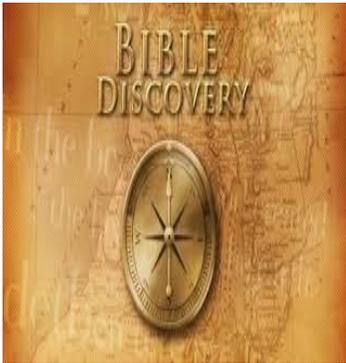


Dependency on Secular Psychology



During the last quarter century there's been substantial increases in the dependency by the Church on secular psychology. Through informal consultation with friends, in connection with non-church organizations to which we affiliate, or packaged as "Christian Psychology"; it employs the same terms and concepts as its secular counterparts. Even pastors rely on Christian counselling stemming from the myriad of best-selling books by psychologists. When I took a course just a few years ago at Emmanuel College in Kitchener on Counselling, the instructor was all about Freud and Jung. Since many Christians may admittedly be confused about Christian psychology, perhaps even asking if it should be embraced, used cautiously or outright rejected, it deserves examination in light of God's unchangeable Word.

Let me begin by cautioning there are many ailments - emotional, mental and physical - each requiring medical attention including helping the patient with the psychological details of his or her condition. Such medical reasons for psychological problems require medical responses. However, Sarah Rainer, writing for *LifeWay Research* on new research on mental illness and the church, explains "secular psychologists operate on a biopsychosocial model of human development and behaviour. This model proposes humans develop and operate according to biological, psychological, and social influences. Accordingly, we are products of our biology and environment, both bearing equal importance". The first criteria for us to consider then is that we're coming from the same starting point. Jesus keeps it simple telling us it's a matter of the heart - beginning with presupposing that the heart is essentially evil. What causes the problems that lead to need for psychological care so many times? Look at the list with me from those things that come out of the heart. Evil thoughts lead to murder, adultery and other sexual sins, as well as theft, bearing false witness, and telling lies about others cause tension and grief. Do you recall the Ten Commandments? You should for in essence what causes destructive behaviour is the sin we commit against God and subsequently against one another.

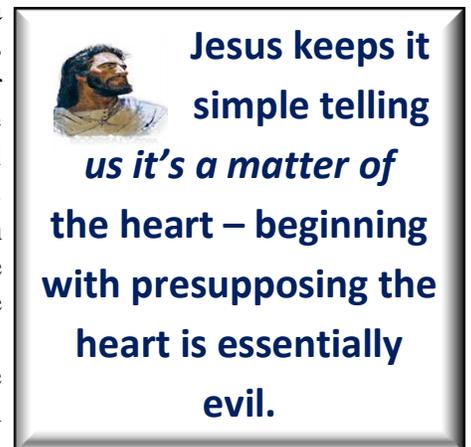
What's so amazing is the truly evil man is probably quite comfortable with himself because he has completely rebelled against his conscience and isn't troubled by his behaviour. There's left for the rest of us ***troubled nights and more troubling days in conflict between what we know is right and that which we do.*** May I suggest then for the vast majority of what ails us, the Bible's sufficient for dealing with our deepest psychological and emotional needs? When we look at what the Bible claims, as we heard earlier...

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." [2 Peter 1:3-4]

Peter goes on to specify this gift consists of God's "very great and valuable promises" contained in His Word. The Apostle Paul also instructs us, telling us,

"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

As we read from Matthew 15:10-20, we see how Jesus lays it out once and for all saying what matters isn't the state of a man's ritual performance, not his outward appearance, not the mask he puts on for all the world to see, not the temporary solitude he presents suggesting he has it all together, but what matters is the state of peace and righteousness (or its absence) in his heart - the status of which only comes from having surrendered



to Christ and been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb being set in right relationship with God the Father. Jesus wants to see people transformed and their hearts renewed because He came to save people from their sins.

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Before any of us regular church attendees get too comfortable, notice Jesus also insists that identifying religion through rituals and pleasing God through external regulations and observances is worthless in giving us the peace of mind so desperately needed if we're to overcome the ailments of the modern man to his mind and emotions. Jesus speaks quite bluntly, with no attempt at being cryptic, that real religion, real release, from our suffering isn't through those outward means at all but only consists in personal relationships and in our right attitude to God and subsequently to our fellow mankind. Sadly many lead faultless lives externally – that which we consider “well-adjusted” – but have the bitterest and most evil of thoughts in their hearts. The sound teaching Jesus leaves us with is that not all the outward observances, not all the counselling sessions in the world, can atone for a heart where pride and bitterness and lust hold sway. In essence, Jesus is telling us that what we are affects what we say and do which in turn determines our destiny. Eternity is waiting around the corner and what an awful thing to spend it apart from

God! Jesus insists that is what the OT law points to – in fact directly to Him therefore the full force of the prescriptive remedies it offers are all determined by our relationship with Him, not the other way around.

While psychologists have begun recognizing our spirituality indeed impacts our lives, they've yet to say it is imperative for life as Jesus has specifically indicated. Therefore if we're to find value in our discourse through secular psychology we must seek out those who measure a worldview determined by Scripture and not by the view of man. When we seek guidance and counseling we must ensure the foundations of what we're being told

do not contradict what God's word has plainly illustrated. For instance the fruit of the Spirit, listed for us at Galatians 5:22-23, describes an emotionally balanced, psychologically stable person through love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Any contradiction to this should be considered erroneous. Remember the Bible assures us God provides us with, “*everything pertaining to life and godliness*” so Scripture's sufficient for healing our whole person including our emotional and psychological well-being. The belief and use of Scripture and the Gospel are perhaps the most prevalent differences between the secular and Christian psychology worlds.

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INHERENTLY SEPARATED FROM GOD

As Christians, we recognize we're all inherently separated from God. This separation causes sin leading to disorders and disease of every kind. It cannot be overcome by good works, religion or morality. However, we serve a loving and just God who provides a way out of our depraved state through His Son Jesus Christ. Our Heavenly Father longs us to seek Him and His promise of eternity. As pastors, laity, and as Christian counsellors

Any intervention without Christ leaves a gap in the care of God's child.

we should teach, preach and pray like Jesus and provide one another with the support, care and love extended by God when He gave us His Son. Any intervention without Christ leaves a gap in the care of God's child. Overreliance on secular therapy by the Church, while perhaps bringing improvement, falls short simply because while they produce a “*symptom free*” individual, the end result fails to provide dependence on either the Lord, or His on

His salvation or sanctification. The result is nothing other than having symptoms stop – at least for a brief time – without freedom from the bondage to sin. The underlying cause of the problem – that of separation from God hasn't been addressed and Satan hasn't been defeated.

Overreliance on secular therapy by the Church...



Separation from God hasn't been addressed and Satan hasn't been defeated

While I can agree with Sarah Rainer as she cautions...

"The elimination of research-based interventions from therapeutic practice would be a disservice to our clients. Not providing clients with skills that may help alleviate their psychological distress is also not good stewardship of our knowledge",

I hesitate to embrace that which denies or ignores faith's foundation and the need for a relationship with the Creator of our universe. God allows trials, some mild, some severe, into each of our lives. Some have suffered from horrible childhoods – enduring physical, sexual, and verbal abuse – leaving deep emotional scars. The question is, where do we turn at such times for healing? God doesn't desire we live in pain and continued suffering. Repeatedly, in His Word, God Himself claims to be our healer – sufficient to bind our wounds and make us whole through our trust in Him. Jesus shared Isaiah's words as being fulfilled in Him,

"I have come to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." [Isaiah 61:1b]

We're warned not to be taken captive by the world's philosophies and principles, but to walk in the fullness of Christ just as the Apostle Paul wrote,

"Continue to live in (Christ) rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." [Colossians 2:6]

Finally, we're to cling to the knowledge we receive from God's Word – recognition God doesn't leave us defenseless but we're equipped for the battle against the evil that assails us. Rather than us being consumed by *how* we act, we must partner with God's concern for *why* we act as we do. Not so much with what we actually do but what motivation comes from our heart, what prods us onward to do in pleasing ourselves. Perhaps the question becomes, "WHO" motivates us and what are we doing about it? Listen to Paul's instruction to the Ephesians as they too faced evil times,

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his great power. Put on the full armor of

God so that you can fight against the devil's evil tricks. Our fight is not against people on earth but against the rulers and authorities and the powers of this world's darkness, against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world. That is why you need to put on God's full armor. Then on the day of evil you will be able to stand strong. And when you have finished the whole fight, you will still be standing." [Ephesians 6:10-13 (NCV)]

Standing firmly established with Christ, we'll truly receive the state of peace and righteousness we most deeply desire – that which comes from within and is eternal rather than what the world chases after elusively never quite achieving its goal.

*Blessings,
Pastor Dave*

