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How John Calvin Led Me to Repent Of Christian Psychology

On March 24, 1974, the day after our wedding, my wife, Marla, and I rented a rowboat at Lake Arrowhead, California. Being a cheapskate, my intention was to rent the boat for only one hour. I planned to row out into the lake for about 20 minutes, sit and bask in the presence of my bride for about 20 minutes, and row back in time to avoid the charge for the second hour.

When I got to the point where I planned to sit for 20 minutes, I lined myself up with two separate points on shore to make sure I wasn't drifting too far from my spot. Every so often, I rowed back to where I thought the two points lined up. But when it was time for the 20-minute row back to the rental place, I was in for a surprise. I discovered that in spite of my precautions, we had drifted much farther out into the lake than I had thought. To get us back to shore in time, I had to row like an Olympic crew member!

I have found that spiritually, it's easy to think that you're on course when actually, you're drifting. For years in my pastoral ministry, I thought I was giving my people solid biblical principles to live by. I had graduated from a seminary whose motto, emblazoned in the original Greek at the front of the chapel, was, "Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2). I had been trained in how to exegete Scripture, how to prepare and deliver biblically sound sermons, and how to counsel people from the Bible.

Like most of my evangelical pastor-comrades, my preaching was often flavored by the latest insights of psychology. Of course, I would *never* use psychological insights unless they were in line with Scripture. But, at the same time, I had been taught in seminary, "All truth is God's truth." If a psychologist stumbles across some biblical principle, why not use it? Doesn't the Bible teach proper self-love, as long as I'm not proud ("love your neighbor *as yourself*") Matt. 22:39)? Isn't God's love for me the basis for proper self-esteem? Aren't parents supposed to build their children's self-esteem?

So I preached sermons such as “Feeling Good About Yourself” and “Developing a Sense of Self-Worth,” based on Scripture (so I thought), laced with insights, quotes, and stories from the leading Christian psychologists, whose books and articles I read. I attended conferences where these men provided training in various aspects of pastoral ministry, counseling, and communication. I used videos by Christian psychologists to help train people in things like child-rearing and marital relationships. I took church people with me to a marriage seminar led by two popular Christian psychologists. In the early 1980’s, I tried to publish a book on the Christian and emotions, which I thought at the time was solidly biblical. I’m thankful now that it never found a publisher.

Although we did not have support groups in our church (because I was too busy to organize them), I was open to using programs like A. A. to help minister to hurting people. After all, the 12 Steps sounded biblical, many large evangelical churches used them, and they seemed to help people. I had an associate pastor who wanted to start such a group in the church, and initially I was agreeable to the idea.

But then, after about 13 years in the pastorate, God graciously whacked me on the side of the head with a two-by-four to show me where I had drifted off course. At the time, I wasn’t unhappy with my view of the Christian life. I would have argued that I was solidly biblical, that I only used psychology to illustrate or supplement scriptural principles, and that I was communicating in terms that my congregation could relate to.

God sovereignly brought together several factors to confront me with the need to change. One of the most powerful was that for the first time I read completely through John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. At the same time, the elders of the church I pastored had assigned another elder and me the task of reading a Christian psychology book that the support group planned to use. The contrast between Calvin on the one hand, and the Christian psychology book on the other was like day and night. God drew a line in the dirt and pointedly said, “Which side are you on?” I couldn’t straddle the line. I had to repent of the psychologized version of the faith I had drifted into and turn back to God-centered Christianity, founded on the all-sufficiency of Christ and the Scriptures.

That was in 1991, and since then I have grown more certain of the evil of blending Christianity and psychology. Just as in Israel of old, men both “feared the Lord and served their own gods according to the custom of the nations” (2 Kings 17:33), so I believe many American Christians have fallen into a syncretistic blending of Christianity and worldly psychology. But the two do not mix!

Before I look at some specific issues, let me emphasize that it took a while for these issues to come into focus for me. I began to have some concerns in the early 1980’s. But I continued to be supportive of using psychology to some degree up till April, 1991, when I came to a crisis point and I had to cross the line. Since then, I have grown more in my understanding of these matters. Some of you may disagree strongly with what I say. I don’t expect everyone to agree with me instantly. But I do hope that I make you begin to re-think these matters in light of Scripture. I have to be very selective, but I want to present five areas where I believe so-called “Christian psychology” is at odds with biblical truth.

1. The Christian psychology movement is built on an inadequate view of salvation.

In the late 1980’s, it began to dawn on me in a greater way than ever before that there were many people sitting in my congregation every week who professed to be saved, but there was not much evidence of it in their lives.

In the fall of 1990, as I mentioned, the elders assigned to another elder and me to check out the book that the proposed “Recovery Group” led by my associate wanted to use. This elder and his wife had been on Campus Crusade’s staff for about 20 years and he taught at their seminary (my church was near Crusade’s headquarters and many of our people were on staff). His wife was one of the emotionally “hurting” people who wanted us to start these recovery groups.

The book we read was Henry Cloud’s *When Your World Makes No Sense* [Oliver-Nelson, 1990]. I was told that it would help me understand these hurting people. I tried to give it every benefit of a doubt, but there was one part early in the book that troubled me, where Cloud asserts that for these hurting people, the “standard Christian answers” (dealing with sin, faith, obedience, time in the

Word and prayer, etc.) did “not work.” He compares such things to the counsel given by Job’s friends, calling it “worthless medicine.” Then he proposes his solution, which is essentially a baptized version of developmental psychology.

As this elder and I were discussing Cloud’s approach, he told me that people like his wife who were from dysfunctional homes could not relate to my preaching because I emphasize obedience to God’s Word. Because they had strict, cold, authoritarian fathers, they don’t relate well to authority. I replied that I thought that I also put a strong emphasis on God’s grace as the motivation for obedience. But he responded that his wife couldn’t even relate to God’s grace—it went right by her. I was a bit taken aback, and so I said, “You mean that the many times I have spoken on God’s grace, she didn’t hear me?” He said yes, in her 20 years on Crusade staff, never once had she *felt* God’s grace and love on a personal level.

I thought about what he had said and asked some clarifying questions to make sure I understood him. Then I responded, “If your wife has *never felt* God’s love and grace, she is *not* converted!” I had been reading Jonathan Edwards’ classic, *A Treatise on Religious Affections*, in which he makes a strong biblical case that saving faith is not mere intellectual assent to the gospel, but that it affects the heart. This elder got very upset with me. But I stuck to my guns then and do so now, that if a person can sit in church for 20 years and never be *moved* by God’s grace and love as shown to us at the cross, then that person is not truly converted.

As I thought about what this elder, my associate, Henry Cloud, and others in their camp were saying, I realized that, in effect, they were saying that the transforming power of the gospel, which has sustained the saints in and through every conceivable trial, was not sufficient to deal with the emotional problems of these late 20th century Christians. And, I came to realize that the psychologized approach to Christianity was built on the inadequate theology that equates conversion with making a decision to invite Christ into your heart. But the two are not necessarily synonymous.

Biblically, conversion is the supernatural act of God whereby He imparts spiritual life to a person who is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-5). It is not something that man can effect at all (John 1:12-13). As Calvin (and Edwards) helped me to see, invaria-

bly God has revealed to the truly converted person something of His awesome majesty and holiness. Instantly, like Isaiah after his vision of God, the sinner is struck with his utter defilement of heart in the presence of this unapproachable light, and he cries out, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Rather than feeling better about himself, he feels much worse as he realizes his true condition before the Holy God. Like the man in Jesus' story, he is even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but he beats his breast and cries out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). And, of course, God *is* merciful to all who truly call on Him.

Psychologist Henry Cloud (p. 16) contends that any approach that makes the hurting person feel like he is to blame for his pain—whether due to a lack of faith in God or a lack of obedience, or whatever—is "judgmental" and only causes "untold damage." But Calvin starts out *The Institutes* in quite the opposite direction:

For, as a veritable world of miseries is to be found in mankind, and we are thereby despoiled of divine raiment, our shameful nakedness exposes a teeming horde of infamies. Each of us must, then be so stung by the consciousness of his own unhappiness as to attain at least some knowledge of God. Thus, from the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and—what is more—depravity and corruption, we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone. To this extent we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God; and we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves (1.1.1).

I believe that there are many people in evangelical churches who have been told, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." They think they're right with God because they went forward or prayed a prayer, but they have never known anything of their own corruption of heart through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. They do not feel, as Spurgeon put it, the noose around their neck, and so they do not weep for joy when the Savior cuts the rope. In many cases, they have not been truly converted. I believe that the Christian psychology movement is built on this faulty view of sal-

vation that minimizes depravity and makes conversion something the sinner can do by deciding for Jesus.

2. Christian psychology focuses people on self, not on God and His glory.

One of the most pervasive errors to flood into the church in the past 25 years is that the Bible teaches that we need to love ourselves and grow in self-esteem. I was influenced toward this view in part by reading James Dobson's, *Hide or Seek* [1974], sub-titled "Self-Esteem for the Child." He contends that there is an epidemic of low self-esteem in our society that is responsible for many of our social ills. His opening illustration is about Lee Harvey Oswald, and how this poor man constantly was put down. The only thing he could do well was shoot a rifle, so he finally was driven to do something where he could feel good about himself: he shot President Kennedy. The clear message is that if somehow this man had felt better about himself, maybe he wouldn't have done this terrible deed. Dobson also wrote, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* [Tyndale, 1975], in which he asserts that low self-esteem is the number one problem plaguing America's Christian women (p. 22).

This notion pervades dozens of popular Christian books. In *Worry-Free Living* [Thomas Nelson, 1989], Frank Minirth, Paul Meier, and Don Hawkins state that a lack of self-worth "is the basis of most psychological problems" (p. 140). They say that the reason David could defeat Goliath but Saul could not is that David had good self-esteem, whereas Saul did not (p. 139). They also say that the ten spies who brought back a negative report on the giants in Canaan suffered from a negative self-concept, whereas Joshua and Caleb had a positive self-concept and respected themselves (p. 136).

I received a brochure from the Rapha Treatment Centers, founded by Robert McGee, author of *The Search for Significance*. There are glowing endorsements from Billy Graham, Charles Stanley, Dawson McAllister, D. James Kennedy, Jerry Falwell, and Beverly LaHaye. The brochure explains, "Part of Rapha's success is found in the unique ability to target and resolve problems of low self-esteem. At the core of all emotional problems and addictive disorders is low self-worth. It is never the only problem; but it is so

major an issue that, if not dealt with adequately, one is kept from experiencing lasting, positive results.”

I had never gone that far in teaching self-esteem. I was “more balanced”! I taught that too much self-love was pride, but that we must have a proper amount of self-love so that we can have enough confidence to function in life and to serve God. I had used the truths of our position in Christ to support this, along with the command to love your neighbor as yourself.

Then I read Calvin! In discussing original sin, he shows how by fallen nature we all are prone to flatter ourselves because of innate self-love. He states (2.1.2),

Nothing pleases man more than the sort of alluring talk that tickles the pride that itches in his very marrow. Therefore, in nearly every age, when anyone publicly extolled human nature in most favorable terms, he was listened to with applause.

He goes on to say that such building up of fallen human nature teaches us to be satisfied with ourselves, but that “it so deceives as to drive those who assent to it into utter ruin.”

Later, in discussing our need to love our neighbor as the fulfillment of the law, he states (2.8.54),

Obviously, since men were born in such a state that they are all too much inclined to self-love—and, however much they deviate from truth, they still keep self-love—there was no need of a law that would increase or rather enkindle this already excessive love. Hence, it is very clear that we keep the commandments not by loving ourselves but by loving God and neighbor; that he lives the best and holiest life who lives and strives for himself as little as he can, and that no one lives in a worse or more evil manner than he who lives and strives for himself alone, and thinks about and seeks only his own advantage.

Indeed, to express how profoundly we must be inclined to love our neighbors [Lev. 19:18], the Lord measured it by the love of ourselves because he had at hand no more violent or stronger emotion than this.

He goes on to refute certain men in his day who taught, as many modern Christian psychologists teach, that we must first learn to love ourselves before we can love God and others.

As opposed to self-love, Calvin repeatedly emphasizes humility as the chief virtue. In a chapter dealing with the bondage of the will in sin (2.2.11), he cites Augustine, "When anyone realizes that in himself he is nothing and from himself he has no help, the weapons within him are broken, the wars are over. But all the weapons of impiety must be shattered, broken, and burned; you must remain unarmed, you must have no help in yourself. The weaker you are in yourself, the more readily the Lord will receive you." Calvin concludes, "But I require only that, laying aside the disease of self-love and ambition, by which he is blinded and thinks more highly of himself than he ought [cf. Gal. 6:3], he rightly recognize himself in the faithful mirror of Scripture [cf. James 1:22-25]."

Also, Calvin has a wonderful chapter titled, "The Sum of the Christian Life: The Denial of Ourselves" (3.7). As I read Calvin's solidly biblical treatment of the nature of man and sin, I realized that I had erred greatly by falling into the "proper self-esteem" teaching of Christian psychology. I realized that Christian psychology served to build man up in his sin and to pull God down as our good buddy who loves us unconditionally so that we can accept ourselves. But the Bible lifts God up as holy and glorious, while it strips man of his pride and self-righteousness and lays even the most righteous man on earth in the dust so that he proclaims, "I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?... I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4; 42:6).

Stemming from the wrong view of self and of God, I also began to see that Christian psychology does not direct people toward the proper focus of glorifying God and living to please Him, no matter what the personal cost. Rather, it *uses* God and the Bible for the selfish ends of happiness and inner peace. The Christian psychology/self-help books invariably quote numerous Scriptures and, at times, even expound on them. This gives these books the veneer of sounding biblical. But the heart of their approach is using God to make self happy or fulfilled, rather than submitting to God to glorify Him because He alone deserves it.

It took a while, but I finally came to see that this was the problem with the popular 12 Step programs that have also invaded the church. When I was looking for some way to help these hurting people in my church, a man gave me a video and workbook that was being used in Chuck Swindoll's thriving Fullerton Evangelical Free Church. I respected Chuck and had benefited from his preaching ministry, so I was hopeful that I could use the material.

But as I examined it, I became disturbed. It used Scripture references often, but it wove in all the familiar stuff about low self-worth. It said that the cure to our emotional problems comes when we learn to focus on ourselves, to love ourselves and build our self-esteem, which is the missing ingredient in our personalities. I realized that the 12 Step programs are simply using God (however you conceive him to be!) to make self happy.

In contrast to Christian psychology, Jesus states that if you want to follow Him the very first thing is to deny yourself and take up your cross daily (Luke 9:23). The two approaches cannot be blended. Either you repent of self-love and pride and die to self so as to live for the glory of God and His purpose, or you vainly try to use God to further your own happiness. To follow Jesus, self must constantly be dethroned.

3. Christian psychology denies the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Henry Cloud, in the book mentioned earlier, states flatly, "I tried the 'standard' Christian answers for myself and others, and I came to the same conclusions that Job reached: they are worthless medicine" (p. 17). These standard answers are to tell people that they are in sin, that they don't have enough faith, that they don't spend enough time in the Word or in quiet times, or that they are in some other way to blame for their pain (p. 16). In other words, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are not enough. You need the insights of psychology to deal with your emotional struggles.

But the Bible is clear that the living Lord Jesus Christ is everything to the believer. "In Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete" (Col. 2:9, 10). Furthermore, He has not left us alone, but has freely given us His Holy Spirit to indwell and empower us. If we walk by the

Spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh and His fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—will characterize our lives (Gal. 5:16, 22, 23). I contend that these qualities describe a psychologically mature, whole person. Being fruit, these qualities take time to develop. They are not attained without effort and struggle. But the Bible does not say that these qualities are available to everyone from fairly normal backgrounds, but those from dysfunctional homes will have to wait for psychotherapy to come along to attain them! It promises this fruit to every believer who will walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

I am not suggesting that for the believer, life is effortless and easy, where we are never down, we never struggle with feelings of despair, depression, anxiety, or fear. The Bible shows us godly men and women who wrestled with overwhelming emotions as they went through horrible trials. Paul himself said that he was burdened so excessively that he despaired even of life. But did he go visit his therapist and learn to feel better about himself? No, he says that the point of his awful trial was so that “we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8, 9).

I contend that one of the main purposes of trials is to teach us that same lesson, not to trust ourselves, but to trust even more fully the all-sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes trials also teach us that we need one another in the body, to bear one another’s burdens. So when I talk of the all-sufficiency of Christ, I am not excluding the need for fellow believers to listen and care and counsel. But we should be helping one another to appropriate Christ, not the latest techniques of self-focused psychotherapy.

4. Christian psychology undermines the sufficiency and authority of God’s Word.

This is related to the sufficiency of Christ and the Holy Spirit, of course. But it extends to all of Scripture. Christian psychology tells us that the Word is fine, as far as it goes, but that it does not deal with all the complex problems we face nowadays. The Bible is fine for dealing with spiritual matters of salvation, but when it comes to grappling with emotional problems, you need a trained therapist.

For example, *Christianity Today* [2/10/92, p. 28] pontificated, "Myth: A pastor is competent to counsel his parishioners. Fact: Most pastors are armed with only a meager knowledge of behavioral therapies. A pastor's calling is, primarily, a spiritual one, helping people to find strength in God's presence and a sense of divine direction in the midst of difficulty. Psychological adjustment is a different matter, and when it requires serious attention, pastors should find ways of partnering with professional counselors or psychiatrists."

Sadly, even R. C. Sproul, whose teaching I usually appreciate, buys into the view that Scripture is not sufficient for the believer. In his "Tabletalk" magazine [2/94], he ran an article by John Coe from the Rosemead School of Psychology. Coe develops the argument that Scripture is only *part* of God's revelation. He calls Thomas Aquinas to testify that God not only speaks to us through the Word, but also in nature. Coe contends, "Only when *all* forms of revelation are taken together can we speak of the sufficiency of revelation." He says that "the Bible provides the divine interpretation of aspects of history and nature. But alone it is insufficient." He states that the author of Ecclesiastes "is conscious of both the insufficiency of the Bible alone as well as of natural wisdom alone."

Coe is trying to establish that we need the wisdom gained through psychology to supplement Scripture, because "all truth is God's truth." The Bible doesn't tell us all we need to know about medicine or mathematics. Even so it is foolish to ignore the "wisdom" of modern psychology.

But these arguments are fallacious and detrimental to the authority of Scripture. The real issue is, how do we determine what truth is, especially in the psychological realm? Psychology encroaches on issues that are dealt with quite clearly in the Bible: anger, lust ("sexual addiction"), bitterness, anxiety, abusive speech, depression, and many other areas. The whole Bible is aimed at helping us to have healthy relationships ("love your neighbor"). The Bible speaks to some medical issues, but that is not its focus. But it clearly tells us how to deal with the very problems psychology purports to help us resolve. And psychology invariably takes a different approach than Scripture, because it is self-focused and not concerned with pleasing God. Furthermore, it is fallacious to as-

sume that psychology is a science on a par with modern medicine. There are literally hundreds of competing psychotherapies that do not have any scientifically established validity. If there are psychological "truths," then they will line up with Scripture, in which case psychology is superfluous.

One of the things that strikes me in reading Calvin is that through Scripture alone he was able to extricate himself from the monolithic influence of Roman Catholicism. Because he was steeped in the Word Calvin lived a godly life in spite of almost constant bodily illness and in spite of intense opposition to his teaching. His universal test for everything was, What does Scripture say? As a pastor, he helped his people deal with all the trials of that time by preaching and counseling strictly from God's Word. The Bible claims that it will equip the man of God for every good work. A psychologically or emotionally impaired person is not so equipped. God's precious and magnificent promises, along with His divine power grant to us everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3, 4). What more do we need to face life's problems? Certainly not worldly psychology!

5. Christian psychology minimizes the biblical view of sin and personal responsibility.

If you've read any of the popular Christian psychology literature, I won't need to prove for you that the Christian psychology movement greatly minimizes the biblical view of sin and personal responsibility. The movement consistently uses medical terminology that implies that the person is not responsible for his problems. He is "a sexual addict," not enslaved to lust. He is an alcoholic, not a drunkard. He is in recovery, not repentance. A workbook called, "The Twelve Steps for Christians," used by Chuck Swindoll's former church in Fullerton states,

For Christians who suffer from an addictive disease, or who are the product of a family with addictive traits, the Church's judgmental messages can be especially troublesome. They can keep a person from seeking recovery....

As we become willing to admit our dysfunction to ourselves and others in recovery, we will see that this process is healing and rewarding....

It goes on to tell us that we need “to acknowledge and even befriend our negative or repressed nature.” We will learn “to accept our unwanted tendencies such as anger, inappropriate sexual behavior, hostility or aggression.”

Did you notice, there was no mention of sin, corruption, repentance, or God’s *undeserved* favor? A few pages later the manual lists some milestones in recovery. One is that we “generally approve of ourselves.” Another states that “we are recovering through loving and focusing on ourselves.” “We feel comfortable standing up for ourselves when it is appropriate.” “We love people who love and take care of themselves.” “We have a healthy sense of self-esteem.”

I could go on and on citing examples of the psychobabble that has flooded the church. It simply echoes the current cultural emphasis on victimization and self-acceptance, no matter how terribly a person has sinned.

In stark contrast, Calvin is refreshingly humble in classing himself and all believers as sinners. In his great chapter on repentance, he states (3.3.10), “We ... teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness.” Later in the same chapter (3.3.20), he calls us to a life of “continual effort and exercise in the mortification of the flesh, till it is utterly slain, and God’s Spirit reigns in us.” He states, “Therefore, I think he has profited greatly who has learned to be very much displeased with himself, not so as to stick fast in this mire and progress no farther, but rather to hasten to God and yearn for him in order that, having been engrafted into the life and death of Christ, he may give attention to continual repentance.”

In his chapter on “Self-denial” (3.7.4; you will find no biblical treatment of self-denial in the Christian psychology books), Calvin writes most insightfully of our sinful nature:

For, such is the blindness with which we all rush into self-love that each one of us seems to himself to have just cause to be proud of himself and to despise all others in comparison. If God has conferred upon us anything of which we need not repent, relying upon it we immediately lift up our

minds, and are not only puffed up but almost burst with pride. The very vices that infest us we take pains to hide from others, while we flatter ourselves with the pretense that they are slight and insignificant, and even sometimes embrace them as virtues. If others manifest the same endowments we admire in ourselves, or even superior ones, we spitefully belittle and revile these gifts in order to avoid yielding place to such persons. If there are any faults in others, not content with noting them with severe and sharp reproach, we hatefully exaggerate them. Hence arises such insolence that each one of us, as if exempt from the common lot, wishes to tower above the rest, and loftily and savagely abuses every mortal man, or at least looks down upon him as inferior.... But there is no one who does not cherish within himself some opinion of his own pre-eminence.

If I were not feeling well, I would want the doctor to tell me the truth about my condition. He may give me hugs and tell me that I'm the most wonderful guy in the world. He may assure me that my problem is minor and tell me that I should ignore how I feel and tell myself how terrific I am. But if I've got cancer, all of his hugs and reassuring talk are worthless. I need to face the hard truth about my condition. Only then is there any hope that I will take the cure, as painful as it may be, and get better.

We don't do sinners a favor by glossing over the serious, pervasive nature of their pride, lust, greed, jealousy, and self-centeredness. We only truly help sinners when we lovingly but honestly help them to see the truth as revealed in God's Word. The closer anyone draws near to the unapproachable light of God's holy presence, the more he sees the contamination of sin in his own heart. If he truly knows Christ as his Savior from sin, he will hate the sin he sees within, make efforts to root it out, and thankfully appropriate God's abundant grace and forgiveness.

Conclusion

I hope that you can see how far from biblical truth today's "Christian" psychology movement has drifted so that you will completely renounce it. I hope you'll also see how sound Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life is so that you will begin to read him.

Some of you may be thinking, "Aren't you being kind of extreme? Aren't you throwing the baby out with the bath water? Isn't there some good to be gained from psychology?"

Not much! There may be some useful insights in the same vein that *Reader's Digest* offers some interesting observations once in a while. But psychology does not offer anything necessary for life and godliness that is lacking in the Bible. If a problem is due to organic or chemical dysfunction in the brain, a person may need a medical solution (although I urge caution with regard to the use of psychiatric drugs). But in terms of offering solutions to the emotional and relational problems we face, psychology has nothing to offer the believer, and it has much to deceive and confuse.

In a letter I asked James Dobson if he could name just *one* problem for which the Bible has no answer, but psychology does. His form-letter reply was that we need Christian psychologists to help parents determine if a six-year-old boy is emotionally and physically ready to enter the first grade; to help the parents of a gifted or retarded child cope; to help a man whose wife became schizophrenic and ran screaming down the street; to give counsel to a man thinking about mid-life career change; and, to help an adolescent who was extremely rebellious and resentful of his father.

Educational or vocational counseling is far different than the psychotherapeutic nonsense that is flooding the church, thanks to Dobson and others like him. Why do we need psychologists to help parents cope with a difficult child? Doesn't the Bible give us wisdom for dealing with such trials? In the case of the schizophrenic woman, if her problem is organically caused, she needs a medical doctor. If not, she definitely does *not* need a psychologist, and neither does her husband. He needs to learn to love her as Christ does the church. She needs to deal with whatever sinful thoughts and behavior are behind her breakdown and to learn to trust in the sufficiency of Christ. The last thing a rebellious teenager needs is to hear a psychologist tell him that he needs to build his self-esteem!

For thousands of years the Bible has been adequate to equip the saints to go through tragedy, to face persecution and even martyrdom. Why are we so insistent on turning from our all-sufficient Lord, the fountain of living waters, to hew cisterns for

ourselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13)? We don't need psychology. We need the Lord and His Word. I thank the Lord for His servant, John Calvin, who helped me to repent of so-called "Christian" psychology!

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