

The Significance of Sin for the Psychologies

Karen and her husband came to discuss the possibility of marriage mediation after only being married for a little over a year. These were second marriages for both and now their new relationship was in deep trouble. She believed that she had been lied to about his financial situation and she let him know it. Her tongue got her in trouble regularly as she lashed out and “told him the truth,” whether he liked it or not. Nothing he could do would satisfy her. To top it off, anger and extreme anxiety, leading to health issues and lack of sleep, were a regular part of her life. Karen and, as you can imagine, her husband were both miserable. How do we make sense of her troubles? It is obvious that Karen has problems but why is she like this?

When someone is ill, obtaining a proper diagnosis is essential. If not diagnosed precisely, a lot of time, energy, emotion, and money go into treating the symptoms inaccurately. This principle is also true of counseling issues. The counseling psychologies deal with the personal problems of humans and endeavor to understand what the problem is in order to then give a treatment plan.¹ If we are going to properly diagnose personal problems we must include a biblical view of what is truly wrong. This view of what is wrong is clearly portrayed in Genesis 3 and these details directly apply to the social sciences. In fact, the implications of both the cause (vv. 1-6) and effects (vv. 7-24) portrayed in this crucial chapter of Scripture lead to a robust model to explain the myriad of human issues.

For example, why are there mass shootings? Every time there is another mass shooting there is an onslaught of analysis over why someone would do something so horrible. Terms like “mental illness” are used and some decry that we are not putting enough into research of the brain to try to understand. Others might say it is the shooter’s environmental pressures that

¹ I am using the term “psychologies” instead of psychology since there are many proposed paradigms to explain what is wrong with humans and how to help them deal with their problems.

caused him to pull the trigger. Yet others might say it is a combination of both a brain issue and environmental issues.² It is frustrating to many that we cannot figure this out. Out of love for people we desperately need the correct diagnosis so the treatment can address the true problem.

In the midst of this confusion and pain, as our cultures desperately try to understand why humans do what they do, I want to pose the same question as Dr. Karl Menninger, “Whatever happened to sin?” As a well-known psychiatrist he wrote, “It was a word once in everyone’s mind, but now rarely if ever heard. It is only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal, or asleep?” He then added, “...Is nothing now a sin?”³ He was concerned about the moral direction of our culture. I have the same questions. Are we now so sophisticated that there is no soul sickness but only mental illness? Have we moved beyond the supposedly primitive idea of sin? How does the doctrine of sin influence the way we understand the term “mental health?”

Let me be the first to acknowledge that talking about sin related to the mental state of others is hard. It sounds calloused. But that is not my demeanor. My desire is to have compassion (Col 3:5) and bear with others in love (Eph 4:2) as I help them truly get to the root of their problems. But, a proper treatment plan demands a proper diagnosis. Therefore, my intent is to demonstrate how crucial a literal understanding of sin is to the social sciences. In other words, a biblical view of counseling must include the doctrine of sin and what it has done to humanity. Even if a psychology is making accurate observations and even if there is a strong physical

²Typical thinking is described in this definition. “A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbances in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities.” American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 20.

³ Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 13–14. In quoting Dr. Menninger it is not to be assumed that he believes in the biblical doctrine of total depravity. He is just trying to make the point that there is right and wrong and people are responsible for their behavior. He is also decrying that American culture had gotten to the point, even at the time of his writing, of not believing in right and wrong.

component to the issue, the diagnosis cannot be accurate if it does not include the immaterial part of our being and how it has been infected by sin.⁴ Our culture is scrambling for answers and there is not unity on etiology (the source of the problem) partially because we are not operating from a biblical framework.⁵

Counseling Theories Are Diagnostic Frameworks

Defining Psychology

Before studying the account of the Fall let us look at some secular viewpoints on the source of problems and their solutions. To do that we must understand what a psychology is. Most psychology texts would define their field in the following way: “Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes ... consequently, the phrase behavior and mental processes in the definition of psychology must be understood to mean many things: it encompasses not just people’s actions, but also their thoughts, emotions, perceptions, reasoning processes, memories, and even the biological activities that maintain bodily functioning.”⁶

While most agree on this definition, there are many different theories of why we have the behavior and mental processes we do and a vast array of approaches for helping (various therapies). In other words, you could say that each psychology offers its own view of the

⁴ This immaterial part of our being biblically is called, soul, spirit, mind, and heart throughout Scripture. I will seek to demonstrate that the term heart is the leading word and is directly impacted by what happened in the garden.

⁵ “**1:** CAUSE, ORIGIN *specifically*: the cause of a disease or abnormal condition, **2:** a branch of knowledge concerned with causes *specifically*: a branch of medical science concerned with the causes and origins of diseases.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, s.v. “etiology.”

⁶ Robert S. Feldman, *Understanding Psychology*, 5.

problem and solution. Each solution has its own set of methodologies, consisting of types of questions, homework, and tests that are used to carry out the approach to people problems.⁷

Viewing this theologically, each psychology has a view of sin. Here they are answering the question, what is the source of the problem? Each then has a view of salvation⁸ and sanctification,⁹ answering the questions, what is the solution to the problem and the methodology for carrying it out?¹⁰

Examples of Various Diagnostic Frameworks

Volumes of books have been devoted to explaining all the various approaches to counseling but here are some of the most common: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, the Biomedical model, and Maslow's needs theory.¹¹

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

⁷ To test my understanding of this we did a simple experiment. My assistant called five different counseling offices and asked the Director or head therapist what they believe is the source of anger. In other words, why do people struggle with anger and then how do we help them deal with it. Guess what? We got five different answers as to the source and solution to the problem! The answers were the typical range of brain chemistry, unmet needs, and family upbringing (environment). The treatment plans then matched what they perceived the problem to be.

⁸ Even some secular psychologies use this terminology. Psychologist Paul Vitz quotes Jungian practitioner, Jacobi as describing Carl Jung's psychology as "a way of salvation." Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion*, 3.

⁹ "...That gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 532. I will explain in more detail how this fits into a biblical counseling methodology toward the end of the chapter.

¹⁰ You can actually breakdown the psychologies as individual belief systems by using more S's. Every psychology has a "source of authority" (epistemology). Each has a view of the problem to be solved "sin" (etiology). They then propose a "salvation" (the solution to the problem) and a methodology or "sanctification." The psychologies also have "support systems" like mental hospitals and universities to teach their viewpoint. Finally, each psychology does apologetics or "sparring" to defend their understanding of people problems. This sparring takes place in various journals and research studies as articles are written to demonstrate why this approach to counseling is superior to others. I am thankful for Dr. David Powlison introducing me to this type of thinking; he is the Director of The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF). He is also the Editor of *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. If you are interested in gaining more insight into how Biblical Counseling views people and problems this journal and David's writings in particular would be a great resource.

¹¹ There are many therapies, e.g. Family Systems Therapy, and other Psychodynamic approaches.

A leading therapist in the counseling psychologies is Aaron Beck who developed an innovative approach called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or CBT. “The basic idea behind CBT is that thinking controls or largely affects behavior. If you change thinking, you have a good chance of changing behavior. As Alfred Adler, a psychotherapist who developed a precursor to CBT, stated, ‘I am convinced that a person’s behavior springs from his ideas.’”¹² Thus, their main focus would be the belief that if thinking changes behavior changes as well.

Biomedical

Others are not convinced of CBT but believe that the source is biological, specifically the brain. Brett Deacon puts it very succinctly, “The biomedical model posits that mental disorders are brain diseases and emphasizes pharmacological treatment to target presumed biological abnormalities.”¹³ At this moment, at least at the media level, culture accepts this as the explanatory lens to understand human problems.¹⁴

Many psychologists though would not buy into a strictly biological model but instead say we are bio/psycho/social beings and that all three of these elements are interacting to create issues. In other words, our biology, our mental state, and our social relations all interact with one another to create our responses to the world.

Maslow’s Needs Theory

¹² Charles Barber, *Comfortably Numb, How Psychiatry is Medicating a Nation*, 141.

¹³ Brett J. Deacon, “The biomedical model of mental disorder: A critical analysis of its validity, utility, and effects on psychotherapy research,” 846-61.

¹⁴ Karl Menninger shows the logical outcome of this thinking as it applies to responsibility and criminal behavior. “If one can be treated effectively by medical science for a propensity toward certain behavior, it would be absurd to punish him for this same manifestation.... Diseases are not crimes. Hence, no matter how reprehensible or offensive a piece of behavior may be, it cannot be called a crime if it is a symptom of a disease. A man may murder his best friend or his worst enemy during a delirium and yet commit no crime.... The demonstrated presence in the offender at the time of his criminal act a condition called “mental disease” which impairs discretion and control cancels the legal guiltiness of the offender.” Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 74-75.

Another common theory is that basic needs are not being met. When Maslow presented this view of the source of human problems he also consciously rejected the idea of a sin nature. “As far as I know we just don’t have any intrinsic instincts for evil. If you think in terms of basic needs; instincts, at least at the outset, are all ‘good’ or perhaps we should be technical about it and call them ‘pre-moral,’ neither good nor evil.”¹⁵

His solution was to learn to be a “self actualized” person like Thomas Edison or others who reached their full potential. They had all of their basic needs met and therefore happiness could be achieved. While Freud studied negative motivations, Maslow studied positive incentives for humans to reach full potential.

Many today have essentially the same view of what the illness is and its solution. For example,

One of the deepest concerns of psychologists and some other social scientists has been the identification of the spring of human action. What moves us to action and/or determines the direction of our strivings? Our motives, described by concepts like needs, desires, aims, goals, and aspirations, not only shape our actions, but their fulfillment or frustration also deeply affect our inner life, our experience of ourselves and the world. Basic needs are conceptualized here as the most fundamental motives. Their satisfaction is essential for growth, development and well-being of human beings.... Basic needs have an imperative quality: they press for satisfaction.¹⁶

Biblical Eyeglasses

While all of these approaches provide interesting and helpful insights into humanity I do not believe they get at the root of the problem that is influencing everything else. As Christians,

¹⁵ Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 3.

¹⁶ Ervin Staub, *The Psychology of Good and Evil: Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others*, 52. It is not the purpose of this chapter to fully analyze secular views. I am only trying to demonstrate how essential a biblical view of humanity is for the social sciences. If the reader would like another perspective on “needs” theory read Ed Welch’s article, “Who are we, Needs, Longings, and the Image of God in Man.” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* Vol. 13, Number 1 (Fall 1994). In this article he is answering the following questions. Where are needs in the Bible? How should we think biblically about needs? If we are image bearers and have needs are we saying God has needs?

we want to know what the all-knowing Creator said about humanity. In light of this, problems arise when we take a discerning look at these theories.

Think with me about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Of course we are rational beings according to Scripture, but it is also true that strong desires often override the rational part of our being. They might say in response that we must reorient thinking about desires. But change is more complex than reprogramming our mental processing of desires. Titus 3:3 says that humans are “slaves to various passions and pleasures.” Many people intellectually know the right thing to do but their desires override thinking. According to Scripture we are worshiping beings (Matt 12:34-35), desiring beings (Rom 13:14), and much more.¹⁷ Something deeper is going on than just thinking.

It is also true that we are Bio/psycho/social beings but consider what secular culture means by these terms. Your biology is evolved and has not been impacted by a sin nature.¹⁸ Your “psyche” is your mental state with no emphasis on an immaterial part of your being. Yes, we are social beings but the ultimate relationship is missing in that you were created to be in relationship with God.

Thus, from a biblical standpoint, we can already begin to see that these theories are inadequate. You see, Karen’s problems did not begin when she said, “I do.” They began thousands of years ago in the garden.

¹⁷ There are many worship words that describe what is going on inside of humans. For example, we are devoted, hope in, serve, bow down to, love, fear, and treasure many things above the Lord.

¹⁸ In fact, the secular psychologies would not agree on a common human nature. As we have seen from just three examples there are multiple views of what is wrong with humans and why evil exists. A biblical anthropology would tell us there is a common human nature. Consider Jonathan Edward’s argument. “If it be observed, that those trees, and all other trees of the kind, wherever planted, and in all soils, countries, climates and seasons, and however cultivated and managed, still bear ill fruit, from year to year, and in all ages, it is good evidence of the evil nature of the tree. . . . And if we argue in like manner from what appears among men, ‘tis easy to determine, whether the universal sinfulness of mankind, and their all sinning immediately, as soon as capable of it, and all sinning continually. . . , in all ages, and all places, and under all possible circumstances, against means and motives inexpressibly manifold and great, and in the utmost conceivable variety, be from a permanent internal great cause.” John Piper, *A God Entranced Vision of All things, The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 180-81.

Genesis 1-3 Provide a Biblical Diagnostic Framework

Genesis One Defines Normal

Before we get to the diagnosis of the problem we must understand what God intended normal existence to be pre-fall. For things to be abnormal or disordered implies there is a norm and order. But, who determines “normal”? God made the answer clear right from the beginning.

Genesis 1:26-28 portrays humans made to be in relationship with their Creator. This was normal and healthy. The relationship was to be so close that we reflect His image. Much has been written on this and a crucial aspect of being made in God’s image is that we were made to live for His glory (Isa 6:3; Ezek 43:1-3; Hab 2:14; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31). His glory is all that He is in the sum total of His attributes and we were made to reflect those on the planet. We were made to live “godly” (God-like) lives. Imagine the whole world being filled with worshipers like this. That is exactly what His original intention was (1:28).

Since Scripture says this is true, ask yourself if true mental health is possible outside this fundamental relationship. Could anyone be “self-actualized” outside of relationship with their Creator? It should also be clear that humanity has a big problem since most live alienated from Him. What led to this alienation and what is the solution? Genesis 3 gives the answer.

The Cause of Problems Is a Worship Disorder

Chapter three is incredibly ugly against the “very good” backdrop of chapter one (1:31). God told them they had a high purpose for being on the planet. Now comes the test of obedience and fidelity to their Sovereign. Will they be godly or not? Will they live for His glory or their own?

To answer these questions we need to take a deeper look at a paradigm shifting verse of the Bible (v. 6). Where did this act of rebellion originate? We are told, that they ate because “...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.” Their whole being was involved in this decision to go against what the Lord had commanded. The inner person was actively engaged in how each responded to the external pressure of the temptation. The serpent puts pressure on Eve, she influences Adam, and even though he knew better, he rebels.

They were not victims of circumstances unwittingly shaped by their environment. Instead, they were active agents who made a decision based upon being rational and emotional. They were thinking about “being wise” and wanted (i.e. desired) to be like God “knowing good and evil” (v. 5). The emotions were stimulated by the fruit being a “delight.” Their loyalty and devotion was tested, the inner person was stirred, and they failed. According to Scripture the term that is used for our inner being consisting of “minds, will, and emotions” is the heart.¹⁹ It “...Became the richest biblical term for the totality of man’s inner or immaterial nature.”²⁰

They could have said no but chose not to. Ever since, the heart has been tainted and you are dealing with a Genesis three hangover and so am I!²¹ They rebelled against God’s commands and a multitude of human problems have been unleashed as a result.

¹⁹ Heart is defined as, “one’s inner self, seat of feeling and emotions; inclination, disposition, will, reason, mind in general.” Ludwig Kohler and Walter Baumgardner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1:514-15.

²⁰ R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:466.

²¹ I first heard the term “Genesis three hangover” from Dr. George Zemek teaching on apologetics at The Master’s Seminary.

G. K. Beale in his book, *We Become What We Worship*, makes an important observation about what happened in the garden. The chapter on the origin of idolatry explains, "... When Adam stopped being committed to God and reflecting his image, he revered something else in place of God and resembled his new object of worship. Thus at the heart of Adam's sin was turning from God and replacing reverence for God with a new object of reverence to which Adam became conformed."²²

Genesis 3 then in part reveals what Adam and Eve would put their hope in and choose to be devoted to. Would they believe the LORD, trust Him, and let Him be God and them the creation? Or, would they believe the serpent, trust it and desire to be like God and rule their own lives? We all know the answer and are feeling the results. Like Adam and Eve, every morning we awake and make the same decisions. What will I love? What will I hope in? What will I serve? But now, because of them, I have a bent the wrong way. I have a tendency to worship (i.e., trust in, hope in, rejoice in, and love)²³ the wrong things. I am guilty of idolatry.

The Rest of Scripture and False Worship/Wrong Desire in the Heart

We see Adam's heart idolatry in the garden paralleled in how Scripture describes sin. Just like Adam and Eve, Scripture clearly states that life is lived out of the heart. We must guard it

²² In another place Beale writes, "There is no explicit vocabulary describing Adam's sin as idol worship, but the idea appears inextricably bound up with his transgression. But how is this discernible? Recall that idol worship is revering anything other than God. At the least Adam's allegiance shifted from God to himself and probably also to Satan, since he comes to resemble the serpent's character in some ways" (133). It is intriguing to think about the implications of resembling the serpent. Was it part of Satan's strategy to make his own "image bearers" instead of their original design of being image bearers of the true and living God? G.K. Beale, *We Become What we Worship*, 127, 133.

²³ A long list could be compiled of words from Scripture that tell us what we are to do in relationship with God. Each one of these words has counseling implications. For example, what do you devote yourself to? What do you "sing the praises of?" Where do you bow?

with all vigilance since it is the springhead of life (Prov 4:23).²⁴ Our Lord reinforces this by telling us that from the heart the mouth speaks (Matt 12:34). He then adds a crucial piece to help us understand the puzzle of our hearts. He replaces the word heart with treasure in verse 35. In other words, our hearts are our treasures, revealing what we value. How can you tell a person's value system? What they love, hope for, trust, rejoice in, and fear, reveals "treasures."

The Bible directs us where to place our love, hope, and faith, and warns us about false loves and hoping in empty things (Ps 33:13-22; Matt 22:37-40; 1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 3:1-4). It is guaranteed that the thought life, decision-making, and emotions are wrapped around these things. But, according to Jeremiah 17:9 all of this has been tainted by the deceitful and desperately sick nature of the heart.²⁵

Do you see that the problem is deeper than chemical imbalances? Brace yourself. We have another key component to add. In the heart dwell desires and passions.²⁶ We are desire filled beings and these appetites and passions are permeated with sin (Matt 5:28; Rom 1:24; Jas 3:14).

John's classic passage warns about loving the world and in particular not to love the "desires of the flesh," the "desires of the eyes," and the "pride of possessions" (1 John 2:15-17). There is a clear connection to the garden. But here John adds that this is about the futility of false loves. Ruling desires, reveal "heart themes" that are directly connected to counseling issues. Here are a few examples.

²⁴ There are hundreds of other references to the heart (e.g. Gen 6:5; Isa 29:13; Mark 7:21-23; Heb 4:12).

²⁵ For one understanding of how this verse precisely relates to the believer see my article at <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2013/07/11/jeremiah-179-is-it-true-of-the-believer/>

²⁶ Gerhard Kittel, *The Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 3:612.

- Desires of the flesh (In Gen 3, “good for food”): sexual pleasure, food, comfort-loving, enslavement to alcohol or other enslavements.
- Desires of the eyes (In Gen 3, “delight to the eyes”): appearances, pornography.
- Pride in possessions (In Gen 3, “desired”): materialism, cars, technology, degrees.

To really help people grow and change we must help them get to the deepest disorders. Humans do not just have personality disorders, they have worship disorders. The testimony of Scripture is that the desires resulting from Genesis 3 become strong, entrenched, ruling desires (see Titus 3:3). Genesis 4 makes clear that “...Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you....” (v.7). It is pictured as having a life of its own (cf. Heb 4:12 where the heart is described as being active with “thoughts and intentions”). David Powlison makes it clear why we must understand this as an interpretation of human nature. “If we would help people have eyes and ears for God we must know well which alternative gods clamor for their attention. These forces and shaping influences neither determine nor excuse our sins. But they do nurture, channel, and exacerbate our sinfulness in particular directions.”²⁷

The Result of Misplaced Worship Is Counseling Issues

I agree with Berkouwer who wrote, “In Genesis we observe a sin whose essential traits return in *every* [emphasis his] sin. Thus in the history of Israel[,] the fall was apostasy from the fellowship of God and the assumption of man’s own way.”²⁸ In other words, the seed of every

²⁷ David Powlison, “Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair,” 57. This seminal article has shaped the thinking of much of the Biblical Counseling world.

²⁸ G. C. Berkhouwer, *Sin, Studies in Dogmatics*, 274.

distortion and disorder is in this seminal section of Scripture. The basis of what we view as the problem with humanity starts here.²⁹

Humans Have Desire Problems

We have already noted the central place of desires within the heart but let us make clear where it started. The tree was “desired to make one wise” (3:6). They ate and consequently we all have a bad case of the “I wants.”³⁰ Their desires, not stopped by the dam of relationship with the Creator, overflowed into ruling desires. Lust takes on a life of its own. This topic is discussed frequently in Scripture showing how common the problem is (e.g., Rom 7:15-25; 13:14; 1 Pet 1:14; Eph 4:22). In counseling you can almost always ask, “What do you want that you are not getting?” And, “what are you getting that you do not want?” Unruly appetites and passions have launched thousands of counseling issues like the vast array of “addictions” humanity experiences. Sinful desires permeate the rest of the list and lead to sins not delineated.

Humans Experience Pain/Suffering

The earth is now going to produce “thorns” (3:18) and cause Adam pain in his labor (3:17). Romans 8:21-22 reinforces this saying that all creation groans and is subject to decay.

Other things change as well. Death was warned about (2:17) and death, with its suffering and diseases, was delivered. It should not surprise us if there are mental diseases since the brain, like the rest of the body, has been impacted by the fall.

²⁹ We are about to see a literal list of the consequences of sin. If the consequences are literal why would the cause be metaphorical? In other words, if the effects of sin are literal (which is self evident from daily experience) it makes sense that a literal Adam and Eve were the cause.

³⁰ Please note that the word in Hebrew for “desire” (Gen 3:6) is translated “covet” in the tenth commandment (Exod 20:17). Can we conclude that Moses (the author of both) saw the connection?

We also see humans hurting each other. The first thing that Adam does when confronted with his sin is blame Eve. This is the man who seems to have been delighted when God presented his wife to him. He said, “This *at last* [my emphasis] is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). What a change! I sin and I am sinned against. Much that is dealt with in counseling relates to hurt caused by others.

Humans Struggle with Food Issues

The object of desire was food and as we saw, all desires went awry (3:6). We all have eating issues as a result. When the pressure is on some over eat and some under eat. You should not be surprised. It is intrinsic to the fall.

Humans Struggle with Giving into Social Pressure

Psychology has long noted the shaping influence of others in our lives. We see it in the garden. She gave to him, he listened to the voice of his wife and we suffer (3:6, 17). Could this be the common human malady called “fear of man” (Prov 29:25)? Have you suffered because you listened to the voice of others?

Humans Struggle with Relationship Issues

As mentioned before, in chapter four we see the word “sin” mentioned for the first time and what is the context? It is interpersonal conflict of the worse type—murder. How bad was the fall? It was so bad that just twenty-six verses after the dreadful decision, brother murders brother. Also, instead of taking personal responsibility Adam shifts the blame to his wife (3:12). “It was not me” has been the default of humans ever since and it causes much pain in relationships.

Humans Struggle with Hiding and Deception

The first thing they did was cover and hide because of their shame and fear (3:7-10). Not only that, but the Satanic character of deception (3:13) now influences humanity (John 8:44). Humans hide and deceive in many ways, like not allowing others to see the real self. Other ways deception has influenced us are too numerous to mention.

Humans Struggle with Sexual Temptation

Why were they ashamed of their nakedness? While I understand that the primary message here is the shame from sin and what their newly informed conscience was doing to their souls. But, they are the only two on the planet! Could there also be implications of sexual deviance? Are they looking at each other in a different way now? The end of chapter two tells us, "...The man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed." At that point they were one flesh and happily united. But now, what was supposed to be a blessing is impacted by sin and they cover themselves.

Humans Struggle with Ungodly Communication

One of the first things that happened is Adam sinned against his wife with words. Imagine what she was thinking when she heard, "...The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree..." (v. 12).

Humans Struggle with Materialism

Think about it. Is not materialism desires for more? It is the attitude that stuff will bring me security and happiness. Adam and Eve were not content with what God gave them. They wanted more, and human nature became like Gollum in *Lord of the Rings*, frantically grasping

for “rings” that then grip our hearts. David Powlison, in a seminal article that has shaped much of the current biblical counseling movement states, “The tenth commandment is also a command that internalizes the problem of sin, making sin ‘psychodynamic.’³¹ It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes in Romans 7.”³²

Humans Struggle with Disordered Emotions

For the first time we see fear and shame in human history (vv. 8-10). It is easy to imagine the disordered emotions that grew out of this. For example, there was probably anxiety as they heard God approaching (v. 10). I find it interesting that every picture I have seen depicting them being driven from the garden shows them downcast, depressed, and ashamed. How have you felt these?

Humans Struggle with Self-Centeredness

This is the culminating fact that launched it all. Their sin was about wanting to be like God. Their focus turned to what they thought was best instead of what God said was best. They thought they deserved more. Pride is written all over the decision to operate independent of God.

What happens if we keep living for false hopes, shallow loves, and distorted desires? I will tell you—counseling issues. These become disordered relationships, emotions, and behavior.³³ When you begin to see people problems this way you say to yourself, “It would take a miracle for people to change.” And you would be right.

The Solution to the Problem

³¹ “Psychodynamic” would refer to processes going on internally that are impacting the external.

³² David Powlison, “Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair,” 44.

³³ The term “disorder” is the current terminology of the DSM-5. I like this terminology since the Lord can bring order out of disorder.

The Gospel Radically Reorients Life

Miracles happen as the cross sets us free from enslaving lusts and desires (Titus 3:3; Rom 6) and reorders the worship (love, trust, and hope) of our heart. The cross is not just a message to believe to get us to heaven someday. It is a message of hope and deliverance from the tyrant of sin and the lordship of engrained lusts and desires. This amazing grace is even promised for the first time right after Adam and Eve's rebellion (Gen 3:15). Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8). As we repent, our Sovereign has, and continues to, liberate us from Satan's and sin's tyrannical rule (Col 1:13). Worship is being restored to the King.

Such a salvation can happen because the most God-glorifying person who ever lived was our Savior. He was a perfect worshiper and through the power of the gospel we can become like Him. The New Testament is clear that this is the goal of our progressive sanctification (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). We are being made into the image of our Savior and restored to a place of obeying out of love. The purpose of the cross is to, "...Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col 3:10). We are enabled and motivated by the Holy Spirit to trust His character, putting our hope in Him (Rom 15: 4-5, 13). We are called to rejoice in, and sing the praises of the Creator of the universe, instead of the empty things this planet tells us are worthy of devotion. The image of God in man is being restored, which means the mind, will, and emotions can change because of the power of the gospel.

It seems like this is what the Lord was after with the woman of Samaria in John 4. This story is a wonderful example of the Lord going after themes of the heart.³⁴ Have you ever wondered why the Lord abruptly changes the subject and asks her to call her husband? He had

³⁴ The rich ruler is another example of the Lord going after a heart theme—wealth, materialism (Luke 18:18-25).

already offered to be living water if she would believe (4:10). Could it be that he goes right for her heart? His request clearly demonstrated her loves and hopes. Can you imagine the counseling issues of her lifestyle? Instead of putting her hope in relationships she needed to repent and put her trust in the Lord for her salvation. Doing so would begin to reorder the disorder of her soul (v. 14). Significantly, the Lord then tells her that God is seeking worshipers (v. 23). He was calling her to be one of them and the gospel reorders another life.

The problem that was launched in the garden is clear and so is the solution. We have a wonderful message of hope not only for eternity but also for daily struggles. Think of your own testimony. How has the gospel changed what you serve? What you are devoted to? What you love? What you are willing to sacrifice for? What you put hope in? This has many practical applications.

How Does This Work Out Practically?

I tell my classes, if false worship is the problem then true worship is the solution. Worship reorders the heart. My growth is dependent on living as a worshiper, which is made possible by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). The disorder of life is being reordered as my inner person is influenced by the power of the gospel and the living Word of God (Heb 4:12). I obey out of love for and trust in my Creator and Savior (John 15:10).

Practically this means we have to help counselees understand what is being served in the inner person. Meaning, we ask heart questions. These questions are worded to faithfully represent what Scripture says about the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Gen 6:5; Heb 4:12). For example, what do you find your mind dwelling on? What situations do you seek to avoid (decision-making)? When do you tend to experience fear, worry, and anxiety? As mentioned

earlier, these questions usually reveal values like living for the approval of people, materialism, comfort loving, pleasure, or strong desires to control life.

The natural question then is, what do you do with the answers? We disciple individuals to see the biblical alternative to these false themes of the soul and give practical homework so they can carry out the alternatives in real life (Matt 7:24). This would involve their thinking, emotions, and decision-making. We also show the behavior changes that should result from being a follower of Christ (Matt 28:20).

*The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*³⁵

Let us take one worship word and demonstrate how this reorients false worship to true worship. Love one another is the most often repeated command of the New Testament, so love seems like a great example (e.g., John 13:34; Rom 13:8-10). Is this just because God is love and wants us to be nice to each other? No, there is a strategy to His commands. Love leads to holiness (Rom 13:8). Why? Because superior loves push out inferior loves. We pursue the objects of our desire, so grow in love for God and others. It makes perfect sense why the two great commandments are the two great commandments (Matt 22:34-40). We grow in holiness when we love God because we will pursue Him. Thus, part of our job in counseling is to disciple others how to grow in love for God and each other. This actually reorients the desires of the inner person.

The medicine then for a sick heart is to submit to the King. Then continue to grow practically in love for God and others. I agree with John Piper, that once you understand our

³⁵ This is the title of an insightful sermon by a Scottish pastor named Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847). I would also remind the reader that you can take any worship word (e.g. faith, hope, obey) and think how they can be useful for reorienting the heart and thus deal with counseling issues.

original purpose on the planet but then do not point people to the ultimate solution is “...Like treating a fever with cold packs when you have penicillin.”³⁶

Because of the gospel, we will grow to be like our Lord, the godliest person who ever lived, and thus, we will reflect more and more glory back to the Creator instead of worshipping idols (1 Thess 1:9). This then helps people deal with their worries, fears, and depression. The impact of the Fall is being reversed in people like Karen. That is a great reason to rejoice instead of being worried, fearful, or depressed (Rom 15:13).

How to Think Biblically about the Term Mental Illness

Now that we have seen how the doctrines of sin and salvation impact the psychologies, and have viewed how to deal with counseling issues biblically, we are in a better position to think theologically about the term “mental illness.” As we do, keep in mind that the various psychologies do not agree on the source of problems. They just know there are problems.

Before diving into this controversial subject, allow me to make a clarification lest I am accused of being anti-scientific. I enjoy studying neuropsychology and have friends who are neuropsychologists. The study of the brain is crucial and I am thankful for those gifted to do so. There are many mysteries yet to be discovered. But, my assumption is that something deeper is going on in humans that must be kept in mind when doing research. I am not naïve enough to believe that the secular psychologies would operate from the presupposition that something did

³⁶The full quote is in a context discussing the theology of Jonathan Edwards. “In other words, if God’s glory is the only all-satisfying reality in the universe, then to try to do good for people, without aiming to show them the glory of God and ignite in them a delight in God, would be ‘like treating fever with cold packs when you have penicillin.’” John Piper, *God’s Passion For His Glory*, 36.

happen in the garden.³⁷ My concern here is for the church to not be gullible and buy into the talk of mental illness without taking into consideration Genesis 3.

I began to think seriously about this topic at the church where I was pastor in Virginia. We purposefully tried to reach struggling families for the sake of ministry in general, and the gospel in particular. Part of our strategy was an active children's ministry to our community. We loved the children and it was a great outreach to underprivileged children. This brought an interesting dynamic to our church, most of it positive. One of the negative things though was the highly undisciplined nature of the children. It was not uncommon for a child to say to us when we were trying to address his or her behavior, "I cannot help myself. I did not have my medicine." I desire to be teachable on this, and maybe there really is a brain disease that has yet to be discovered, but even many in the secular world would not call their cluster of symptoms a disease or even a disorder.³⁸ Do you find it sad that these children at such a young age seem to think they have an illness that must be controlled by medicine?

On the other hand, I have a friend who is a Neuropsychologist who studies frontal lobe injury and its impact on emotion. I am very thankful for people like him who are studying the

³⁷ I find it interesting to read the speculations of secular researchers on the source of evil. They do not believe in a sin nature but still have to explain the obvious—evil behavior. An example is, "Perhaps our dark side [evil] comes from our evolutionary heritage, in which aggression ensured our survival. Maybe it is the result of faulty wiring in our brains. The depletion of certain brain neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, has been found to parallel aggressive behavior." Robert Simon, *Bad Men Do what Good Men Dream: a Forensic Psychiatrist Illuminates the Darker Side of Human Behavior*, 3.

³⁸ A syndrome is defined as, "...Typically constellations of signs and symptoms that co-occur across individuals. In syndromes neither pathology nor etiology is well understood.... A disorder is the next rung on the ladder and is understood as, ...Syndromes that cannot be readily explained by other conditions [a specific cause cannot be determined]." Compare these to how a disease is defined. Diseases are, "...Disorders in which pathology and etiology are reasonably well understood." Then they make this startling statement. "With the possible exception of Alzheimer's disease and a handful of other organic conditions the diagnosis in present system of psychiatric classifications are almost exclusively syndromes or, in rare cases disorders.... This fact is a sobering reminder that the pathology in most cases of psychopathology is largely unknown, and their etiology is poorly understood." Scott O Lilienfeld, Sarah Francis Smith, and Ashley L. Watts, "Issues in Diagnosis: Conceptual Issues and Controversies," in *Psychopathology: History, Diagnosis, and Empirical Foundations*, 2nd ed. W. Edward Craighead, David Jay Miklowitz, and Linda W. Craighead, 2-3.

brain and doing cutting edge research. There are people whose physiology is definitely impacting their behavior.

Because of what I believe about the fall and how it has impacted our bodies, and because brain research is a relatively new and developing field of science, I am confident there are yet to be discovered diseases that are influencing behavior and the inner person. To say that they are influencing is not to say they are causing behavior though. As we have seen, humans are more complex than just a body. Among other things, we are social, emotional, rational, self aware, worshipping/false-worshipping beings as well. We must keep in mind that a secular worldview often misses these factors or puts a different emphasis on them. As a believer, we respect science but do not bow down to science. Bowing down is “scientism.”³⁹

William Schweitzer states this well, “Our gratitude for technological achievement does not entail a servile deference to whatever the scientific authorities tell us especially when a theory extends beyond any contemporary ability to test conclusively.”⁴⁰ This does not mean though that we ignore the valid observations of science that do not contradict our worldview.⁴¹

My colleague in the Biblical Counseling Coalition, Dr. Jeremy Pierre, has written an article to give the church guidance:

³⁹ Scientism is a term being used to describe the tendency to give science an inappropriate amount of authority. It is defined as, “An exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of natural science applied to all areas of investigation (as in philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities).” <http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/scientism> (accessed January 31, 2014).

⁴⁰ William Schweitzer, *Engaging with Keller: Thinking through the Theology of an Influential Evangelical*, ed. Ian Campbell (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2013), 200-01, Kindle.

⁴¹ I have tried to nuance my understanding of this in *Scripture and Counseling, God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, not released at the time of this writing.

We should be skeptical because the paradigm of mental illness is built without the basic building materials of a biblical view of people. Absent is any consideration of moral agency as Scripture defines it: an active heart responding dynamically to God and His creation with every thought, feeling, and choice. Such an absence of the spiritual aspect of the person results in a critical misunderstanding of the person as a whole. And the care offered is inadequate for the ultimate troubles of the soul.

But we should also appreciate that these diagnoses at times accurately describe physical symptom clusters [“syndromes” as defined earlier in the chapter, *my addition*] and could to lead to medical interventions that offer some level of helpful influence over them. In other words, because we recognize humans as corrupted in body as well as in soul, we can appreciate medical ingenuity that helpfully addresses the potential neurobiological aspects of people’s trouble.

...Extreme mental, emotional, or behavioral problems are not *either* spiritual *or* physical. They are both, though we recognize a sliding scale of influence. Some troubles may be more neurologically engrained, thus requiring closer medical attention. Others may be less so. But, whether it’s more or less, a spiritual heart is always actively in need of the grace of the Lord Jesus.⁴²

⁴² I am including an extended portion here to demonstrate the theological nuance that is needed.

Various folks have been pointing out the need for the church to pull its head out of the sand on the issue of mental health care. By this, we can be saying something very good or something not-so-good. Let’s start with the not-so-good. We should not mean that the church should just accept that extreme emotional, mental, or behavioral troubles are merely physical problems with physical solutions. Of all people, Christians must insist that we were created spiritual beings with the dignity of moral agency. Our thoughts and actions are not merely the product of our biology. We have freedom to act out of our nature as the image of God. And so, wisdom for living from the Word of God is always necessary in the ongoing care of a person, which includes addressing mental, emotional, and behavioral troubles.

Now let’s get to the good. What we should mean by the church pulling its head out of the sand is that Christians should acknowledge that the corruption of the fall warps not just our souls, but our bodies as well. The influence of bodily corruption on the soul is powerful, and the church needs to recognize those suffering under it in a way that points them to help—both body and soul.

Extreme mental, emotional, or behavioral problems are not *either* spiritual *or* physical. They are both, though we recognize a sliding scale of influence. Some troubles may be more neurologically engrained, thus requiring closer medical attention. Others may be less so. But, whether it’s more or less, a spiritual heart is always actively in need of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Here are a few pairs of insight that may help establish a culture of grace toward those who suffer from some of the more extreme cases of physiological trouble:

Pair 1

- On one hand, medical intervention, including psychotropic medication, does not heal the ultimate problem of a person’s disordered desires, beliefs, or choices. Medical intervention does not reverse the results of sin and corruption. Only the power of the gospel of Jesus does this. Visiting a doctor apart from considering how your spiritual responses are involved in your condition will not lead to an ultimate solution.
- On the other hand, medical intervention often allays the effects of sin’s corruption of the body, including the brain. And so we should affirm the value of medical treatment and should encourage our people to seek medical attention when necessary. The need for medical intervention is not in itself anti-spiritual. Visiting a doctor does not necessarily mean you are failing to trust the Lord.... Jeremy Pierre, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2013/04/19/mental-illness-and-the-church>, (accessed January 31, 2014).

A Story Demonstrating a Biblical Counseling Approach to Problems

To help us think through what we have just seen let us go back to the story of Karen.⁴³ If this heartbreaking story does not demonstrate the reality of the garden then I am not sure what will. Just as in the garden, it is full of shame, fear, blame shifting, sins of the tongue, and false worship. But, change happened not only as thinking changed but also as desires/worship changed.

As the mediation unfolded, a story kept bleeding out into the process. From the time Karen was a young girl her brothers sexually molested her and unfortunately it lasted until her late teens. To try to shame her into silence they regularly told her that no one would love her when they found out who she really was and what she had done. After many years of silence she finally told her mother, but she did nothing. Can you imagine the pain and bitterness? Can you imagine the distorted thinking this would cause about romantic relationships? Can you imagine the fear of being hurt by others? Can you imagine the anger and bitterness? It became obvious that she had a lot of unresolved issues related to her abuse from decades earlier. This woman was full of hurt and self-protection.

During the mediation they both humbly submitted to the process and more importantly to the Lord. They were convicted of their wrong responses to the other and asked forgiveness for how they had sinned against the other and a plan was developed to address the concerns of each. But, more importantly Karen recognized the need for help with truly dealing with the issue of abuse and the controlling tendencies she had developed as a way to protect herself. It became painfully clear to her that her mouth was directly related to her heart as the Lord so poignantly

⁴³ This story is used with the permission of the counselee. If there is any similarity between this story and others it is coincidental. It should not surprise us though that it sounds familiar because of common sins and common responses to being sinned against by others. We are all cut from the same cloth.

states in Matthew 12:34-35. So, even though the marriage was now more stable there was a lot of personal growth that needed to take place.

I arranged for a godly woman of her church to be her discipler and they developed a loving and trusting relationship. Here is how the issues were patiently approached.

The first thing that we focused on was learning that God is sovereign and to trust Him. We went chapter by chapter each week through *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges. Weekly she would share when she was angry, frustrated, fearful, or anxious and we would talk about it. I explained to her how these feelings and attitudes pointed to what we are serving in our hearts (idolatry). We discussed that we are called to worship Christ above all else. That he should be on the throne of our heart. It is He we serve and not ourselves and idols. No excuses. As we did this, week by week she was able to recognize her sinfulness in the situations and recognize that she was not trusting God and wanted to control people and situations. Little by little she improved greatly in this area by trusting God more and seeing her sin sooner and more easily.

...We talked a lot about loving and respecting her husband and how to do that practically. Their relationship and her attitude and behavior toward him was the most consistent pressure that revealed her sinful desires and in turn an area we have seen tremendous growth. She is constantly thinking and would sometimes refer to it as “stinking thinking.” We talked about Phil 4:8-9 and how it related to her thinking. She worked on putting off bad behavior/thinking and putting on righteous behavior/thinking. We discussed anger a lot and how to control it by recognizing her desires, pleasing and worshipping God above all else, and trusting in God’s sovereign grace and love. I gave her questions to ask herself when she felt anger, irritated, anxious, frustrated, fearful, etc to help her identify what she was demanding instead of trusting God in the situation.

Also, to work on a proper self image, we talked a lot about who she is in Christ now (Col. 2:10). We talked about working on the areas where she needed to change and grow and accepting who God had made her in the areas that she couldn’t change.

She was very fearful of being physically harmed. Again, it was believing and trusting in the sovereignty of God that has really helped her not to be as fearful (1 John 4:18-19; 2 Tim 1:7). We also talked about healthy fear and sinful fear.

We went through *Rid of My Disgrace*.⁴⁴ It addressed denial, distorted self-image, shame, guilt, and anger. The truths from God’s word taught in this book of how Christ’s life, death and resurrection transform us were a life changer for her. She Learned and accepted

⁴⁴ *Rid of My Disgrace*, has been used in the lives of many who have been sexually abused. Justin S. Holcomb, Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*.

that Christ not only died for her sins, but for the guilt of sin, and shame. We saw how Christ took her shame and clothed her in righteousness. He rose from the dead to bring her healing and hope. God allowed the abuse to happen and He loves her and it can be used for her good and His glory. She has learned to practice the truth that we forgive others out of the amazing forgiveness we have received in Christ. She knows that it is only Christ that can help her deal with her pain.⁴⁵

I have heard Karen talk publicly about how much she has grown in Christ. She is not as controlling [her dominant heart worship theme] or angry and reports that she is much more relaxed and is processing life much differently than just a couple of years ago. Her relationship with her husband is stable and loving and she is sleeping better. She regularly reminds herself that Christ took her shame and guilt and does not struggle with the same degree of fear. She is much more content (Phil 4:11-13). This chapter has been about worship, so it seems very appropriate to add concerning Karen, “Praise God from Whom all blessings flow”! The effects of the fall are being reversed in her life. The image of God is being restored as she grows to be more like her Savior. If she had gone to secular counseling these certainly would not have been the diagnoses and prescriptions for change.

Conclusion

From a biblical perspective we live in a naïve age concerning human nature. In spite of all our advances in understanding how the brain functions, we are missing a key lens for interpreting the data we see—the doctrine of sin. Humans will never be able to be understood properly, no matter how advanced our neuroscience or psychologies become, if Genesis 3 is not understood as a defining moment in human history. It impacts every second of existence and makes the best sense of what we observe. I share the same concern as Dr. Menninger, there are serious consequences to a culture that denies the reality of sin. He said, “Notions of guilt and sin

⁴⁵ Brief summary sent to me via e-mail.

which formerly served as some restraint on aggression have become eroded by the presumption that the individual has less to do with his actions than we had assumed, and hence any sense of personal responsibility (or guilt) is inappropriate.”⁴⁶

I marvel at the profundity of Genesis 3 in regard to its relevance for anthropology in general and the counseling psychologies in particular. While it is compassionate to try to help people with their problems I also fear that we are not accurately diagnosing the deepest issues of the soul. Therefore, our treatment plans are not getting to the root issues. As I hope you have seen, it is crucial that we keep a literal understanding of what happened at the beginning. A worship model has the best explanatory power to bring into focus the multitude of counseling issues humans face. May our gracious Lord help the church see the significance of what happened in the garden as we endeavor to help others with personal problems.

⁴⁶ Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 177.

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