “A Levels-of-Explanation Response,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 226-31.

⁴⁷Myers, “A Levels-of-Explanation Response,” 227. It is worth noting that Myers actually quoted Powlison out of context. Powlison's point in the quotation is that when the God-referential aspect of humans is taken away (i.e., the lifeblood of humanness) then they are left as a figment, beast, and so on. Powlison was saying that to the extent that

A few pages later, however, Collins comments on Powlison saying,

Not long ago I found myself seated next to David Powlison at a luncheon for Christian counselors. I was reminded again what a pleasant person he is—gracious and friendly. He and his associates represent a new generation that has come out of the nouthetic-counseling tradition. These are people who retain their strong and admirable commitment to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture but who are more gentle and less abrasive than some of their predecessors.⁴⁸

For Myers who had no exposure to Adams, Powlison's argument sounded ignorant, vehement, and psychophobic. For people with a basis for judgment, however, like Collins (who had been present at Krisheim and the College of Christian Counselors) there had been a clear shift in the tone of biblical counselors towards outsiders. Indeed, a new day had dawned. There had been significant development concerning apologetic engagement of the biblical counseling movement. Disagreements aside, for the first time in nearly a quarter of century, biblical counselors were once again talking to those in the larger Christian counseling world.

McMinn and Phillips, *Care for the Soul*. After a 21-year gap in the counseling conversation between integrationists and biblical counselors, one year seemed a brief turn-around for another collaboration. That is how long it took though for Powlison to contribute to another counseling volume. In 2001, Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips edited *Care for the Soul*, which was to be an attempt to explore the intersection of psychology and theology. In demonstrating the accomplishment of having a biblical counselor included in the book, the editors spent more time in the introduction than

psychology (or anything else) takes God away they are removing the most important element of a human being. In other words, Powlison's point was more nuanced and careful than it appears in the Myers reference.

⁴⁸Collins, "An Integration Response," 232.

anything else on the rift between the movement they represent and biblical counseling.

They said,

As uncommon as it is to bring psychologists and theologians together for a book such as this, it is even less common to bring together biblical counselors and Christian psychologists. Since the publication of the seminal works of Jay Adams on the one hand, and Gary Collins, John Carter and Bruce Narramore on the other, biblical counseling has stood apart from Christian psychology. Each approach has its own training institutions and regimens, leaders in the two fields have often been critical of one another (fairly and unfairly), and each group has sometimes resorted to hyperbole when describing the other. Some biblical counselors have misrepresented Christian psychologists by asserting that they uncritically accept the worldview assumptions implicit in contemporary psychological theories. Some Christian psychologists have misrepresented biblical counselors by accusing them of holding a simplistic view of sin. . . . Given this heritage of disagreement and conflict, it is a monumental step forward to have both groups represented among the contributors of this volume.⁴⁹

In Powlison's chapter he defended the biblical counseling movement and critiqued those outside of it. In this sense he did—in a new and freshly relevant way—what his predecessors had done. Powlison, however, accomplished more than mere engagement in his chapter. He also did something that had never been done before by those in the counseling movement. He provided priorities for engagement. It had been common for biblical counselors, while expressing the sufficiency of Scripture, to state that psychology still maintains *some* value.⁵⁰ Powlison was the first biblical counselor to give definition to what this value might be. Powlison outlined three epistemological priorities. The first priority Powlison describes as, “Articulating biblical truth and

⁴⁹Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips, “Introduction: Psychology, Theology & Care for the Soul,” in *Care for the Soul*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 12-13.

⁵⁰See various discussions in chap. 2.

developing our systematic theology of care for the soul.”⁵¹ The second priority is to engage in “Exposing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models.”⁵² Finally, Powlison says the third priority should be, “Learning what we can from other models.”⁵³

These priorities could be alliterated as construct, confront, and consider.

According to Powlison, biblical counselors must be concerned in a primary way to *construct* a biblical model of helping people with their problems in living. This means that there is no principal necessity on the part of Christians to learn from or borrow from other, conflicting models of people-helping. In a secondary way, biblical counselors should *confront* secular models of people-helping. Because secular models ultimately fail to understand people and offer help that is devoid of Christ and his Word they will be fundamentally wrong. This means Christians have a responsibility to point out those areas where they are wrong and show a better way. In a tertiary way, biblical counselors should *consider* what there is to learn from alternative models. Because of the doctrine of common grace unbelievers can comprehend true information, ask significant questions, and can critique (explicitly or implicitly) the church’s failure.⁵⁴ Also, even the most incorrect secular theories understand some things correctly which give them a ring

⁵¹David Powlison, “Questions at the Crossroads: The Care of Souls & Modern Psychotherapies,” in *Care for the Soul*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 14.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 15.

⁵⁴This is true even though it must be balanced with a biblical understanding of the noetic effects of sin, which will mean that even truthful apprehensions will have the taint of sin.

of truth. Because of this reality, biblical counselors can listen to secularists and be provoked in their efforts to strengthen a biblical understanding of people.

This contribution of Powlison is an important one because as he is engaging in apologetics he provides an apologetic.⁵⁵ That is, for the first time biblical counselors had been given a system to process and engage with alternative models.

The Way Forward on Apologetic Engagement

Though there has been apologetic development, there is still room for more.⁵⁶ The Biblical counseling movement has still continued to spend a great deal of time talking to itself. There may be legitimate reasons for this⁵⁷ but biblical counselors must be ever vigilant to develop ways to engage other counseling positions and, in the process, maintain their own as a viable intellectual movement. As the biblical counseling movement seeks to expand its frontiers, reach a lost world, and engage with other

⁵⁵This also touches on another of Powlison's proposed crucial issues. His sixth crucial issue was that the relationship between secular psychology needed to be publicly clarified. He said, "Perhaps it seems a paradox, but the final crucial issue for contemporary biblical counseling is the need to define more clearly the nuances in our relationship to secular thinking. . . . Biblical counseling has never developed in any detail what the properly constructed relationship would look like or do." David Powlison, "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 74. Powlison went on to sketch out some basic contours (p. 75) but these sketches were presented in an apologetic context for the first time in the *Care for Souls* project.

⁵⁶If it is any indicator that it has been eight years since a similar engagement then this is especially the case. Although David Powlison did sit on a panel in May where he engaged with Eric Johnson, a Christian Psychologist. This panel, however, happened too late for inclusion in this project.

⁵⁷See discussion below.

Christians who hold opposing counseling positions there are two specific areas that must be considered. These areas are the professorate and the pastorate.

The Professorate

One specific audience that Powlison suggested the biblical counseling movement begin to address was academics in institutions of higher learning. He stated,

I would like to propose one particular audience into which biblical counseling must be contextualized. We need to speak with Christian academics. We have barely begun to generate meaningful dialogue with faculty and students in Christian colleges and seminaries.⁵⁸

Powlison was correct and his call has been heeded to a certain extent. During the first twenty years of the biblical counseling movement, the only institution that had an explicit commitment to biblical counseling was Westminster Seminary. During these last twenty years there has been ground taken. A number of institutions, including Master's Seminary, Southeastern Seminary, Southwestern Seminary, and Southern Seminary now have full-time faculty teaching biblical counseling courses. Such advances are important since professors at those (and other) institutions will provide an intellectual foundation for biblical counseling and, perhaps most importantly, train the pastors that go out to the churches.

If the biblical counseling movement is to expand it will be necessary for those in the movement called to the academy to take—as part of their calling—the effort to engage with those who hold different views on counseling. This can be done through scholarship, as counseling professors contribute to journals, conferences, and write books that show the intellectual foundation of a movement committed to the sufficiency of

⁵⁸Powlison, “Crucial Issues,” 70.

Scripture. This engagement can also happen through relationship. Powlison made a striking comment about the division that occurred at Krisheim when he said, “The intellectual and institutional rift had been ratified interpersonally.”⁵⁹ Biblical counselors—especially those in the academy—should increasingly seek to practice what they preach regarding their theology of relationships (see chapter four) by engaging in loving relationships with those to their theological left in counseling.

The Pastorate

Meanwhile, those called to the pastoral ministry must continue to heed the call that they are competent to counsel. They must counsel and they must lead, train, and exhort their flocks to counsel.⁶⁰ This local church ministry of the pastorate is the front line of biblical personal ministry. People that come for biblical counseling ultimately do not care what the arguments for sufficiency are or whether a biblical counselor utilizes proper epistemological categories. People care whether or not the counselor in the room can help them with their problems. If pastors can attain and impart increased facility in counseling there will be no more effective means to spread a biblical counseling vision.

One excellent example of this is the biblical counseling ministry of Faith Baptist Church in Lafayette, Indiana.⁶¹ Begun by William Goode and Bob Smith, and continuing under the current leadership of Steve Viars, Faith Baptist Church is an example of how

⁵⁹Powlison, *Competent to Counsel?*, 131.

⁶⁰This was part of Adams’s burden when he wrote *Shepherding God’s Flock*. Jay Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 159-313.

⁶¹Internet. <http://www.faithlafayette.html>. May 10, 2009. Information about this was taken from the Faith Baptist Church website and from their strategic ministry plan that is available for download on that site.

effective a biblical counseling ministry can be in reaching a community for Christ. Leaders in the church have counseled thousands of people in the community during their weekly ministry. They are establishing counseling outreach centers at Purdue University, opening up new ministry centers for use by the community in Lafayette, and building facilities to contain men's, women's, and foster-child counseling ministries. Their program of ministry has been so effective that secular mental health practitioners now regularly refer hurting persons to this Baptist church because they know they will be helped! Such is the power of a biblical counseling ministry that is matched with effective leadership and engagement with the enviroing culture.

Another option for engagement that should be considered by local churches is the sending of counseling missionaries into secular mental health facilities. For those with such a calling, giftedness, and sufficient skills in biblical counseling they could pursue secular education and credentials under the leadership of their pastors in their local church. The leadership of the church is important for at least two reasons. First, it is the responsibility of the church to ordain and call out its ministers. Those interested in counseling (i.e., personal ministry of the word) must not think that they have a unilateral right to determine their own giftedness and calling. They must understand that when they engage in counseling they are not doing so on their own but as an arm of the body of Christ.⁶² A second reason church oversight is important is because of the danger of purely secular education. Ministers in training to be counseling missionaries should not be left to navigate the complexities of secular training (or practice) on their own. They must be accountable to spiritual leadership who will be equipped to help them stay

⁶²Powlison, "Questions at the Crossroads," 52ff.

oriented to proper biblical principles of engagement. Such a plan, though in need of elaboration, would provide another means of engagement for biblical counselors.

Conclusion

The biblical counseling movement has experienced development in the area of engaging apologetically with those outside its boundaries. Adams made several attempts at engagement before ultimately concluding that such a task was not to be apart of his ministry. The more recent leadership of the biblical counseling movement has demonstrated a desire to reengage the counseling world with whom they differ.

It must be said, however, that this field of engagement is the one where biblical counselors have the farthest to go of all the areas examined in this project. Though the biblical counseling movement, in particular Welch and Powlison, has demonstrated a desire to engage there is much work to do to make these desires a full-scale project that actually does what it hopes.

It is also worth noting that this effort at engagement may continue to be the hardest area for biblical counselors to develop. There are at least two reasons for this. First the sharp dividing lines between the movements make conversation difficult. Biblical counseling is distinguished from every other approach to counseling (secular or Christian) by its firm belief that Scripture alone is sufficient to help people with their problems. This one is a non-negotiable truth for biblical counselors and a non-negotiable fallacy for everyone else. Such firm divisions make compromise difficult. Second, most biblical counselors simply are not willing to devote their ministries to intellectual defenses of the movement. Biblical counselors are typically those God has called into hands-on pastoral ministry and they desire to help people with their problems as a

demonstration of faithfulness to that call. Apparently there is little interest in wading into the theory that supports biblical counseling and defend it to those advancing other models.⁶³

As true as this is, the biblical counseling movement has a responsibility to engage an atheistic society and the surrounding counseling culture. Nothing less than the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) summons biblical counselors to faithfulness in engaging lost and hurting people in the personal ministry of the Word. Additionally, the Pauline call to speak the truth in love mandates that biblical counselors talk to those counselors with whom they disagree so that all might be more like Christ (Eph 4:15). It is then both evangelism and discipleship that buttress the call for biblical counselors to be increasingly diligent in their efforts at apologetic engagement.

⁶³One bit of proof that this is so is a look at the available literature. Biblical counseling literature has exploded in the last twenty years but most of it is written to help deal with specific pastoral issues. There are, comparatively, few authors and few works that deal with the theory behind biblical counseling commitments.

Powlison's epistemological priorities reinforce this. With varying degrees of clarity the leaders of the movement have articulated for forty years that biblical construction is primary while apologetic engagement is secondary or tertiary.

CHAPTER 5

AN OUTSIDE ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT

Introduction

Outside of the present work, there has only been only one other evaluation of how the biblical counseling movement has developed. In *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal*, Eric Johnson includes an assessment that both parallels and differs from the assessment made herein. Johnson writes as a Christian psychologist, not as a biblical counselor. But Johnson's reading of the biblical counseling movement has attempted to be much more careful than other Christian psychologists.

In his book, Johnson describes Christian psychology as,

A distinctly Christian *version* of psychology: a wise science of individual human beings that includes theory building, research, teaching, training and various kinds of practice, including the care of souls. This science flows from a Christian understanding of human nature and therefore can be distinguished from alternative versions of psychology based on different worldviews.¹

Johnson is clear that he is involved in the task of formulating a psychology, and that his approach is an attempt at a distinctly Christian version. This nuance makes his position different from two other approaches to counseling that Christians often practice. These two approaches are integration and biblical counseling—both of which are criticized by Johnson. According to Johnson, his approach has five core distinctives. Johnson

¹Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 9. Original emphasis.

describes his approach as one that is God-centered,² appreciative of the God-referential aspect of humanity,³ relational,⁴ canonical,⁵ and psychological.⁶ There is much that can be said about these distinctives but for the purposes here it is enough to say that Johnson intends to forge a model that is more biblical than integrationism, and more scientific than biblical counseling.

In commending his own view, Johnson engages in a critique of three other counseling approaches including parallelism, integration, and biblical counseling.⁷ Johnson's criticisms of the biblical counseling movement are substantial, and a careful response by those in the biblical counseling movement is necessary. But the purpose of this project is something else. In considering the biblical counseling movement, Johnson does something that no other has done; he both recognizes and seeks to evaluate the development within the movement of biblical counseling. Since the purpose of this work is to evaluate that same development, and because Johnson is the only other person to engage in such an analysis, it is important to understand his work, and to compare it with this present work.

²Ibid., 12.

³Ibid., 13.

⁴Ibid., 14.

⁵Ibid., 15.

⁶Ibid., 16.

⁷Ibid., 85-86 (parallelism); 87-106 (integration); 106-25 (biblical counseling).

Johnson's View of Development

In seeking to understand the biblical counseling movement, Johnson makes a distinction between two schools of thought in the biblical counseling movement.⁸ Johnson refers to the first school of thought as traditional biblical counseling (TBC). Johnson calls TBC the “Dominant model in the movement” whose members “adhere very closely to the emphases of Jay Adams.”⁹ Johnson mentions John Broger, Wayne Mack, John MacArthur, Ed Buckley, and of course, Jay Adams as being leaders in TBC.¹⁰ He also lists such organizations as the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC), the Biblical Counseling Foundation, Master’s College, and the International Association of Biblical Counselors as being institutions that are committed to a TBC approach.¹¹

According to Johnson, the signature trait of TBC is their commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture. Johnson variously calls TBC’s position on sufficiency “absolute

⁸Actually Johnson distinguishes a third school of thought as well, the Psychoheresy Awareness Network. He acknowledges, however that this group has “little influence outside a small group of extremists.” Because of that, he spends no time evaluating it. Johnson, *Foundations*, 111.

⁹Ibid., 109.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

sufficiency,”¹² “extreme sufficiency,”¹³ “a well-intentioned but unnecessarily restrictive doctrine of sufficiency,”¹⁴ and even “scriptural positivism.”¹⁵ Johnson states,

TBC proponents teach that Christian soul care must be based exclusively on what the Bible teaches and have suggested it is heterodox to make positive reference to contemporary psychological research and theory and argued that it compromises the adequacy of God’s revelation in the Bible.¹⁶

Johnson looks mostly to Mack to buttress his argument.¹⁷ First he notes Mack saying, “Because of our finiteness and sinfulness, our understanding of man and his problems can be trusted only when our thoughts and insights reflect the teaching of Holy Scripture. We simply are not able to ascertain truth apart from divine revelation.”¹⁸

Later he says,

Mack, . . . for example has written, “Everything we need to know to live successfully is found within the pages of God’s Word.” He . . . believes that “we do not need any extrabiblical resources to understand people and their problems and help them to develop the qualities, attitudes, desires, values, feelings, and behavior that are proper for relating to living before God in a way that pleases and honors Him.” . . . He concludes: “Secular psychology has nothing to offer for

¹²Ibid., 120.

¹³Ibid., 121.

¹⁴Ibid., 185.

¹⁵Ibid., 113.

¹⁶Ibid., 117. In his footnote on this statement, Johnson refers to this as a “strict Bible-only position.”

¹⁷Johnson mentions other authors such as Doug Bookman, Jay Adams, and Lance Quinn to advance his argument. Since Johnson does not rely on these men in constructing his case, however, it is only necessary to reference his use of Mack.

¹⁸Johnson, *Foundations*, 113, quoting Mack A. Mack, “What is Biblical Counseling?,” in *Totally Sufficient*, ed. Ed Hindson and Howard Eyrich (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2004), 41.

understanding or providing solutions to the non-physical problems of people. When it comes to counseling people, we have no reason to depend on the insights of finite and fallen men.”¹⁹

Later, Johnson quotes Mack disapprovingly, for saying that the Bible contains, “A comprehensive system of theoretical commitments, principles, insights, goals, and appropriate methods for understanding and resolving the non-physical problems of people. When it comes to counseling people, we have no reason to depend on the insights of finite and fallen men.”²⁰ Johnson takes strong exception to the sufficiency belief of what he calls TBC. He believes TBCs have over-reached and gone beyond Scripture, claiming more than is appropriate.²¹ He refers to the position represented by Mack as, “An egregious misunderstanding . . . of the form of the Bible.”²² He says that TBCs have “overreached”²³ and likens the error to the one concerning Copernican theory²⁴ and insinuates that the position is arrogant.²⁵

Johnson has much kinder words for the second school of thought, which he calls progressive biblical counseling (PBC). According to Johnson, PBCs are known by their,

¹⁹Johnson, *Foundations*, 117. Johnson’s first Mack quotation is taken from, Wayne A. Mack, “Providing Instruction through Biblical Counseling,” *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur and Wayne Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 251. Johnson’s second and third Mack quotations are taken from, Mack, “What is Biblical Counseling,” 49, 50.

²⁰Johnson, *Foundations*, 117.

²¹Ibid., 118-19; 182-86

²²Ibid., 119.

²³Ibid., 121.

²⁴Ibid., 187.

²⁵Ibid., 124.

“Willingness to move beyond Adams’s nouthetic model in certain respects.”²⁶ Johnson lists David Powlison, Edward Welch, Michael Emlet, and Paul David Tripp as PBC leaders. He also notes Westminster Seminary, The Christian Counseling and Education Foundation, and *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* as institutions that embody a progressive approach.²⁷

Johnson mentions four specific areas where PBCs have developed beyond TBCs: a focus on being rather than doing, a more balanced perspective on sin and suffering, relationships in counseling, and the more irenic nature of PBC discourse.²⁸ It is thus the case that Johnson finds several areas of distinction between PBCs and TBCs, but where he draws a very firm line between them is on the issue of the sufficiency of Scripture. Johnson says, “Progressives . . . have recognized the inadequacy of this [extreme sufficiency] position.” He quotes Powlison saying,

Do secular disciplines have anything to offer to the *methodology* of Biblical counseling? The answer is a flat no. Scripture provides the *system* for Biblical counseling. Other disciplines—history, anthropology, literature, sociology, psychology, biology, business, political science—*may be useful in a variety of secondary ways* to the pastor and the biblical counselor, but *such disciplines can never provide a system* for understanding and counseling people.²⁹

Johnson laments Powlison’s “strident” tone but generally commends his sentiment. According to Johnson, Powlison is correct here in seeing the limitations of

²⁶Ibid., 110.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 122. quoting David Powlison, “Frequently Asked Questions about Biblical Counseling,” in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: W Publishing, 1994), 365. Emphasis Johnson’s.

Scripture's resources and the beneficial nature of other resources. Johnson says, "[Powlison], allows for a role for extrabiblical literature, and he recognizes that the Bible cannot be understood as 'an encyclopedia of proof texts containing all facts about people and the diversity of problems in living.'" ³⁰ As he continues his analysis of Powlison's position Johnson states, "PBC proponents believe that the Bible does not provide an exhaustive discussion of Christian soul care, but it is *comprehensive in scope*." ³¹

Johnson makes the perceived rift between PBCs and TBCs even more apparent with an analogy he draws between the contemporary counseling context and the Protestant Reformation. Johnson says, "The issues surrounding [sufficiency] of Scripture as developed in the Reformation are especially relevant to our predicament as Christians in psychology and counseling in the early twenty-first century." ³² Johnson sets the context for the Reformation debate by explaining that the Roman Catholic Church believed that "Christian tradition provided a necessary complement to the sacred Scripture regarding what constituted divinely revealed Christian truth and morality." ³³ The Church believed that there was ongoing revelatory work of the Holy Spirit being mediated through church tradition. This view was formally ratified in the Council of Trent.

³⁰Johnson, *Foundations*, 122, quoting David Powlison, "Affirmations and Denials," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 19, no. 1 (2001): 19.

³¹Johnson, *Foundations*, 122.

³²*Ibid.*, 177.

³³*Ibid.*

Johnson says, however, that “The Reformers, in contrast, taught the sufficiency of Scripture, that is, Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*) was divine revelation and therefore was by itself adequate for the task of formulating the church’s doctrine and morality.”³⁴ Johnson observes though that there were two strands of the Reformation including the magisterial Reformation and the radical Reformation. The difference between these two movements was the desire on the part of the radicals to reform the church without the assistance of the state (magistrates). According to Johnson, however, there was another difference. Johnson says that the magisterial Reformers,

Did not reject church tradition *in toto*. . . . The magisterial Reformers believed that the Holy Spirit had worked within the church—but not in a way that rendered the church infallible. This work had resulted in valuable textual reflection on the Bible, with some previous interpreters demonstrating a greater fidelity to Scripture than others, so that consulting the texts of the church fathers and the medieval church could prove very illuminating.³⁵

On the other hand, Johnson says of the radical Reformers that they were “Wary of consulting any merely human sources of insight, believing they were largely corrupt, so they called into question any reliance on church tradition in interpretation.”³⁶

The relevance of all this information to Johnson’s analogy becomes clear when he observes,

Biblical counseling advocates have made the phrase ‘the sufficiency of Scripture’ the rallying cry of their movement. In doing so they are presumably making allusion to the debates of the Reformation era and suggesting that they offer a parallel to our era, since the Christian counseling community also faces the problem

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 178.

³⁶Ibid.

of relating Scripture to the texts of another body of literature, in the present case, the texts of modern psychology . . .

When we make a comparison between the groups in the Reformation era and our own, we find that the ‘Bible-only’ position of Traditional Biblical Counseling bears a closer resemblance to the understanding of the radical Reformers than to the magisterial Reformers. Pressing the analogy further, the . . . progressive biblical counseling approaches have more in common with the magisterial Reformation, since they view the Bible as sufficient for counseling in certain key respects, . . . and see it as the final standard, by which other, relatively important texts are evaluated (analogous to church tradition).³⁷

It is clear that, according to Johnson, the difference between PBCs and TBCs lies at the level of Scripture’s sufficiency. TBCs have a commitment to the exclusive sufficiency of Scripture in counseling. They are “Bible only.” PBCs, on the contrary have a more nuanced perspective on the issue allowing other sources of information to contribute to the Bible’s teaching. They allow the usage of other sources of information. The question that must be asked and answered, however, is whether Johnson is correct in his analysis.

A Correction of Johnson’s View

In fact, it appears that Johnson’s division of the biblical counseling movement into two groups regarding the sufficiency of Scripture is unwarranted. In reality, Johnson’s research has not properly captured the positions of those persons with whom he interacts. This inaccurate understanding is true for those Johnson alleges to be progressives as well as the purported traditionalists.

³⁷Ibid., 178-79.

The So-Called Progressives on Sufficiency

Johnson interacts with Powlison as an example of a progressive. According to Johnson, Powlison's view on sufficiency is much more moderate and nuanced than those who articulate an "extreme sufficiency" position. Has Johnson correctly understood Powlison? It is necessary to look at other statements from Powlison than just the one that Johnson quotes to understand the totality of his argument.

In "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls"³⁸ Powlison engages in a substantial defense of Scripture's sufficiency regarding problems in human living. Powlison makes the case that the issues that concern God in the Bible are the same issues that are addressed in any counseling experience. Powlison is careful to make the point that persons must read the Bible as those seeking to learn God's language in understanding people and their problems; one must not think that it will be fruitful to look up the term schizophrenia (for example) in the concordance of a Bible in order to do this, however. Powlison's point—as it is in other places—is that the Bible is about what counseling is about.³⁹ Even the title of this article it seems would be sufficient evidence to prove the point and yet Powlison makes a number of strong claims concerning Scripture. Powlison says, for example,

The conviction? Scripture is about understanding and helping people. The scope of Scripture's sufficiency includes those face-to-face relationships that our culture labels "counseling" or "psychotherapy." The content? The problems, needs, and

³⁸David Powlison, "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (2005) 2-14.

³⁹The same point is made in David Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling View," in *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 221-24.

struggles of real people—right down to the details—must be rationally explained by the categories, which the Bible teaches us to understand human life.⁴⁰

In this passage, Powlison argues that a core conviction concerning Scripture is that it is sufficient for counseling. He further argues that counselors must explain the problems, needs, and struggles of people in biblical categories if they are to offer real help. These words are strong on their own and yet Powlison continues,

What is a genuinely biblical view of the problems of the human soul and the procedures of ministering grace? Such a view must establish a number of things. First, we must ask, does Scripture give us the materials and call to construct something that might fairly be called “systematic biblical counseling.”? In fact, we do have the goods for a coherent and comprehensive practical theology of face-to-face ministry. Scripture is dense with explanations, with instructions, with implications. We have much work to do to understand and to articulate the biblical “model.” But we don’t have to make it up or borrow from models that others have made up as ways to explain people.⁴¹

Powlison makes the strong claim here that in Scripture, the Christian community has a coherent and comprehensive guide for systematic biblical counseling so that there is no need to borrow from any other model to understand, explain, and help people. He describes this understanding as a genuinely biblical view of the problems of the human soul. These are two examples from one article by Powlison⁴² but these statements here

⁴⁰Powlison, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” 2.

⁴¹Ibid., 2-3.

⁴²Powlison makes the argument in plenty of other places. See, for example, David Powlison, “Is the Adonis Complex in Your Bible?,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 22, no. 2 (2004): 42-58. David Powlison, “What is Ministry of the Word?” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 21, no. 2 (2003): 2-6. Idem, “Does the Shoe Fit?,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (2002): 2-15. Examples could be multiplied but the reality is that every work by Powlison appearing in the bibliography of this project either assumes or explicitly articulates a conviction regarding the comprehensive sufficiency of Scripture. But, as Johnson rightly recognizes, Powlison never means by this that Scripture is “exhaustive” or “encyclopedic.”

are representative of what others in the second generation of biblical counselors

(Johnson's PBC) believe. For example, Welch writes,

Biblical Counseling is built on a simple, enduring principle: the triune God has spoken to us through the Scripture. Furthermore, through biblical history, doctrine, law codes, poetry, and songs, God has revealed to us everything we NEED to know about Him, about ourselves and about the world around us (2 Pet 1:3).

This fundamental promise—"God has spoken"—has been the long-standing confession of the church. Every church attendee would agree. Brows might furrow, however, at the phrase "everything we need." We sense that the Bible talks about many important things, but there are complex life situations where we would like more specific direction, extra information, or novel counseling techniques. Yet the reality is that we have access to everything that Jesus had: "Everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). God has not held anything back from us. What Jesus knew from His Father, we too can know.

Given the degree to which God has revealed Himself and ourselves, we can assume that the Bible's counsel speaks with great breadth, addressing the gamut of problems in living. It is certainly able to speak to the common problems we all encounter, such as relationship conflicts, financial pressures, our responses to physical health or illness, parenting questions, and loneliness. But it also speaks to distinctly modern problems such as depression, anxiety, mania, schizophrenia and attention deficit disorder, just to name a few.

Of course, the Bible doesn't speak to each of these problems as would an encyclopedia. It doesn't offer techniques for change that look like they came out of a cookbook. But through prayerful meditation on Scripture and a willingness to receive theological guidance from each other, we find that the biblical teaching on creation, the fall, and redemption, provide specific, useful insight into all the issues of life.⁴³

These words from Welch demonstrate that ostensible progressives believe exactly what Johnson says they do not believe. The conviction articulated by Welch has been embraced, debated, and maligned since the founding of the biblical counseling movement. Some people will love it; others will think it is silly. But it is this belief that characterizes all those committed to the biblical counseling movement.

⁴³Edward Welch, "What Is Biblical Counseling, Anyway?," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 1 (1997): 3.

The So-Called Traditionalists on Science

It would seem that those in the biblical counseling movement labeled “progressive” by Johnson are not quite as progressive as he alleges. This reality raises questions about so-called traditionalists. In fact, Johnson has misconstrued their position as well. Johnson presents those he labels as TBCs as holding to a harsh and untenable position of extreme sufficiency and are unwilling to receive helpful information from outside Scripture. In fact, the available evidence does not seem to support this claim. Indeed, Jay Adams, the founder of the contemporary biblical counseling movement and exemplar of TBC strongly affirms the *scientific* value of secular psychology. Indeed, in the opening pages of his very first book on counseling, Adams had this to say:

I do not wish to disregard science, but rather I welcome it as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling in generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong human interpretations of Scripture, thereby forcing the student to restudy the Scriptures. However, in the area of psychiatry, science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and gross speculation.⁴⁴

Adams made a similar observation several years later:

Do you think that you can learn something helpful from psychologists? Yes, we can learn a lot; I certainly have. That answer surprised you, didn't it? If it did you have been led to believe, no doubt, that nouthetic counselors are obscurantists who see no good in psychology. . . . I do not object to psychology or psychologists as such. . . . That I deplore psychology's venture into the realms of value, behavior and attitudinal change because it is an intrusion upon the work of the minister, in no way lessens my interest, support, and encouragement of the legitimate work of psychology.”⁴⁵

In other words, Adams values psychological science and affirms its use. He urges caution, however, when practitioners begin to have worldview commitments that drive

⁴⁴Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), xxi.

⁴⁵Jay Adams, *What about Nouthetic Counseling?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 31.

them away from that which is specifically scientific. These statements from Adams come very early, within the first few years of the founding of the biblical counseling movement. The earliest available evidence therefore shows that Adams, in fact, never held the view that Johnson credits him with holding.

According to Adams's own testimony, he has always found value in psychological science, and does not believe this endangers his own strong view of the sufficiency of Scripture. But what about Mack whose work Johnson relies on to advance his case? Johnson uses Mack to argue that TBCs have adopted an approach to the sufficiency of Scripture that is as extreme as it is unbiblical. Johnson quotes from two articles to criticize Mack in particular and TBCs in general. Johnson's harshest criticism for Mack, however, comes in his interaction with a quotation from "What Is Biblical Counseling?" Mack's quotation was cited earlier but is repeated here with Johnson's criticism included. Johnson says,

Mack goes even further: 'Because of our finiteness and sinfulness, our understanding of man and his problems can be trusted only when our thoughts and insights reflect the teaching of Holy Scripture. We simply are not able to ascertain truth apart from divine revelation.' Unless it is just carelessly worded, this is an example of "scriptural positivism," and it would seem to necessitate the rejection of all information not found in Scripture (for example, information about anorexia nervosa, neurotransmitters, and personality traits). Such extreme pessimism about human reason, however, is foreign to the greatest thinkers of the Christian tradition. Calvin, for example, recognized both sin's mental distortions as well as the preserving, blessed effects of God's common grace on non-Christian thought.⁴⁶

Is Johnson's criticism correct? Is Mack a "scriptural positivist" who rejects the classic Christian doctrine of God's common grace and the classic Christian practice of

⁴⁶Johnson, *Foundations*, 113, quoting Mack, "What Is Biblical Counseling?," 41.

continually valuing extrabiblical information? A few comments will aid in answering these questions.

It is important to understand Mack's article in the larger context of his life and ministry. Mack has devoted his life to the pastoral task of helping struggling people with their problems in living and to training pastors for that same task. He has produced scores of materials to help people change and grow in Christ, and has written dozens of books and articles to explain what biblical counseling is and how to do it.⁴⁷ In his writings, Mack never functions as a philosopher explaining theological epistemology but rather, as a pastor attempting to explain how to help people according to a biblical counseling framework.

"What Is Biblical Counseling?" is just such an article. In it Mack is explaining and defending the nature of biblical counseling. He is not writing an article on the nature of knowledge. In fact, the statement quoted by Johnson appears in a very specific context. To begin, as the title indicates, in his article Mack is intending to answer a question regarding what the nature of biblical counseling is. Mack grounds his work in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy⁴⁸ and is clear on multiple occasions in his article that he is addressing how to help people with their non-medical problems in living in a counseling context.⁴⁹ It would be too much to examine all of these but one will suffice. At the end of the article, Mack summarizes his argument this way,

⁴⁷For one of many examples, see Wayne Mack and Joshua Mack, *God's Solutions to Life's Problems* (Tulsa, OK: Hensley, 2002).

⁴⁸Mack, "What Is Biblical Counseling?" 25.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 25, 30, 39,41, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51.

Because the Bible asserts its own *sufficiency for counseling-related issues, secular psychology has nothing to offer for understanding or providing solutions to the non-physical problems of people*. When it comes to *counseling people*, we have no reason to depend on the insights of finite and fallen men. Rather, we have every reason to place our confidence in the sure, dependable, and entirely trustworthy revelation of God given to us in Holy Scripture because it contains a God-ordained, sufficient, comprehensive system of theoretical commitments, principles, insights, goals, and appropriate methods for understanding and resolving *the non-physical problems of people*. It provides for us a model that needs no supplement. God, the expert on helping people, has given us in Scripture *counseling perspectives and methodology that are wholly adequate for resolving our sin-related problems*.⁵⁰

Mack's work is clearly not in the field of epistemology but has rather to do with biblical Christian ministry. Further this passage articulates that in helping people he is talking about counseling with regard to non-physical problems that stem from sin and other interpersonal issues. Johnson's charge that Mack is a "scriptural positivist" based on one quotation from this article does not seem to correspond to the facts. It appears rather, that Johnson has not read Mack charitably. In so doing, Johnson criticizes Mack for making a point that, understood in context, he was not making.

Finally, Mack states in the chapter under consideration that psychology can have a limited usefulness. He says,

Secular psychology may play an *illustrative* (providing examples and details that, when carefully and radically reinterpreted, illustrate the biblical model) or *provocative* (challenging us to study the Scriptures more thoroughly to develop our model in areas we have not thought about or have neglected or misconstrued) function, but, because of man's finiteness and fallenness, the insights, methodologies, and practices of secular psychology are in many instances dangerously unbiblical, dishonoring to God, and harmful to people. Other aspects of secular psychology are at best neutral and therefore unnecessary.⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid., 50. Emphasis added.

⁵¹Ibid., 51. Original emphasis. In this passage Mack is interacting (as he does in other places discussed below) with statements made by Powlison, who he believes to be advancing his same argument.

This statement is very carefully worded. Mack is clear that psychology can play a role in helping people with their problems. Psychology can have an illustrative and provocative purpose in the counseling task. Mack is also clear, however, that there is danger in psychology so that its findings must be reinterpreted and that it is *ultimately* unnecessary. Mack may be wrong in his position, which Johnson takes obvious exception to but his views on the relationship between Scripture and psychology are no different than the ones advocated by Adams, Powlison, and all those in both first and second generations of the biblical counseling movement.

**Do “Traditionalists” Disagree
with “Progressives”?**

If Johnson has read the movement incorrectly from the outside, then how do those within the movement see matters? Specifically, how does the first generation (Johnson’s TBC) understand the position of the second generation (PBC)? To understand the answer to this question, it will be helpful to see how Mack cites Powlison in “What is Biblical Counseling?” In fact, Mack quotes Powlison on two occasions. Each of these quotations is critical here. First Mack says,

When he commented on the role that secular disciplines should play in biblical counseling, David Powlison vividly described the noetic impact of sin on man’s thinking processes:

Secular disciplines may serve us well as they describe people . . . but they seriously mislead us when we take them at face value because they are secular. . . . Secular disciplines have made a systematic commitment to being wrong. This is not to deny that secular people are often brilliant observers of other human beings. They are often ingenious critics and theoreticians. But they also distort what they see and mislead by what they teach and do, because from God’s point of view the wisdom of the world has fundamental folly written through it.⁵²

⁵²Ibid., 41, quoting David Powlison, “Frequently Asked Questions,” 365-66.

In this section of his article Mack is arguing for the “Depravity of Human Nature”⁵³ and is showing the impact this has on a Christian’s ability to trust secular theories of helping people. But Mack (a so-called TBC) agrees with Powlison’s assessment about the descriptive and provocative value of secular thought.

In another place when discussing “The Need for Caution,” Mack says,

David Powlison has stated well the danger of including extrabiblical ideas in the counsel offered to or by Christians:

Do secular disciplines have anything to offer to the methodology of biblical counseling? The answer is a flat no. Scriptures provide the system for Biblical counseling. Other disciplines—history, anthro-pology, [sic] literature, sociology, psychology, biology, business, political science—may be useful in a variety of secondary ways to the pastor and the biblical counselor, but such disciplines can never provide a system for understanding and counseling people.⁵⁴

Again, Mack’s favorable quotation of Powlison shows that as far as he is concerned there is no disagreement. This passage is important for another reason though. What is very interesting about this passage is that it is the exact one quoted earlier by Johnson to show that—in his view—Powlison has taken the movement in a more nuanced and careful direction that is more inclusive of science.⁵⁵ But Mack himself reads the same words and concludes that he and Powlison have the same view of Scripture’s sufficiency and the same nuanced concerns regarding psychology’s utility and problems.

In fact it is not too hard to see why Mack would come to such a conclusion. In the statement that Johnson singles out, Powlison articulates the standard sufficiency position that biblical counselors have always embraced. He answers a “flat no” to whether secular

⁵³Mack, “What Is Biblical Counseling?,” 38.

⁵⁴Ibid., 50-51, quoting Powlison, “Frequently Asked Questions,” 365.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Foundations*, 122, quoting Powlison, “Frequently Asked Questions,” 365.

disciplines have anything *constitutive* or *fundamental* to offer a biblical approach to counseling. He says no other discipline can ever provide a *system* for understanding and counseling people. These italics are important. Here, Powlison's view sounds just as "extreme" as any "TBC" that Johnson references. Of course Powlison understands that other disciplines may be helpful in secondary ways, but his position is no different in principle than the one of TBC as has been shown here.

Johnson seems to be aware of texture in the TBC approach to extra-biblical information on counseling, but does not give those he cites credit for it. In a section entitled, "The actual sufficiency beliefs of the TBC," Johnson says,

[The PBC] position legitimizes the use of valid terminology derived from extrabiblical sources. More surprising is the fact that even many Traditionalists are willing to use terms (with great misgivings) that are not found in the Bible, and many of which are derived from contemporary psychological discourse.⁵⁶

Johnson describes a number of examples where he sees this including the usage of anorexia nervosa by Elyse Fitzpatrick, child development and blended families by John Street, dehabitation and emotion by Jay Adams, depression by Wayne Mack, and the use of a plethora of psychological terms by the Ashers. Johnson then goes on to say,

A careful examination of the above articles and books forces one to conclude that even some Traditionalists recognize some value in scientific labels not found in the Bible but developed in the twentieth century by secularists. . . . As a result, TBC itself appears to have benefited, to some extent, from the increased conceptual precision that has resulted from scientific research and theorizing in psychology.⁵⁷

Johnson's analysis here does not seem tenable. As has been demonstrated, "TBCs" have always recognized that there is much to learn from sources outside the Bible and that this

⁵⁶Johnson, *Foundations*, 123.

⁵⁷Ibid.

recognition and practice does not harm a strong notion of sufficiency. Johnson, against the available evidence, presses a “Bible-only” position onto TBCs that they do not hold. Rather than be corrected by seemingly contradictory information, Johnson assumes that data not fitting his theory amounts to inconsistency on the part of “TBCs.” Such a conclusion does not seem to be consistent with the facts, as they exist.

When all the evidence is examined there is simply no reason to conclude anything other than that biblical counselors share a common view of the sufficiency of Scripture. That view finds Scripture to be the sufficient source for developing a practical theology of counseling. However this view of sufficiency also does not mean that any biblical counselor excludes other sources of information as being helpful in a secondary or tertiary way. The statements of biblical counselors in their own words indicate this to be the case.

Do “Progressives” Disagree with “Traditionalists”?

It was shown above that Mack’s use of Powlison’s writing indicates he believes they are in agreement. In other words, TBCs think that PBCs agree with them. But what about PBCs? Do they think TBCs agree with them? A passage in one of Powlison’s writings sheds light on this.

In an article entitled “Does the Shoe Fit?” Powlison engages various critics of the biblical counseling movement and assesses whether their criticism is founded or unfounded. James Beck’s criticism of Powlison receives particular attention. Beck says,

Many of the old conceptual problems attendant to Adams and his thought remain. Their insistence that only the Bible should be used in our ministrations to the emotionally troubled is as rigid as ever. Their unrelenting dismissal of scientific, clinical, and counseling psychology is astounding. . . . This reductionism, in the

name of faithfulness to the biblical record, winds up insulting the richness of scriptural thought and the complexity, which the authors of the Bible ascribed to the human experience.⁵⁸

Beck is actually critiquing Powlison's contribution to *Psychology and Christianity: Four Views* which was edited by Johnson.⁵⁹ According to Beck, Powlison is guilty of the same "extreme sufficiency" views of which Johnson accuses Mack and Adams. The point to notice, however, is that Powlison is incredulous at Beck's criticism. He responds (with emphasis added),

But what about his specific charges against *us*: biblicistic anti-science and a moralizing reductionism of the human condition? . . . Let me attempt a simple answer. I think that God intends Scripture to serve as the orienting and reorienting wellspring of all wisdom ("the Faith's psychology," we might call it). Belief in the necessity and authority of Scripture does not arise because of closed-mindedness, but because other explanations and models express the disoriented gaze and intentions of other interpreters, model-builders, and would-be redeemers ("the psychological faiths"). Scripture gives a vista, not a straight jacket. Other systems ("philosophies" in the Colossians 2:8 sense) give distorted lenses and compasses skewed away from North. They don't give us straight facts or a good sense of direction. God intends to teach us how to rightly understand and properly use anything the whole world (without being misconverted). Everything is fair game: from your own life story to today's weather; from something a counselee said yesterday to a research study of 829,000 students; *from a guru's comment (Jay Adams favorably quoted Swami Akhilananda in the Christian Counselor's Manual)* to war in the Middle East; from a hymn to Zeus (Acts 17:28) to observations of behaviors that never appear in Scripture. . . . All of this is a far cry both from biblicistic anti-science and from syncretistic integrationism. . . . The way James Beck puts it has the ring of his own prejudices. I hope we can replace the caricature with an accurate photograph. *He did not evaluate what was actually written in my articles or what has been written over the past 30 years. In the Four Views book, I openly criticized biblicism and distanced biblical counseling's epistemology from the notion that the Bible was intended or was to be treated as an exhaustive*

⁵⁸ James Beck, review of *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views* ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones, *The Denver Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 4 (2001).

⁵⁹ Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones eds., *Christianity and Psychology: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IL, 2000).

*encyclopedia containing all truth. . . . I might be wrong in my view of the issues in question, and Beck might be right, but he savaged a view that I don't hold (and neither does Jay Adams).*⁶⁰

This passage is fascinating. In responding to Beck's criticism of Powlison in particular, Powlison asks, "but what of his specific charges against us?," indicating that Powlison understands his position to be standing in the tradition of every other biblical counselor. Powlison refers to Adams's affirmation of extra-biblical information in *The Christian Counselor's Manual*.⁶¹ He also notes that Beck cited nothing specific that has been written in the 30 years of the biblical counseling movement indicating Powlison believes that nobody holds the view Beck creates. Finally he says, that Beck criticized a view (biblicistic, non-scientific) that neither he nor Jay Adams hold.

Powlison makes a similar point in another article when he says,

Adams's formal epistemology is a rather typically reformed transformationist position toward the observations and ideas of secular disciplines. He denied their necessity for constructing a systematic pastoral theology, but affirmed their potential usefulness when appropriated through Christian eyes. Epistemologically, Adams is a radical Christianizer of secularity, not a biblicistic xenophobe. He is no triumphalist, believing that Christian faith has already arrived at the sum of all wisdom, but believes that secular disciplines can both challenge and inform us. But Adams was sharply against psychology when it came to dubious theoretical models and when it came to giving state-licensed, secularly-trained mental health professions the reins to the face-to-face care of souls.⁶²

Powlison points out here that Adams was suspicious of secular psychology when it infringed on matters that uniquely belonged to the Christian faith. Adams further points

⁶⁰David Powlison, "Does the Shoe Fit?," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (2002): 10-12. Emphasis added.

⁶¹Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 80 n. 15, 105 n. 5.

⁶²David Powlison, "Educating, Licensing, and Overseeing Counselors," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 1 (2007): 30.

out, however, that such secular disciplines could challenge and inform Christians even though they were not necessary. This is the exact point Powlison made in his own work. In fact, Powlison says that Adams's position not only makes him a good biblical counselor but also makes him a good practitioner of Reformed epistemology. For Powlison then, Adams's project was not something strange but was identical to his own. All of this is clear evidence that Powlison sees no principled distinction between his view of sufficiency and the view of the so-called Traditionalists.

Conclusion

What this all means is that Johnson has found principal disagreement where in fact there is none. Of course, there may be differences of emphasis, tone, and application but all the people Johnson cites in his book appear, upon more careful examination, to hold the same basic position on Scripture and the relevance of outside information for the counseling task. Every available piece of evidence indicates that all those who call themselves biblical counselors share a robust understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture, and use Scripture as eyeglasses to see everything else in the world. The point of this project is not to debate whether or not the position on sufficiency is correct.⁶³ Biblical counselors, integrationists, and Christian psychologists will continue to disagree over this important and controversial issue. The point here is to engage whether Johnson is correct in his understanding that there is a different view of sufficiency among those in the biblical counseling movement.

⁶³Though I am in agreement with these claims.

As has been shown Johnson argues in his book that the development in the biblical counseling movement has chiefly to do with key distinctions regarding the sufficiency of Scripture. More traditional biblical counselors believe in the exclusive sufficiency of Scripture for counseling and are “Bible only.” More progressive biblical counselors adopt a nuanced view of sufficiency, recognizing the limitations of Scripture and allowing for other sources. The present analysis has shown Johnson’s distinction does not hold up. In fact, So-called traditionalists are much more progressive and the supposed progressives are much more traditional than Johnson allows. None of this is meant to indicate that there has been no development in the biblical counseling movement. Indeed, it is the labor of this present work to show such development. The point is that Johnson’s claim of a principal disjunction is incorrect. Though Johnson’s work takes pains to show development in the area of Scripture’s sufficiency, in truth this is one of the main areas where there has been no development in the last twenty years. In the actual development of the biblical counseling movement, Scripture—far from being a source of division among biblical counselors—is actually a source of cohesion.

CHAPTER 6
AREAS OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT IN MOTIVATION
AND IDOLATRY

Introduction

In chapter 2, the development of the biblical counseling movement regarding the issues of human motivation was analyzed. This chapter will consider those areas where it is necessary to further develop the good work that has been done. Because motivational issues in counseling are so critical and because they have received so much attention it is necessary to devote extra care in thinking through this area of biblical counseling concepts. With all of the benefits of the “idols of the heart” language, there are also certain shortcomings.¹ Rather than a fundamental change of course, it is necessary to build upon the good work that has already been done bringing increased theological precision to the nomenclature of motivation and idolatry. The purpose in the following pages will be to examine the biblical context of idolatry in Scripture, showing how it functions to advance sinful self-interest in people’s hearts. In this sense idolatry is a secondary problem flowing out of the primary problem of a sinful self-exalting heart. We must first make this distinction, and then demonstrated why it is important. To do this, it will be necessary to

¹As pointed out in chap. 2, David Powlison introduced this idea in “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 35-50.

examine the understanding of idolatry in both Old and New Testaments and then examine the importance of these findings in an understanding of heart idolatry. It is necessary to begin with an understanding of idolatry from the Old Testament.

Idolatry in the Old Testament

The Israelites were incurably mired in the worship of the false gods of the nations. The clarity of this fact does not make it any less appalling. Israel had experienced the deliverance of God out of Egypt, had received his promises, witnessed his mighty acts, received his gracious gifts, and heard his authoritative voice through prophets. The fact that the Israelites repeatedly experience all of these glorious things from God and then are able immediately (Exod 32) to turn and worship a false god makes one incredulous. Such incredulity was the response of the prophets. Isaiah articulates this response of the prophets in Isaiah 44:9-20.

In this passage, Isaiah reflects at length on the utter absurdity of idolatry. The argument that Isaiah makes in this passage is that idols are “nothing” and “profitable for nothing” (Isa 44:9-10). In supporting this argument, Isaiah advances two lines of thought. First, Isaiah spends considerable time describing the labor of the human worker both in selecting the raw materials for the idol and in the work necessary to fashion such materials into an object of worship (Isa 44:12-14). Second, after going to such effort to obtain the raw materials, the craftsmen only uses part of the material for the idols while the rest of the material is used for other things like fuel for heating and cooking (Isa 44:15-17). Isaiah’s clear point is that it makes no sense for a workman to worship an object that he created and a portion of which was also used for eating and keeping warm. Isaiah closes by saying,

They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. . . . A deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isa 44:18, 20)

Such a portrayal of the futility of idolatry only underlines the incredulity expressed above. How could clear-thinking people trade the glory of the infinite God for a statue that is not god? The importance of this question ought not to be missed. In speaking of idolatry in the Old Testament, commentators typically stop at the mere observation that God’s people worshiped false gods. Rarely, is there an investigation about the deeper motivations—the heart issues²—that would lead God’s people to acts of such insanity. The Bible, however, does not leave the issue of the motivation for idolatry unaddressed. In fact, it is stated quite clearly. There are, perhaps, many texts that could be examined but two will be used here in order to demonstrate the issue. Those texts are Jeremiah 44 and Hosea 2.³

In Jeremiah 44, the prophet excoriates the Israelites in Egypt for their worship of idols. Through Jeremiah God reminded the people of all the calamity he had brought to Jerusalem because of their idolatrous practices. God graphically promised to consume them with his wrath because of their idolatry. The response of the people to Jeremiah’s message is the opposite of humble contrition. The Bible articulates the response of arrogant defiance from their lips, saying,

As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and

² Indeed, Isa 44:20, quoted above, states that it is a deluded heart that leads to the activity so the text of Isaiah itself raises the question of what such heart issues might be.

³ See also Num 15; Ezek 23; Judg 3.

our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine. (Jer 44:16-18)

After hearing the starkest of warnings from God's anointed prophet, the people respond in abject defiance saying they will not leave the worship of their idols. In their rebellious articulation, the people are very clear about the reason why they intend to persist saying that it was when they were worshiping their idols that they received all the things they wanted. It was after they quit worshiping their idols that bad things started to happen. This account from Jeremiah is very clear about the motivation of people in worshiping false gods: the idols gave the people what they wanted.

Hosea 2 is another passage that gets at this same idea but in a different way. Adultery is the graphic metaphor that pervades the book of Hosea. In forsaking the true God for idols, the people are committing acts of adultery against their husband Yahweh. God has been a true and faithful husband to Israel, providing for her all the gifts that she has ever received and yet Israel has painfully and persistently turned her back on her husband. Why has Israel behaved so shamefully? The prophet explains in Hosea 2:5, 8-9, 12,

[Israel] has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." . . . And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. . . . And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, "These are my wages, which my lovers have given me." I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them.

The reason the Israelites turned their back on the true God was because they did not see according to reality. The objects mentioned above (bread, water, flax, oil, etc.) were not luxuries but were essential for basic sustenance in the land. Without them, the people would die. The people believed that they had received these critical provisions from the hands of their lovers, the false gods. The people worshipped idols, again, because they perceived that the false gods gave them the things that they desired.

These two texts conspire to demonstrate a fundamental reality of idolatrous worship; false gods in the ancient world were quite utilitarian. They were worshiped purely and exclusively for the benefits they were believed to convey. This is the point explained by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit in their book *Idolatry*. Halbertal and Avishai give a great deal of space to the metaphor of adultery that is frequently applied to idol worship in Scripture. They say,

The main function of the husband in [the] metaphor is the satisfaction of the wife's material needs. Extending the metaphor, it is God who satisfies Israel's needs. . . . [In spite of this], *Israel prefers other lovers because she thinks they satisfy her needs more successfully*. . . . The sin of idolatry is whoredom. *Israel gives her favors to whoever pays her the highest fee*, but idolatry is worse than ordinary prostitution because in this case the fee is always being paid with the husband's money, as he is the sustainer of the world. The sin of idolatry as whoredom is made even worse by the great gap between the husband's faithfulness and love for his wife, and the wife's faithless behavior. *For the wife sexual relations are based on pay, and she believes that the lover pays more. In theological terms, the Israelites relate to God as to a supplier of material goods, and when he seems to have disappointed them they turn to other gods.*⁴

⁴Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13-14. Emphasis added. This is also the issue at stake in Ezek 14. What is going on with this 'idols of the heart' text is nothing new. Instead, the elders appear before Ezekiel outwardly seeming to desire a word from the Lord but secretly they are not trusting in God but in the idols of Babylon. This is what the metaphor means in the context. It is not (contra Tripp as quoted above) some new

The point advanced here is a critical one to grasp and has two elements that are necessary to understand. First, idols serve the very pragmatic function of meeting the needs and desires that God's people believe he has left unmet. Second, this reality gets to the deeper heart issues spoken of earlier. The Israelites had a very clear picture of what they needed and wanted. The problem with the Israelites is that they wanted to decide, unilaterally, what they needed and how they would get it. They did not seek to learn from God about their needs and trust him for his provision. Instead, they became gods unto themselves worshipping themselves.

Idol worship then was a secondary problem flowing out of the primary problem of the worship of self. The reason the Israelites could switch back and forth between serving God and idols is because they each served the same function: Yahweh and Baal were both errand boys for Israel. The true Israelite god was the Israelite himself, pursuing his own ends by whatever means worked best. These two elements come together to teach that the problem of the Israelites was not idolatry *per se* but consisted, rather, in their effort to decide—unilaterally—what they wanted and how they would go about getting it. The problem for Israelites was that of every man doing what was right in his own eyes. Idolatry flowed out of this larger, deeper problem and was simply one way that the Israelites could attempt to manipulate the creation, bringing it into their service

The Israelite problem was that they failed truly to worship the Lord as God.

and deeper sin not seen before. See Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* The NIV Application Commentary vol. 23 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 183-84. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 29 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 205. Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel* Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary, vol. 23 (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 160.

Instead, they worshipped themselves, focusing on their own desires (both good and sinful) to the exclusion of what it seemed good to the Lord to provide. Their affections having been captured, they turned to any possible source to fulfill them. This indulgence in one's own desire rather than in delighting in God and his provision is the root sin of idolatry and, it will be argued, every other sin. Before examining how this understanding is relevant for counseling and the issues of human motivation, it is necessary to examine how the understanding of idolatry presented here gets expanded in the New Testament.

The New Testament Grasp of the Problem

It is not uncommon for commentators to note the relative absence of the theme of idolatry in the New Testament. When one grasps all of the information above, however, it becomes clear that the fundamental biblical understanding of what is wrong with people has not changed but only its manifestations. In other words, the New Testament picture of the deep, heart problems of people is the same as the Old Testament picture. Though outward acts of idolatry are more prevalent in the Old Testament, both testaments present the same underlying heart problem.

Many texts could be cited to demonstrate this but the clearest one is, perhaps, Matthew 22:37-40. This passage is Jesus' response to the Pharisaic question of which commandment in the Law is the greatest. Jesus replies,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

What makes Jesus' response so important is that in two sentences he reduces the entirety of God's perfect law into two axioms. With two brief statements,

the Son of God describes the root behind every sin it is possible for a person to commit. Every sin in the history of the human race shares in common a failure to love God and/or a failure to love one's neighbor.

Since Jesus sums up the totality of righteousness in love of God and neighbor and roots all sin in a failure to accomplish these two things, that means the hearts of sinful people are deeply committed to serving another. Who is it that sinful people seek to serve if not God and neighbor? The New Testament repeatedly teaches that the person sinners love above all others is the sinful self. A few examples will suffice.

James 1:14-15 says,

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

In this passage, James describes the process of temptation in a logical progression from desire to sin and from sin to death. The Bible is clear that the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) but what is it that precedes sin? The answer of James is that every sin happens when "each person . . . is lured and enticed by his own desire." This text is a perfect complement to Matthew 22. Just as it is true that every sin has its root in a failure to love God and neighbor, so it is true that every sin has its root in a pursuit of one's own desire above all other considerations.

Although using different language than James, the Apostle Paul writes in a similar vein in Philippians 2:4-8 when he says,

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This one could be considered the theme verse of the book of Philippians and is very relevant to the discussion here. If Matthew 22 describes the most basic command in God's Kingdom and James 1 describes the most basic reality of the existence of sinful mankind, then Philippians 2 gives the example man whose life completely conformed to God's great commandment and completely rejected the sinful lifestyle of every other human being. In other words, Jesus Christ is *the* example of one who perfectly fulfilled the law of God and perfectly resisted wicked desire.

In the text, Paul gives the command that each person should not only look to his own interests but also to the interests of others, he then proceeds to give the example of Jesus as one who has done this perfectly.⁵ Jesus makes himself nothing and serves his Father (first) and mankind (second) by his obedient death on the cross.⁶ The aspect of this obedience that makes it most amazing of all is that Jesus "was in the form of God" and yet did not grasp after it. Because of this reality, Jesus' selfless service to God and man is the highest and holiest example of self-denial that can be conceived.

Jesus perfectly kept the great commandment by doing everything his father commanded him and by loving his people unto death. Jesus' righteousness is seen in the fact that he denied himself and sought no honor when, in fact, he deserved all

⁵ In fact, one of the reasons this passage could be described as the theme verse of Philippians is because after this Paul goes on to give more examples of others who sacrificially serve, including Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul himself, and concluding by mentioning Jesus again.

⁶ This exact point is also made in Mark 10.

honor. Fallen humanity is the opposite of Jesus seeking all honor when, in fact, none is deserved. Instead of loving the Lord with all they have, the human race yearns after equality with God that is not theirs by right and seeks to bring their neighbors into service to them instead of loving them. The root of every sin is fundamentally an unwarranted desire to exalt oneself above all other considerations (God or people). Mankind's most fundamental problem is the desire to grasp after divine status that is not ours. All sinful people desire to manipulate others into service instead of seeking selflessly to serve them.

The problem with the human race is that instead of seeking to love God, sinners seek to put themselves in the place of God. All unrighteousness is grounded in the desire of the sinner to have equal status with God. This concept is, of course, consistent with what caused the human race to get into trouble in the first place. In Genesis 3 when the serpent wanted Eve to taste the forbidden fruit, he appeals to the very deepest of heart issues, the desire for self-supremacy, when he says, "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5). The temptation worked as the next verse indicates, "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate" (Gen 3:6). All of this conspires to show that sinful mankind does not want to love God and neighbor; instead, the biblical description of mankind's most fundamental problem is their own desire to be God. Sinners cannot stand to worship the God who alone sits on the throne in Heaven. Instead, in a perpetual grasping after god-hood they seek to become God themselves, reigning from his throne and bringing everything and

everyone else into their service. The wickedness of humanity is seen in that, more than anything else, they grasp after god-hood.

Self-Supremacy and Idols of the Heart

Whether it is called pride, hubris, self-supremacy, a desire to be like God, or a hundred other things, the most important consideration in the sinful human heart is oneself. Sinners exalt themselves above the true God making their own rules and deciding on their own what is good for them. Sinners jockey for position with their neighbors and seek to be served rather than to serve. The task must now be to see how this understanding of the deepest problem in the human heart complements the teachings on the idols of the heart as developed by David Powlison and those following him.

Idols actually come at the end of a process that has its genesis in this evil disposition of the heart being discussed. The sinful, self-exalting heart produces lusts or evil desires that the New Testament discusses so frequently and that Powlison addresses in his "Idols of the Heart" article. These desires and lusts grow out of a heart that sees itself as supreme and as the best and sole determiner of what is best. The sinful heart lusts because it seeks sinful comfort instead of godly suffering, it seeks control instead of humble trust in the real God, and it seeks to be served instead of selflessly serving others. All of the lusts and evil desires that the Bible mentions are a secondary problem flowing out of the primary problem which is a heart that sees itself as supreme.

These lusts, however, do not occur in a vacuum but face strong influences. These influences are what the Bible describes as the world, the flesh, and the devil

(Eph 2:1-3).⁷ These influences work powerfully to shape the lusts of sinful people so that no two people manifest their desire for self-supremacy in exactly the same way. Each sinner has his own peculiar interaction with the world (upbringing, role models, exposure to different cultures, etc.) so that each sinner exalts themselves in ways they learn from the world.

But the world is only one influence. As sinners exist in their world they are constantly rejecting and accepting the lusts that are portrayed for them. Each sinner has his own set of lusts that are uniquely appealing to him. Such lusts appeal to the sinner's own flesh. As Powlison says, the problems of sinful people do not only impinge from the social environment but are also rooted deeply in the human heart.⁸

Working in and through each of these is the dark power of the devil. The battle for righteousness is not only a battle against the world and against one's own flesh but also against the principalities and powers. Dark and powerful forces exert influence in this sinful and fallen world to lead people away from the worship of the true God and toward the false worship of self.

Each of these influences—the world, the flesh, and the devil place objects of desire before the sinful heart to feed its lusts and to stoke its love of self. Such idols could be blocks of stone and wood, they could be sex, relationships, power, and a million other things. Idols are external elements that the world, the flesh, and the devil use in influencing people to feed the lust of their self-exalting heart. Idols then

⁷ Though we are not interacting with the "Vanity Fair" element of Powlison's article, this would be the place where such interaction would occur.

⁸Powlison, "Idols of the Heart," 38.

are those outward things that the sinful heart fixates upon to fulfill its desires in its exercise of attempted self-sufficiency.⁹

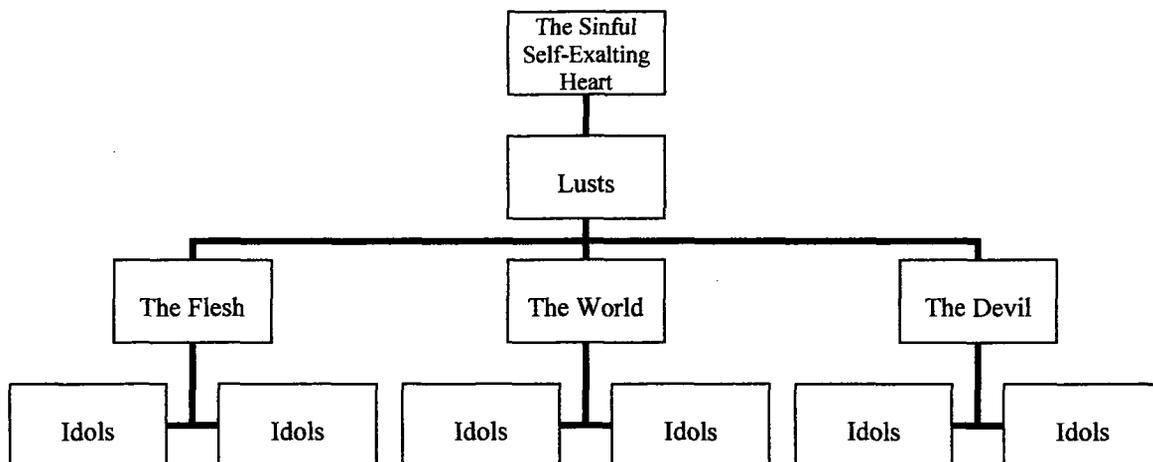


Figure 1. Idolatry and the self-exalting heart

This is exactly where idolatry, as it is most frequently pictured in the Old Testament, fits. It was demonstrated that the fundamental problem with the Israelites in the Old Testament was that they reserved for themselves the prerogative to determine what they needed and when they needed it, instead of trusting the Lord. The self-ward heart of the Israelites then looked to the world (the neighbors in their midst) and followed their lead in bowing to gods that were not God in order to satisfy the lusts of their self-exalting heart. When this is comprehended, it portrays a terrible irony of Israelite false worship. When the Israelites followed the lead of their neighbors and bowed before blocks of wood, that act of false worship underlined their own autonomy and, in an ironic way, was an exaltation of themselves even more than

⁹See Figure 1.

the idol. The idol was incidental (in our world today it could be a pornographic picture, a spouse as the particular object of codependency, or an over-protective mother's controlling fear attached specifically to her own children) the self-exalting heart was the problem that remains the same.

The main problem sinful people have is not idols of the heart *per se*. The main problem certainly involves idols and is rooted in the heart but the idols are manifestations of the deeper problem. The heart-problem is self-exaltation and idols are two or three steps removed. A self-exalting heart that grasps after its own autonomy is the Grand Unifying Theory (GUT) that unites all the idols. Even though idols change from culture to culture and from individual to individual within a culture the fundamental problem of humanity has not changed since Genesis 3, sinful people want—more than anything in the whole world—to be like God.

A. W. Tozer observed the same thing when he wrote *The Knowledge of Holy*. He said,

The natural man is a sinner because and only because he challenges God's selfhood in relation to his own. . . . Yet so subtle is self that scarcely anyone is conscious of its presence. Because man is born a rebel, he is unaware that he is one. His constant assertion of self, as far as he thinks of it at all, appears to him a perfectly normal thing. He is willing to share himself, sometimes even to sacrifice himself for a desired end, but never to dethrone himself. No matter how far down the scale of social acceptance he may slide, he is still in his own eyes a king on a throne, and no one, not even God, can take that throne from him. Sin has many manifestations but its essence is one. A moral being, created to worship before the throne of God, sits on the throne of his own selfhood and from that elevated position declares, "I AM." That is sin in its concentrated essence.¹⁰

¹⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1961), 29-30.

In his “Crucial Issues” article, Powlison made the statement that, “I am not saying that there is a fatal defect within existing biblical counseling. Our problem is a lack of emphasis and articulation.”¹¹ This one is precisely the point advanced here. The issue is not that the biblical counseling movement is fundamentally off the mark in their use of the idols of the heart language. In fact Powlison gets at the idea in his article on heart idolatry. He says,

When a “hunger drive” propels my life or a segment of my life, I am actually engaging in religious behavior. I—“the flesh”—have become my own god, and food has become the object of my will, desires, and fears.¹²

This corresponds perfectly with the understanding being developed here. Later Powlison says,

We should not forget that the reductionism the Bible consistently offers is not a typology that distinguishes people from each other but is a summary comment that highlights our commonalities: all have turned aside from God, “each to his own way,” “doing what was right in his own eyes.”¹³

This is another way of arguing for the sinful self-centeredness presently being advocated. Welch has also touched on this understanding in a few respects. Welch observes this same point saying,

The purpose of all idolatry is to manipulate the idol *for our own benefit*. This means that we don't want to be ruled by idols. Instead, we want to *use* them. For example, when Elijah confronted the Baal worshippers on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), the prophets of Baal slashed themselves and did everything they could to manipulate Baal to do their will. Idolaters want nothing above

¹¹David Powlison, “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling,” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 57.

¹²Powlison, “Idols of the Heart,” 39.

¹³Ibid., 45. Powlison also addresses similar realities in *Speaking Truth in Love* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch, 2005), 33-40.

themselves, including idols. Their fabricated gods are intended to be mere puppet kings, means to an end.¹⁴

The point here is not that there has never been anyone in the counseling movement to mention these concepts. The point is that they have not been developed as much as they should. The goal of this discussion is to evaluate what stands in need of further development. Because the issue of motivation has occupied such an important role in biblical counseling discourse and because of its crucial role in the ministry of counseling these ideas need to be developed with an increased level of care.

Biblical counselors have not tended to develop the complex view of idolatry that has been presented here. Rather heart idolatry has more typically been discussed as a reality in and of itself rather than something that points much deeper.¹⁵ It has become slang. Indeed, Powlison makes the same point when he says,

And I would add something else that I think is very important, and often misunderstood by both biblical counselors and our critics. I don't see "idols of the heart" as the master, catch-all category and the key to all counseling. It's only one of many ways of describing "1st great commandment defections." . . . I'm not hung up on the word 'idols.' I think it's overused among biblical counselors and has become a kind of jargon. People are often so captivated by its explanatory power (against the backdrop of secular culture, church, and self-interpretations that [they] never notice what's really going on) that they go a bit overboard on it.¹⁶

Indeed this expression is in keeping with Powlison's initial statements on the matter.

In "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," Powlison stated,

¹⁴Edward Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 49. Original emphasis.

¹⁵See chap 2.

¹⁶David Powlison, e-mail message to Heath Lambert, 26 November 2007.

'Idols of the heart' is only one of many metaphors which move the locus of God's concerns into the human heart, establishing an unbreakable bond between specifics of heart and specifics of behavior: hands, tongue, and all the other members.¹⁷

So Powlison seems to agree that there needs to be a kind of correction in the development of the movement regarding motivation and idolatry. It is always wise to strive for better, more faithful articulation of one's theological convictions. This is the very endeavor Powlison engaged in with his "Crucial Issues" article and should be continued. No movement has "arrived" but should always be mindful of the need to be ever reforming. The understanding articulated here is a biblical elaboration of the problems of the human heart and how idolatry is a manifestation of that problem. The motivational distinction being made here between specific idols and the sinful self-exalting heart is, in many ways subtle but the distinction has great practical relevance for counseling. This relevance for counseling is seen in at least seven ways.

A Better Understanding of Pride

First, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry honors the New Testament emphasis on pride and self-centeredness. It is true that the New Testament mentions idolatry a number of times (e.g., 1 Cor 10:14; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 John 5:21). As has been argued, however, when the Bible refers to the central problem of humanity it refers to the sinful penchant to honor and love self above other considerations (e.g., Matt 22:37-40; John 3:30; Rom 12:3, 16; 1 Cor 10:33; 2 Cor 5:15; Phil 2:1-11; 3 John 9). This big problem is demonstrated in lusts of the

¹⁷Powlison, "Idols of the Heart," p. 36.

flesh (Rom 1:29ff; Gal 5:16ff; Eph 4:22; James 1:14- 15). In other words, because the human focus on worship of self is wrong, human desires are wrong.

The Old Testament discusses idolatry at length. The New Testament mentions idolatry but goes deeper to the root of idolatry. The apostolic writings help Christians understand idolatry by getting behind it, explaining where it comes from, and showing the problem is a wrong object of worship in the sinful self instead of the eternal God. The issue here is one of having a more consistent biblical theology; just as the New Testament brought clarity to the Old Testament's understanding of the Trinity, so Jesus and the Apostles elucidate the Hebrew understanding of idolatry.

A Better Understanding of People

Second, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry goes as deep as the Bible in understanding people. A new generation of biblical counselors looked at behavior and asked: why? They answered the question with a very helpful metaphor of heart idols; humans seek pleasure in things that are not God. Now it is necessary to look at idols and ask, clearly and with specificity: why? The answer is because humans long for the glory that is due to God. A heart that longs for this glory lusts after idols that provide it.

A Better Understanding of Sin

Third, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry goes as deep as the Bible in understanding the problems sinful people have. When sinners think they might not get the glory due to God alone they fret and plot about how to get it (anxiety); when they are denied that glory they punish themselves by recoiling in despondency

(anguish), punish others with wrathful outbursts or slow, plotting revenge (anger), or they slink off to a garden of secret delights where they are in control (avoidance).

Fully articulating the motivation/idolatry dynamic shows us that the man who screams at his wife for burning the dinner and then spends the evening indulging in pornography does not have two problems but one. Of course he does need to work on his outbursts against his wife and he needs to be equipped to deal with his pornography problem. But appreciating the argument here shows how those two very distinct problems all trace back to a man who wants the glory due to God more than he wants to serve his wife. His problem is definitely a worship problem—as all biblical counselors would admit. What needs to be clarified is that his worship problem is not between God and pornography or between God and his belly. His worship problem is between God and the man himself. The idols of dinner and illicit sex are all present but point to the deeper problem of his sinful, self-exalting heart.

A Better Understanding of Repentance

Fourth, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry goes as deep as the Bible in understanding solutions to the problems of people. The point being discussed here is the one of repenting at a level of depth. It is one thing to repent of one specific idol of the heart (for example, yelling at one's wife). It is another thing to repent of a heart that desires the glory that is due to God alone and confess that verbal abuse and a desire to control another person are but indicators that a man desires to determine for himself what he should and should not receive rather than trusting God and serving others. The reality is that in the Christian life, detailed and specific repentance leads to change that lasts. Having repentance become as detailed

and specific as is being commended here will lead to God's people being equipped to deal with their sin problems with more lasting change.

Compassionate Counseling

Fifth, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry leads to compassion and understanding on the part of the counselor. How can counselors who have never taken drugs, been addicted to pornography, tried to commit suicide, or vomited after every meal identify with and help counselees who struggle with those things? The understanding of motivation and idolatry being developed here shows that there is a common theme running through all wrong behavior. The husband who grouses at his wife every evening before dinner and the teenage girl strung out on crystal meth have one thing in common: they are living for the worship, honor, and glorification of themselves. The angry husband and the teenage addict seek glory for themselves and will reserve for themselves the determination about how that glory will be pursued. The sinful self-exalting heart seeks to get the universe to orbit around itself: all sinners—counselees and counselors alike—have this in common though they will seek different methods to bring it about.

This means a counselor can never listen to a serial adulterer and respond in shocked disgust and disbelief as though such a sin has nothing to do with the life in which he lives. In fact the monogamous counselor listening to such an account knows exactly what it is to want to exalt himself and to be desperate for things that God hates. The difference: the monogamous counselor uses different means—different idols—to get to the same goal—exaltation of self—than the adulterous counselee. The counselee's idols may be more "socially acceptable" but—insofar as

they are sought to honor self above God—they are equally sinister in the sight of God.

Protection against “Idol Hunts”

Sixth, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry will guard against a preoccupation with what might be called “idol hunts.” An idol hunt is the search on the part of a counselor to find *the* idol that is plaguing a person at a particular point. There is no evidence that any leader in the biblical counseling movement advocates such a pursuit, but as the teachings of the leaders have been distilled down to the lay level—and expanded to other movements—there is some evidence that this is happening. An example of this is the book *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart* by integrationist authors Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III.¹⁸ Allender and Longman never credit Powlison for his work but they do spend their entire book developing his idea. Allender and Longman propose seven heart idols of power, relationships, work and money, pleasure, wisdom, spirituality, and immorality. In their work they develop each of these and show the danger of trusting in them.

There are a number of problems with the work of Allender and Longman. First, their categories are confused. For example, they deal with the idol of control, but do not consider the fact that for many, being preoccupied with work or immorality is another effort at control and not separate from it. As another example, they deal with the idol of pleasure but do not address the reality that money and

¹⁸Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart: How to Navigate the Temptations of Life* (Deerfield, IN: IVP, 2007).

relationships can also be a conniving way to pursue pleasure. A second problem is that though they write an entire book about the way idols can dominate a person's life, they never explain specifically how a person might turn from idols through specific acts of repentance. For the work here, however, the most significant problem for Allender and Longman is that they do not seem to recognize the danger of proposing a finite list of idols. Allender and Longman do not ever get behind idols to discover what is going on in every human heart whether they are preoccupied with some, none, or all of the idols that they list in their book. This one is simply not a helpful development of the thinking of those in the contemporary biblical counseling movement. It would be more helpful to avoid compiling a master list of idols (thus contributing to an idol hunt) and instead show the commonality of all sinful pursuits in the sinful self-exalting heart. Once that common theme is understood counselors can help themselves and others understand the specifics of their problem—not by compiling a master list—but by asking: What is this person using to honor and glorify himself? In what areas of her life is this person reserving for herself the right of what to do and not do?

Protection against Introspection

Finally, a fuller articulation of motivation and idolatry will guard against introspection on the part of the counselee. If the previous benefit targets counselors and protects them from an idol hunt with their counsees then this benefit targets counsees and protects them from an over-emphasis on self analysis. Sometimes counsees can become preoccupied with determining what their specific idol is. This particular goal makes true and lasting change dependent on the isolation of one

specific idol. An understanding of the Bible's teaching on the sinful, self-exalting heart frees the counselee from this quest. The biblical understanding allows counselees to understand that the fundamental problem of self-exaltation will manifest itself in a million specific concretizations as idols. This understanding does not mean that counselees should not seek to repent of specific sins and specific idols. It does mean that it is not necessary for a counselee to be preoccupied with introspection to do so. Rather, counselees must be reminded of the gospel of grace, which frees sinners from self by a simple call of faith and obedience.

Conclusion

The second generation of the biblical counseling movement has been helpful in thinking through a biblical theology of motivation. The "idols of the heart" language developed by Powlison has been both enlightening and important. This metaphor rightly captures that sinful human beings are motivated to act by things that are not God. It has been necessary to further elaborate on this metaphor, however, showing that biblically, idols do not exist in and of themselves but instead are concrete manifestations of every human's deep-seated desire for self-exaltation. There are many benefits of this biblical understanding that all organize every idol a person my struggle within a unified understanding of sinful self-righteousness.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: INCREASINGLY COMPETENT TO COUNSEL

Introduction

At the end of the 1960's Jay Adams's proposal of biblical counseling was radical.¹ The approach to helping people with their problems in living had been defined exclusively by its secularity. The church, of all places, denied her own rich resources. It was the church that had totally adopted secular theories and therapies for helping hurting people. It was the church that was often guilty of baptizing those approaches in prayers and proof texts.

Adams's role was to initiate a recovery of Jesus, the Bible, and the Church in helping people with their problems. Adams's goal was to awaken slumbering Christians to the wealth of rich resources that God had given them for counseling troubled people. Adams's context and goal created a twofold necessity for the founder of the biblical counseling movement.

The Founding of the Biblical Counseling Movement

On the one hand, Adams needed to build an entire movement from scratch. While previous generations of Christians had developed resources to help people that were relevant for their own times, there were no resources to address the unique

¹Actually he was recovering something that had been in a place for centuries before as chap. 1 discusses.

challenges confronting counseling in the twentieth century from a distinctly Christian perspective. In the providence of God, the initial task of providing both vision and resources fell almost exclusively to Adams. Adams needed to construct, from the ground up, a theoretical understanding of counseling, an approach to counseling process, and a strategy to engage other counseling practitioners and theoreticians—all of which would meet his goal of being based exclusively on the teachings of Scripture. Furthermore, Adams did not have the leisure of decades to accomplish this task. In a sense, he built it on the wing. Adams and John Bettler commented on this element in an interview,

Adams: It wasn't planned. It was a casual thing.

Bettler: Nothing about the counseling and the counseling center was planned then. It was all by the seat of the pants. Jay would do something on Monday, make it up in the moment; then he'd teach it on Tuesday in class at Westminster.

Adams: It wasn't quite that bad—more like the next week! I at least gave it a week's thought and study. It was on-the-job learning, on-the-job teaching, on-the-job training.²

Adams was responding to a critical need. This critical need demanded that Adams produce the materials for his model immediately, almost spontaneously. More time would have been a luxury that was not Adams's reality.

Adams needed to present his alternative model in such a way that it gained a hearing. This need for a hearing goes a long way in explaining why Adams often spoke the way he did. The assertive tone so frequently employed by Adams was less an accidental character flaw than it was a strategy to drive his hearers towards making a decision. Powlison describes an interview in which Adams commented on this,

²David Powlison, Jay E. Adams, and John F. Bettler, "25 Years of Biblical Counseling: An Interview with Jay Adams and John Bettler," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 12, no. 1 (1993): 8.

Adams discussed his rhetorical strategy freely. Blunt overstatement sounds different when understood as a conscious strategy rather than as the summary of a person's position. In person he offered a rationale for conscious overstatement: as a populist strategy for engaging in turf warfare, it pushed people to decide either for or against. He then criticized scholarly understatement as ineffective strategically, and frequently pusillanimous.³

For Adams, bombast was a conscious tactic. Such an explanation does not excuse everything that Adams did or said. There are times when a deeper appreciation of the biblical call to speak the truth in love might have led to a different approach on Adams's part.⁴ However, such an explanation does place Adams's tactics in the context of a larger strategy. It reminds that the concerns facing Adams in the first generation were different than those facing the second generation. It reminds that the second generation has been able to bring finesse to a movement born through the forcefulness of its founder.

Adams did the hard work of launching a movement, and did so against great forces opposed to or unaware of the need for such a movement. In fact, the task of creating a movement was so great that one marvels that Adams was able to accomplish all that he did. Despite the difficulties he established a beachhead and gained ground in the fight to construct a biblical counseling movement. But the movement he founded was in need of development.

³David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of the Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Glenside, PA: Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1996), 36.

⁴One thinks particularly of Adams's approach at the Congress of Christian Counselors mentioned in chapter four. All can appreciate Adams's call to repentance but when done in such an insulting manner it seems to have done more harm than good. Jay Adams, "Jay Adams's Response to the Congress on Christian Counseling." *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 10, no. 1 (1989): 2-4.

The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement

As the movement founded by Adams moved from a first to a second generation, it changed and matured. There was conceptual development as the second generation pondered more carefully how to balance biblical notions of sin and suffering and how to think through motivational issues, how to explain and address the causes of behavior. There was methodological development as biblical counselors learned from Scripture to be more caring, kind, and relational and less formal and authoritative in their approach to relationships. And there was apologetic development as the second generation learned from the failures and strengthened the successes of the first generation's approach to engagement with outsiders.

The publication of "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling" in 1988 was the movement's first effort at being self-critical and intentionally developing upon Adams. From that starting point the movement has continued to grow and develop over the last two decades. The movement is more thoughtful; it is more caring; it is learning to speak more wisely and loving to outsiders—the movement is more biblical.

That development occurred would not come as a surprise to Adams. Development was anticipated in Adams's own work. Adams was clear on a number of occasions that his work was "only a beginning" as he encouraged others to come behind him and do more work. For example, in *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, Adams commented on the need for solid theology in counseling and wrote,

Truly, the situation is complex (I almost wrote "horrendous"). You can understand, then, why I am begging for volumes to be written, and why I make

no claims about doing more than making a beginning at discussing the many matters of anthropology that confront the Christian counselor who wants to be thoroughly biblical. It is hard enough to know where to begin my sketch, let alone to attempt anything more ambitious.⁵

Adams knew his work was only a beginning, even remarking that the need for theological reflection in counseling was so great that it was a struggle to know where to begin. Those who have followed Adams and done more work are fulfilling Adams's mandate.

Adams was also clear about the necessity for others to critically think through the ideas he had proposed.

The nouthetic counseling group differs significantly from the psychoanalytic coterie with which Freud surrounded himself. For them to differ with the Master was heresy and it was necessary either to recant of anti-Freudian dogma or be excommunicated. No such relationship exists among nouthetic thinkers, all of whom are thinkers and theologians in their own right. They are yes and no men; and I learn continually from their nos.⁶

Adams is clear here that the counseling movement founded by him needed independent theologians and thinkers to come after him and evaluate his project. He further made clear that the "nos" of others in the movement were a source of great learning for him. He further stated that intentional critical reflection was one of the things that should mark biblical counseling as different from secular approaches to people-helping.

⁵Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 97. This exact point is made in different language in idem, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 92-93.

⁶Jay Adams, *What About Nouthetic Counseling?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 6.

Responding to Development

How should we evaluate that development? As the biblical counseling movement moves from a second to a *third* generation, how should contemporary biblical counselors evaluate the development that has taken place?

Before answering this question it will be helpful to state how biblical counselors should *not* evaluate this development. There are three wrong approaches to development. First, biblical counselors should not minimize the work done by the first generation. As stated above, Adams's task was to create, to launch, to found. Every person committed to a uniquely biblical approach to helping people with their problems has Adams to thank for the movement that they call their own. The goal of this project has been to show carefully how the movement founded by Adams has developed. Such work is critical for assessing where the movement is and where it has come from. Every attempt has been made, however, to do this work in a manner, which shows appreciation for the founding work of Adams. It has never been the goal of this project to point fingers or accuse. Such a posture would be inappropriate since God used Adams—flaws and all—as a servant to call the church towards more faithfulness in the task of helping struggling persons. It would be unwise, unloving, and ungodly for contemporary biblical counselors to stomp on the shoulders of the giants on which they stand.

Second, biblical counselors should not evaluate the development that has taken place by ignoring or discounting the work of the second generation. Disregarding the development of the second generation would be just as wrong as minimizing the work of the first. The biblical counseling movement has developed in

biblical ways. All biblical counselors can be thankful for the increased insight into human suffering and human motivation; for greater care in creating relationships of love, care, and concern; and for the increased efforts to spread a vision of biblical counseling to those outside the movement. The biblical counseling movement is stronger today than it was two decades ago because of the faithful work of those following Adams and working according to his same vision.

Finally, biblical counselors should not evaluate the development that has occurred by drawing a firm line between the first and second generations, as though they are not ultimately “familial” differences. In looking at how the biblical counseling movement has matured, there is a danger of making distinctions inside the movement that blur deep commonalities that unite. It is important to remember—as has been addressed elsewhere in this project—that far more unites the first and second generations than divides them. All biblical counselors are united by a desire to help struggling people and see them change, by a commitment to progressive sanctification, by skepticism regarding secular psychology’s usurpation of the ministerial role, and by a commitment to the sufficiency of Christ, his Word, and his church. This unity holds the generations of biblical counseling together as family. It is critical that the movement stand together on this unity and avoid a factious spirit.

How then should biblical counselors evaluate the development of the last two decades? It seems that two responses are appropriate. First, biblical counselors should be thankful. Biblical counselors should be thankful for the founding work of the first generation. Additionally, biblical counselors should be thankful for the work of development engaged in by the second generation. Finally, biblical counselors

should be thankful for the unity that exists between all those who are committed to a uniquely biblical approach to helping people with their problems.

A second response appropriate for biblical counselors is diligence. Biblical counselors need to be diligent to continue the work that has been done in the spirit in which it has been done. Adams was a “Berean.” He looked out over the counseling landscape that existed, and refused to accept what he saw. Instead, he demanded something more biblical. He worked to create it for the good of the church and the honor of Christ. The same is true of the second generation of biblical counselors. They observed the initial work of Adams but did not accept it as it was. Instead, for the good of the church and the honor of Christ they sought to make it more biblical. Biblical counselors in the third, fourth, and fifth generations and onward will be like those in the first and second when they receive all that has been handed down with gratitude while, at the same time, striving to make the work conform more closely to God’s Word.

Conclusion: Building an Airplane in the Air

The work developing a practical theology of biblical counseling is a bit like building an airplane while it is in the air. The first generation provided the force needed to launch a project into the air. The first generation also provided the force that was needed to keep such a project in the air, defending it against dismissive attack. Thinking of the founding of the movement in this way explains the need for development. Adams’s initial theological proposals were tantamount to strapping an engine on to the wing of an in-flight airplane—he simply did not have the luxury of doing finishing work in the cabin—or even affixing a windshield.

Just as Adams's work of force was necessary to launch the plane in the air, the second generation's work of finesse was necessary to improve the quality of flight. Thoughtful reflection on the issues mentioned in this project was made possible because of the first generation's diligent labors. The labor of the second generation makes the quality of the plane much better and a greater pleasure in which to fly.

Adams's work was not perfect. Understood in his historical context, however, there is no way that it could have been. Adams brought the force of a founder—and the flaws that come with it. Adams was a Luther. What *should* be expected is the necessity of development. What *should* be expected is theological reflection and development that makes wise and loving Christians increasingly competent to counsel. This effort has been the work of the second generation of biblical counselors. It will continue to be the work of successive generations.

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ABSTRACT

THE THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT FROM 1988

Heath Blane Lambert, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009
Chairperson: Dr. David Powlison

This dissertation examines how the thought undergirding the biblical counseling movement as founded by Jay Adams has developed since 1988. Chapter 1 examines the historical and theological context for that development. This chapter is concerned to set the context necessary in understanding the work to follow.

Chapter 2 evaluates the conceptual development of the biblical counseling movement. The development in the movement regarding sin and suffering and motivational issues is considered.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodological development of the biblical counseling movement. The shift from the formal and authoritative method of Adams to the relational method of the second generation of leaders is documented.

Chapter 4 tackles the apologetic development of the biblical counseling movement. The chapter highlights the various approaches in engaging with outsiders of the movement.

Chapter 5 engages the work of Eric Johnson. Johnson is the only other scholar who seriously evaluates the counseling movement as anything other than monolithic. This chapter assesses the correctness of his approach.

Chapter 6 seeks to address areas in further need of development with regard to motivational issues in biblical counseling. Efforts are made here to further develop a biblical counseling understanding of human motivation.

Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation. The argument is made that, in evaluating the development of the biblical counseling movement, it is important to embrace the founding work of the first generation and the developing work of the second generation, being thankful for each.

This work argues that the biblical counseling movement is one, single movement that has experienced conceptual, methodological, and apologetic development from a first, founding generation to a second, developing generation. It is further argued that this development has improved the theological foundation of the movement.

VITA

Heath Blane Lambert

PERSONAL

Born: September 13, 1979, Morehead, Kentucky
Parents: Anthony Lambert and Paulette Jamison
Married: Lauren Elizabeth DeCaro, July 27, 2003
Children: Carson Anthony, born August 27, 2005
Chloe Elizabeth, born March 22, 2008

EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Louisville Male Traditional High School, Louisville, Kentucky
B.A., Political Studies/Biblical and Theological Studies, Gordon College, 2002
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005

MINISTERIAL

Associate Pastor, Farmdale Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, 2003-05
Pastor, Unity Baptist Church, Huntersville, North Carolina, 2005-06
Pastor, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, 2006-08

ACADEMIC

Teaching Assistant, Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, 2000-02
Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006-08
Instructor, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007-08
Instructor, Boyce College, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008-
Present