

Sermon Title: Take Corrupted Thoughts Captive (New Year 2024, #2) Speaker: Jim Harris
Scripture Text: Various Date: 1-14-24

This year, I am doing something different with what is typically a New Year message. For one thing, I missed the last Sunday of the year. But this is actually going to be a series, at least three; I don't know if it is going to go more than that or not. But as I usually point out things to be alarmed about, things to be concerned about, things to be prepared for that we have to handle during a year, we will do some of that; but I am starting out with an extended look at something very positive. And I may use some terminology this morning that you are not familiar with, and the point is to help you be familiar with that terminology and what it means.

But, to sort out what it means to live in the world as a Christian means that you have to have an understanding of the fundamental difference between a Christian worldview—or, a biblical worldview—and the way that our world operates (1 Cor. 3:19; Jas. 3:15).

Now here comes one of the first terms I am going to throw out to you today. That fact that I want to call your attention to is that we have become a "therapeutic society." Under the influence of the teachings of evolution, and more and more people denying Divine Creation (e.g., Ex. 20:11a; Mk. 10:6), we are continuing down the road of getting further and further away from understanding that humans are "created...in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27; cf. Jas. 3:9), and we are treating humans more and more as just physical beings only, or even as animals.

And so, as a society, we are *constantly* removing, more and more thoroughly, the ideas of "sin and righteousness and judgment"—*exactly* those things that are the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this era (Jn. 16:8). We are *replacing* them with medical and therapeutic terminology. So, instead of dealing with real soul issues, we are trying to redefine those issues so that we don't have to deal with God.

Now, if you *medicalize* a problem, you remove all of its *moral* implications! If someone has a spiritual, moral problem, and you don't define it that way, you won't provide the right solution.

Now, we all understand medical problems; they are real. We are blessed to have the benefits of modern medicine. I am humbled, I am astounded for what I went through just less than a month ago—that somebody could cut a couple holes in me and shove some gizmo up into my heart, and then systematically destroy specific tissue that was sending out rogue electrical impulses; and now, I'm back to a normal heart rhythm! *That is amazing!* Our generation is the *first* to be able to have *that* as a routine.

If it weren't for medical technology and skilled surgeons, I would not be able to walk—at least, not normally, if at all, after some injuries that *I* have been through. One of my wrists would be frozen in place. The other hand would be shriveled and painful.

We have medicine! We have things that can fix those physical problems, and that is astounding. People with diabetes now live normal lifespans. Cataracts are now a routine surgery; they are no longer a guarantee of blindness in your older years. Appendicitis rarely kills people anymore. *Many* diseases are even *fully preventable* now through vaccinations. We have *great* blessings in the world of medicine.

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But, we have taken those *good* things, and we have applied the concept of "disease" and "medical cure" to things that are not "diseases" and do not have "medical cures"! We try to fix spiritual and moral and theological problems with medications—and now, even in the most bizarre cases, with surgery. It makes a *world* of difference how we describe these things, and we need to make sure we do it as it is done in the Bible.

Now here's your commercial break: I want to repeat what I said last week, that one of my desires for doing this, and one of my ongoing prayers, is that God is going to pique the interest of several people—*many* people in the Heritage Bible Church family, I hope—to take the training for Biblical Counseling, and to consider making that part of what you do in the Body of Christ.

The core training for Biblical Counseling is 30 hours, and it is being offered in person in our area in February, March, and April. On the first weekend of each of those months, you can get ten hours per weekend—Friday night and Saturday—of the training. So you can complete all 30 hours of the basic biblical training for Biblical Counseling. And even if you don't ever spend *any* time doing face-to-face counseling with anyone, I guarantee that if you take that training, it will help you in many ways to grow spiritually and to handle problems as God would have you to handle them, and to make *all* of your interactions with people better glorify God. It is a *great* course in practical, personal sanctification. It's *almost* too bad that it is labeled "Biblical Counseling" because the ultimate goal of using it is to help other people, but it is so much more than that.

And one of our goals is to get all the leadership of Heritage Bible Church to take that training as God allows, so I hope that you will have the desire kindled in you to join them. And if you want details, see Scott Freeman or Scott Basolo or me, and we will connect you to how you can get registered. And needless to say, there is a time factor there, because it starts in a couple of weeks. And if you can't do that, we can direct you to other opportunities for getting that training, but it is even better to get it done in a live setting, if you can.

Alright—end of commercial. Back to what we were saying about a "therapeutic" view of mankind, and the view that we have in our culture.

Take anxiety—or, worry. We all know what it is, and it is vividly described in the Bible. The root of the concept of the idea of "anxiety"—the word that is translated "anxiety" or, frequently, "worry" in the New Testament—is the idea of being "divided." "Anxiety" is when your thoughts are divided, when they are tugged in two or more directions. "Do I trust God with this, or do I have to handle it all on my own? *What if things go bad?* What if there is an accident? What if I do *my* part right, but somebody else's actions cause me grief or harm?" You know how to worry; I don't have to teach you to do that.

For someone who does not know God through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9), there is *ultimately* no *real* basis for dealing with anxiety, except for some wishful thinking and some behavior modification by their own efforts. But that doesn't mean that if you are a Christian, you have a "magic pill" that makes everything go away. Even as Christians, we need to know how to think about these things; that is crucial.

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Everyone deals with "anxious thoughts" (Ps. 94:19; 139:23). Everyone faces scary and unknown situations (Ps. 55:5; Prov. 3:25). And those are the moments at which the Bible becomes *exceedingly personal* and practical, because it gives us the resources to *deal* with those things, and not become stuck and victimized in a vortex of overwhelming fears and dread, or a season of depression (Ps. 119:92).

Biblical Counseling—the movement that I am touting in these couple of messages—is the excellent ministry movement within biblical churches these days, through which believers in Jesus Christ help others to understand what God has provided for us, that He has given us—as Second Peter 1:3 says—"everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

But it is altogether different when you *abandon* God's definitions of man and sin and human suffering and difficult situations, and you *replace* those things with therapeutic medical-sounding terms (see Jer. 8:9; cf. Jer. 2:13).

Now, here is what I mean: I might say, "I'm feeling anxious today." That is something that *anyone* could experience and rightfully say on *any* given day. And in that situation, we need to turn to God (Ps. 27:1, 13-14; 42:5-6; 43:5; 56:3, 11; 71:12-14; Is. 50:10). We need to search His Word—or, better yet, have it memorized (Deut. 6:6; Ps. 119:11; Prov. 22:18; Col. 3:16)—and find the help that we need for those situations. We need to "encourage one another" along the way (1 Thess. 5:11). That's why you cannot truly *practice* Christianity apart from the fellowship of the Body of Christ, because God has given us each other to *help* each other to apply His Word (Rom. 14:19; 15:14; Eph. 4:12; Col. 3:16b; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 10:24-25). We need the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us understand and to help us apply His Word with wisdom (1 Cor. 2:12-13; Eph. 1:17; 3:16-19; Col. 1:9)—and often, with somebody alongside to help us to think clearly and apply Scripture and call us to the very best that God has for us (Rom. 14:19; 15:2; Titus 2:3-5).

The more prone to anxiety you are—and different people have different buttons that get pushed with different frequency and different sensitivity—but the more prone you are to go down that path, the *more* you need to discuss those things and to turn to God, and to be disciplined.

It is *entirely* different when, rather than helping a person find and explore God's resources, somebody says, "Oh! Well, you have 'anxiety disorder'! Here's a pill you can take that might make you feel less anxious, and we can meet to discuss how to find within yourself, in your own heart, the strength and the wisdom to come with your mental disease." (see Prov. 28:26) That is what our world is doing.

Now, "I feel anxious"—that's reality. *Everybody* knows what it means to feel anxious. But you don't need to be *stuck* there! To say, "I have the 'disease' of 'anxiety disorder,' you have taken what God says is true and is real in the human experience in a fallen world, and you have *replaced* it with a manmade *dismissal* of the real problem—which you have now replaced with medical, psychological, therapeutic terminology.

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You might go through a *prolonged* time of discouraging events. You might have a chronic *physical* disease that weighs you down. You might encounter *crushing* setbacks in your life. Or, you might be horribly betrayed by people that you have loved and trusted. And how does that make you feel? Well, I think the right term is "lousy"! That can make you feel *depressed*—"It feels like I'm being *pressed down*."

Well, the good news is: God has *remarkable help* for anyone in that situation! It comes in His Word—including *many* of His examples of people *recorded* in God's Word who *dealt with* depression. Good Biblical Counseling helps you *connect* with those resources.

But it is *entirely different* when, instead of understanding that you are going through a difficult time and you are feeling depressed—that *happens*—but then when somebody says, "Well, that means you have a mental disorder. You have a 'disease' called 'depression.'" And then they will give you medication to help you feel less badly—and, yes, sometimes those medications *do* alter a person's mood—but that isn't solving the problem! You might be told, "Well, we can start meeting regularly to help you learn how to find the strength within yourself to *buck up* so you can survive hard times like this." Altogether different perspective!

It doesn't bring you closer to God to take a medication. It doesn't bring you closer to God to "buck up" and get through it. It doesn't bring you the "grace" of God through "the Lord Jesus Christ" or "the love of God" or "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14). It doesn't help you see the majestic plan of God being worked out in your life (Rom. 8:30; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:11). It doesn't build your "hope" and your confidence about spending eternity with Him (Rom. 5:2), *basking* in His glory with *no more tears* and no more sorrow (Rev. 21:4). It doesn't deal with your *sin* at all (Prov. 28:13).

Here is another example: If someone develops a tragic and tenacious habit of abusing alcohol—we've seen the results of that; it's *awful* (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:5; Is. 28:7; Hos. 4:11; Hab. 2:15-16). The standard attitude in our society is: That person has a "disease." And you can go to some organizations, and some of them provide a lot of help to a lot of people, in a human sense. You can go to someplace like "Alcoholics Anonymous"—they help a lot of people undergo behavior modification so they learn to function in life without causing so much damage to themselves and to their loved ones. They help people learn how to function in the world.

But the attitude they adopt begins with convincing their clients that they have a "disease" called "alcoholism," and they need to live the *rest of their lives* understanding: You have in *incurable* "disease," and you have to learn to keep that "disease" managed and under control. Well, there is a big problem with thinking that way.

Look—I am *all for* people not drinking! I am *all for* people not ruining their lives and their families, and losing their jobs, and all of those things. But *drunkenness* is, indeed, a *terrible problem*! And learning techniques to avoid drunkenness—that's good. Same with people who abuse drugs other than alcohol. But, "drunkenness" *is a sin* (Lk. 21:34; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; 1 Pet. 4:3). God says *specifically*: "Don't do that!" (see Eph. 5:18a; cf. Is. 5:11, 22; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10).

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Now, if you specifically *do* what God says "Don't do," that is a "sin" (1 Jn. 3:4)—it is *not* a "disease"! You can look in *any* medical book you want to—there is no etiology for "drunkenness"! There is no blood test! Well, you can test how much alcohol is in somebody's blood, but there is no blood test or DNA marker for the *habit* of "alcoholism."

It is *sinful* behavior! It *always involves a choice*! I have *never* heard anyone say, "Officer, the reason that I am drunk is that somebody held a gun to my head and *made me* go to that liquor store, and *made me* buy that stuff, and *made me* drink it all, and *then* get in the car!" That is *personal* wrong decisions!

And often, the consequences are *crushing*! And *no wonder* we want to help people with that! *Anybody* does. But there is an *answer*! Jesus "died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3), and *in Him* there is transformation and *lasting* change (Rom. 6:4-7, 11-14; 2 Cor. 5:17).

There are *many* programs for dealing with drug and alcohol abuse, and I am not saying that it is a terrible thing for anybody to go there. *But*, I will tell you: The *best* alcohol and drug abuse program that I have *ever* seen is what is done by our ministry partners in Russia. Now, there are some on our side of the planet who are starting to catch on to this. They bring people—first of all, referred by one of the pastors of one of the churches—they bring people into a fulltime residence program—you live there 24 hours a day—in which *every single day*, when you are not asleep, is filled with prayer, Bible study, discussion, fellowship, mutual encouragement, and physical work. Every day—all that, *only* that. And their success rate is *astounding*! And I know people who are now *pastors* and *church planters* and *missionaries* who came to their life in Christ through that portal.

Now, I would like you to look at a seminal verse for Biblical Counseling. Consider this: First Corinthians Chapter 6, Verse 11—"Such *were*"—past tense—"some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

Now, that is God the Holy Spirit, through the pen of the Apostle Paul (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Pet. 1:21), saying to Christians: "You *were*..." That means "you were *formerly* in that state of being." But in Christ, "you were washed"—you were dirty (Ezek. 36:25); now you have been made "clean" (Jn. 15:3). "You were sanctified"—you were unholy and sinful (Rom. 5:8), and now God has made you "holy" in His Son (Eph. 1:4; Col. 1:22; 2 Tim. 1:9). "You were justified"—that means you were under the "condemnation" of God (Mk. 16:16; Rom. 5:18), you were "alienated" from His Kingdom (Col. 1:21); and now, He has declared you "righteous" (2 Cor. 5:21), He has "adopted" you into His family as His spiritual child (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). So your *identity* is "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3). You don't say, "I am an alcoholic," or, "I am a 'whatever'-addict." "I am a Christian. I belong to the Savior!" (see Rom. 8:33-34; Eph. 5:27; Col. 3:4; Jude 24; 1 Jn. 3:2)

First Corinthians 6:11 is amazing: "Such *were* some of you..." Look at what that refers to in the previous two verses: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."

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So, what "*were* some of *you*" that Paul is writing about to the Corinthians?

"Fornicators"—a "fornicator" is an unmarried person who has sex.

"Idolaters"—those are people who worship *anything* more than they worship God.

"Adulterers"—that is married people who have sex with anyone other than their spouse.

"Effeminate" and "Homosexuals"—those are words that describe different aspects of sexual activity *other* than between a "man" and a "woman" (1 Cor. 7:2; cf. Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27). And certainly, a modern wrinkle on that would include the whole "transsexual" idea (cf. Deut. 22:5). "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecc. 1:9).

"Thieves"—that's pretty obvious: people who steal.

"Covetous"—people who want more than they have, and they are driven by that desire to have what others have.

"Drunkards"—those are people who become intoxicated. The same would apply to abuse of other drugs.

"Revilers"—that is people who are verbally abusive or slanderous or gossiping.

"Swindlers"—that is those who cheat others.

And that is just a *sample* list. Those are *some* of the behavior patterns that show that a person is "unrighteous" and "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (cf. 1 Tim. 1:9-10).

But by God's grace through Jesus Christ, *all* people like that can be *transformed* and no longer *characterized* by those things! It doesn't mean you are never tempted. It doesn't mean you are guaranteed to never stumble. But you "*were*" those things.

Now, how does that work, for someone to undergo that kind of transformation? I was *going* to say to you all sitting here in a crowded room that you are sitting in a room with people who have been delivered from all those things, and more—so, get back here next week, and you can be my illustration. I got a Christmas gift—it's a cap that says: "Pastor Warning: Anything You Do Can Become A Sermon." So, get back here—I *need* you!

Now, to encourage you as you go, I want you to think about what God promises that His Word can do for a child of His when you believe and trust and apply it accurately. Look at Psalm 19, starting at Verse 7 and going through Verse 14—several references to the Word of God in different ways. Notice the things that it does:

"The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." It does "soul" work (Jas. 1:21).

"The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." You need "wisdom"? God's Word has it (Prov. 2:6).

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"The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." You don't have joy? Dig in God's Word (Ps. 119:111; Jer. 15:16).

"The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." You don't "understand" what is going on? Well, come and look at the Word of God (Ps. 119:98-100; Prov. 28:5).

"The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever." "You were washed," says First Corinthians (see Ezek. 36:25; cf. Jn. 15:3; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5).

"The judgments of the Lord are true"—you're stuck in error?—"they are righteous altogether" (Ps. 12:6; 119:128, 151, 160; Prov. 30:5; Jn. 17:17b; Rom. 7:12).

"They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." You know that feeling when you find something in God's Word, and His Spirit just *washes* it through your soul? (Lk. 24:32; Rom. 7:22)

And then, starting at Verse 11—"Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward." What are the guardrails that you need to stay between? They are in God's Word (Ps. 119:9, 11, 24, 104-105).

"Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I will be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression." (cf. Num. 15:30-31; Jer. 18:12)

And then, this prayer: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." (cf. Prov. 12:5a; 23:26)

There's a bit of an introduction. I get too much anxiety to get up and preach—especially if Scott Basolo is here; and I know you are watching, Scott—and not have an outline, especially an alliterated outline. So, spinning off of last week, I decided to title this—we talk about "taking every thought captive" (2 Cor. 10:5); I said, Let's "Take *Corrupted* Thoughts Captive."

And here is my outline:

Number 1: The Big Aberration. That's the big point for today.

Number 2: The Basic Approach.

The *massive* aberration *is* this idea of *psychologizing* and *medicalizing* the entire human condition. I am going to share with you something—I'm going to quote a famous author that is very precious to me. This is what *I* wrote in the course that I was contracted to write on Biblical Counseling to train Christian leaders in Russia, and now elsewhere through the world in the "Antioch Initiative."

I want to propose to you: Psychology is a false religion. Now, if you all were here, I could see who would get up and storm out when I say that. I can't tell how many of you are clicking off of the website at this time, but stay with me.

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Before we do the ministry of counseling, and all the discipleship that it produces, we *have* to declare our *complete allegiance to Scripture!* (see Is. 8:20; Jer. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:18-20) And I need you to understand: Psychology is *antithetical* to God's Word, and we need to understand it as a form of a *false religion!* Now, if you have a degree, and after your name you can put the letters "Psy—Master's in Psychology"—don't run away yet. I want you to sort this through. Psychology *opposes* God's Word. You cannot *mix* it with God's Word without corrupting God's Word (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14c; Jn. 7:7b; Eph. 4:17; 1 Jn. 1:5-6).

Psychological research can provide *myriad* descriptions of symptoms and behaviors. I mean, we can observe things that people go through; we can observe the human condition; we can observe anxiety, depression, addiction. We can observe all of those things. We can understand childhood development. We can understand relational dynamics. We can *observe* a lot of things. But then, how are you going to *define* them? And while we can describe the symptoms and the behaviors, we don't find the ultimate *answers* there.

Now I am going to give you an extend quote from a chapter titled "Rediscovering Biblical Counseling." It is in a book called "Counseling: How To Counsel Biblically." Let me just borrow these words:

"The word 'psychology' literally means 'the study of the soul.' " And I will insert there: *psuchē* or "psyche"—that's the Greek word for "soul"; "ology"—"the study of." So, " 'psychology' literally means 'the study of the soul.' True soul-study cannot be done by unbelievers. After all, only Christians have the resources for comprehending the nature of the human soul and understanding how it can be transformed. The secular discipline of psychology is based on godless assumptions and evolutionary foundations, and is capable of dealing with people only superficially and only on the temporal level. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, was an unbelieving humanist who devised psychology as a substitute for religion. Before Freud, the study of the soul was thought of as a spiritual discipline. In other words, it was inherently associated with religion. Freud's chief contribution was to define the human soul and the study of human behavior in wholly secular terms. He utterly divorced anthropology (the study of human beings) from the spiritual realm, and thus made way for atheistic, humanistic, and rationalistic theories about human behavior.

"Those fundamentally anti-biblical theories became the basis of all modern psychology. Of course, today's psychologists use hundreds of counseling models and techniques based on a myriad of conflicting theories, so it is impossible speak of psychotherapy as if it were a unified and consistent science. But the basis of modern psychology can be summarized in several commonly held ideas that have their roots in early Freudian humanism. These are the very same ideas many Christians are zealously attempting to synthesize with biblical truth."

Now, before I go back to the quote: These are examples of *flawed* anthropology, *flawed* understanding of what it is to be human. But here are some of the ideas. And you might be taken aback by this when you realize: "You know, I have let that creep into *my* thinking!" But, here are some of those things:

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"Human nature is basically good.

People have the answers to their problems inside them.

The key to understanding and correcting a person's attitudes and actions lies somewhere in the person's past.

Individuals' problems are the result of what someone else has done to them.

Human problems can be purely psychological in nature, unrelated to any spiritual or physical condition.

Deep-seated problems can be solved only by professional counselors using therapy.

Scripture, prayer, and the Holy Spirit are inadequate and simplistic resources for solving certain types of problems."

("Rediscovering Biblical Counseling" by John MacArthur, in "Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically" by John MacArthur and The Master's College Faculty, p. 7.)

As I told you: *I* was taught that viewpoint by one of my seminary professors.

So, as *I* wrote for my Russian brothers and sisters:

Man is totally depraved, not "basically good" (e.g., Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Prov. 19:3; 21:10; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 7:11a; Mk. 7:21-22). Answers come from *God* and His Word, *not* from our sin-cursed "hearts" (Ecc. 9:3; cf. Prov. 28:26; Jer. 17:9). A person's past does not enslave him or her; instead, we "press on" in Christ (Phil. 3:12-14), in whom we are "new creature[s]" by faith (2 Cor. 5:17). The wickedness of others—oh, it can *really* hurt, but that does not *enslave* us when we learn forgiveness, and our resources in Christ. Man is only two parts: There is the material part—body; and the immaterial part—which is sometimes called "soul" or "spirit" or "mind" or "heart" or "will" (see Gen. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:16; Jas. 2:26). There is no "psychological" *third* part of man. Scripture says God has given us "*everything*" we need "for life and godliness, through the true knowledge of" Christ (2 Pet. 1:3). *That* is the worldview from which we can competently, effectively, joyfully help each other with the hardest of problems.

In light of the fatal flaws of the worldview upon which psychology rests, there is this concept of "*Christian Psychology*." Now, I like that *term* because the *proper* "study of the soul" can *only* be done in light of what God says (Ps. 36:9b; Is. 8:20); it can only be understood in Christ (Prov. 28:5b). But the term "Christian Psychology" is an oxymoron, because "Christian" and "Psychology" stand on contradictory foundations.

"Psychology" is one of man's inadequate substitutes for knowing God and enjoying Him forever. And whatever passing comfort psychology brings to people—people can be talked down from the ledge, people can learn how to handle crises with less damaging, more comforting ways of doing things. I'm not saying there is *no* help whatsoever. I'm saying it is not the *ultimate* answer, and whatever passing comfort psychology brings *cannot truly change them* as God desires—see Second Corinthians 3:18: We are being changed "from glory to glory." Or, Second Peter 3:18: We "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior." Psychologists can help people process feelings, they can help people modify behavior; they just can't *save* anyone from hell, and they can't *transform* a heart (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 24:7; 13:23; Ezek. 36:26; Jn. 3:3, 5; Acts 16:14).

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So, true Biblical Counseling—that I am *hoping* you will desire to be involved with—that is the "work" of God through His "Word" (1 Thess. 2:13; cf. Ps. 119:104; Jn. 17:17; Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 2:2), accomplished by His Spirit working through His people (Gal. 6:1).

Now, *especially* in America, the idea of "Christian Psychology" has been *very* well marketed. It is rarely questioned in most churches. And the result is that because of a faulty worldview, because you put the word "Christian" as a modifier in front of it, the result is that manmade myths are allowed into the church and sown into people's thinking and utilized in counseling (see Lk. 16:15b).

Biblical counselors—that is why we use the term "*Biblical* Counseling" rather than "*Christian* Counseling" or "*Christian* Psychology"—Biblical counselors believe in the *sufficiency* of God's Word to provide us with "everything" necessary for "life and godliness."

"*Christian* Psychology" *denies* the ultimate *sufficiency* of God's Word, and it says that extra-biblical truths are necessary in order to help people. One of the mantras that you will hear from "Christian Psychology" is: "All truth is God's truth." That sounds pretty good, right? Okay, but: Do people say things are true that are not? We need to go with what *God* says is true (Is. 8:20; 1 Jn. 2:21b).

The two different ways of thinking stand on *different* foundations, and are therefore *competing* religious systems (see Prov. 21:30).

Now, I want to show you one of the great gifts somebody gave me, not terribly long ago. Here it is—and I'm sure everybody at home can read it: This is "The Christian's Guide to Psychological Terms." There is *a lot* of terminology out there for defining people's behavior and attitudes and feelings and all of that—there are *lots* of those things! *And* God has "everything" we need in His Word for "life and godliness"! So, who do we *connect* with those things? This book goes through page after page after page, taking psychological terms and then explaining from Scripture what those psychological terms describe.

I happened to flip to the page of "Aversion Therapy"—opposite the page with "Avoidant Personality Disorder." You might go to "Multiple Personality Disorder" or "Dissociative Identity Disorder." Does the Bible of anything about that? There are "Psychotherapy," "Psychic Healing," "Schizophrenia"—this is not a tiny little pamphlet. This helps Christians to get a handle on when somebody says, "You are such-and-such," or they say, "I have this disorder"—well, what does God say about that? Because the *feelings* are real. The *behavior* is real. The *attitudes* are real. But what is the answer? It is *not* in our sin-cursed hearts; it is in the Word of God.

I think it is helpful to consider the rather vivid contrast between those very complicated theories of psychology—all of which ultimately turn people *inward*: "Look in your heart. Follow your heart." (see Deut. 12:8; Prov. 28:26a; Matt. 12:34) We send them into a spiral of obsessing about themselves, versus the *powerful* "Word of God" (Heb. 4:12; cf. Jer. 23:29; 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 5:23; 6:17b; 1 Pet. 1:23).

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Somebody else came up with a list of Freudian myths. Let me just rattle them off for you; I don't have time to explain. Here we go:

Number 1: The "id," the "ego," and the "superego" are actual parts of the human psyche. A lot of people believe that.

Number 2: A person's unconscious drives behavior more than his conscious mind chooses behavior. By the way: That presumes that there *is* such a thing as "the unconscious mind." Right now, I want you to *think* about your "unconscious mind." You *can't*—there is no such thing.

Number 3: Dreams are the key to understanding the unconscious—and thus, the person.

Number 4: Present behavior is determined by unresolved conflicts from childhood. Hey, can your childhood screw you up? Oh, *yeah*. But is *that* ultimately the cause?

Number 5: Many people are in denial because they have repressed unpleasant memories into the unconscious. 45 years ago, there was a big deal that hit Christians of helping people "regress" in their memories. Oh, those were bad days.

Number 6: Parents are to blame for most people's problems.

Number 7: People need insight into their past to make significant changes in thoughts and attitudes and actions.

Number 8: Children must successfully pass through their "psychosexual stages of development," or they will suffer from neuroses later on.

Number 9: If I am to experience significant change, I have to remember and re-experience painful incidents in my past.

Number 10: The first five years of life determine what a person will be like when he or she grows up.

Number 11: Everything that has *ever* happened to me is located in my unconscious mind.

Number 12: People use unconscious defense mechanisms to cope with life.

That's a lot of stuff! There are *kernel*s of truth behind several of those things. That is true with *every* false belief system. So we need to be *very* careful and *very* discerning before we start giving advice which might rest on something other than Scripture.

Alright, I want to do one more primary thing with you about The Big Aberration in the thinking of these things. I want to show you the contrasts between Psychology and Biblical Counseling. Why do we harp on using the term "Biblical Counseling" rather than "Christian Psychology"?

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Well, let's contrast:

In *both* realms, the *desire* is to help hurting people—to love them, to care for them—and in a manner that honors God if somebody can say, "I'm a Christian Psychologist." I am not questioning their motives. When I criticize "Christian Counseling," I am not making *any* statement about the sincerity of the motivations of people who practice "Christian Counseling." I am commenting on the *beliefs* that are practiced, and where they take secular psychotherapy and try to make it "Christian."

Moving on to training and education: Both Christian counselors and Biblical counselors are *extensively* trained in order to help people with their most pressing issues. It's the *content* of the training that differs with the distinction between Christian counselors and Biblical counselors.

And go to the beliefs of the counselors: Both of them *claim* to believe in God. I know people about whom I don't question their salvation, and they practice Christian Counseling—they'll use *any* methodology they think might help a person; but if you ask them how to get to Heaven, they will give you the right answer. So, both claim to believe in God and His Word in their personal lives, but the difference is in the *extent* of the use of Scripture.

So those are some *common* grounds. Now, I want to show you some distinctions. And this is used by permission from our own Gracie Nelson, who was asked to evaluate the distinctions between the two, and I think you will find this very helpful.

When we talk about The Source of Authority:

Well, in Biblical Counseling, it is the Bible alone. In Christian Counseling, it is the Bible *plus* psychology.

In Christian Counseling, they use the word "integration"—"We want to integrate the Bible alongside secular methods," and it varies a lot from counselor to counselor. But Biblical Counseling "dies on the hill" of the sufficiency of Scripture—that God has given to us *all things* we need for "life and godliness."

Christian Counseling says that the Bible is precious and it is helpful, but it's *not* sufficient for all counseling issues. We say the Bible is precious and sufficient for counseling issues, *and* brings about lasting transformation.

How do we define The Nature of the Problem? What are the distinctions?

Christian Counseling has the use of secular psychology, and it *pretty much ignores* the issues of sin, the work of the Holy Spirit, Satan, God, and Christ. In many realms of psychology—Christian or otherwise—it is *anathema*...I shouldn't have used a Christian word; it is *verboten* to even talk about sin and its consequences. Biblical Counseling recognizes that past experiences and biological influences—they *can* influence behavior, but they do not *determine* one's behavior.

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Christian Counseling focusses on nature—the biological factors—or nurture—the experiences in the environment—to deal with the problem. Biblical Counseling believes that most issues stem from the heart of a person (Mk. 7:21-22; Jas. 1:14). Is there sin "bound up in [our] heart" (Prov. 22:15), or not? (cf. Gen. 6:5; Ecc. 9:3)

How about The Methodology?

Christian Counseling will use secular psychological principles and try to *integrate into them* Bible references and a Christian attitude of caring for somebody. So it is not all evil, but it is not the same worldview. Biblical Counseling—we understand the methodology: It's *totally different*, depending on whether the counselee is a believer or an unbeliever! I cannot call an unbeliever to obey the Word of God (Rom. 8:7). For an unbeliever, the issue is: Present the Gospel (Mk. 1:15; Acts 16:31; 17:30). For the believer, the issue is to understand the implications of the Gospel and *the power to change* in his or her life (Matt. 26:41; Rom. 6:6-14; 8:2-4, 13-14; Gal. 2:20; 5:16; Eph. 3:16; 6:10).

What is The Goal? Well, the goal is helping people. That's the desire, we said at the beginning.

In Christian Counseling, the goal is to help people deal with something difficult. In Biblical Counseling, it starts with the salvation of the counselee.

In Christian Counseling it is to build self-confidence. In Biblical Counseling, it is to help people progress in sanctification—growing in holiness—to build confidence in God.

In Christian Counseling, it is to help people function better in society. In Biblical Counseling, it is that, *plus* to help people function better within the church.

In Christian Counseling and regular psychology, it is to change behavior in a specific area—like anorexia, depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, etc. Biblical Counseling goes after the change of the heart and the desires, and leading to a change in behavior that affects that specific area—but [also] *every* area.

And a big distinction is The Role of the Holy Spirit:

In Christian Counseling, similar counsel is given to *everybody*—believer or unbeliever. And so, the work of the Holy Spirit *cannot* be as much of a focus as secular behavior modification. Biblical Counseling recognizes: The Holy Spirit is the Divine Enabler for change in the heart and the behavior of the counselee (Ezek. 36:37; Rom. 8:4, 13b; Gal. 5:16). So, it requires the *salvation* of the counselee for true change (Rom. 8:9). Go look at Galatians Chapter 5: "the fruit of the Spirit" (vss. 22-23). We are after nothing less, because *that* is the fruit of what the Holy Spirit produces in a life.

Okay, so I said "The Big Aberration"—what is that? We *need* to stick to the terms that the Bible uses to describe problems that people face so that we can appropriately grasp the provisions that God gives us. It is an "aberration"—it is a *departure* from truth—to define man in purely materialistic or medical or therapeutic terms.

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And man has done a lot about it. Have you ever heard of the "DSM"—the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual"? It is the description of all of the so-called mental illnesses, problems, and all of that. It gets revised every five or ten years; now we are on "DSM 5." It is about four inches thick.

This ("The Christian's Guide to Psychological Terms") takes that terminology and connects it to what the Bible says. We don't want to start with *aberrant terminology*, and then try to apply truth.

So *that* leads to: The Basic Approach

Now, here is *my* lovely little personal, happy secret: Because of this *wonderful* storm that God sent us, and cancelling church, I don't have the normal time constraints! We have another *almost 20 minutes* until the service would be over! I'm not going to take that much time, but I *wondered* how I was going to get this all in.

Let's look at The Basic Approach of Biblical Counseling. A great place to look is Romans 12:1-3—"Therefore"—alright, that is assuming you have read Romans 1 through 11—"Therefore I urge you, brethren"—this is addressed to brothers and sisters in Christ—"by the mercies of God"—see Chapters 1 through 11—"I urge you...to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

Friends, we need to relentlessly, tenaciously, lovingly help one another in this process of being "transformed"—it doesn't happen in one afternoon, but this *process* of being "transformed by the renewing of [our] minds" (see Ps. 84:7; Prov. 4:18; Phil. 3:12-14). The ministry of Biblical Counseling is helping each other to think about what we truly believe. When we find something in our belief system that is inaccurate, we need to identify what it is, argue against it from Scripture, and replace it with the "truth" (Jn. 17:19; 2 Cor. 10:5)—and then *act* on the truth (Lk. 11:28; Jn. 13:17; Acts 26:20).

That is *really simple* to define! But real people—eh, they are a little more messy than just stating it in one sentence. *That* is why we need to help each other!

Now, let me give you an example or two. And really, we are almost done; we will be done before the next storm hits.

Consider an example: Is there anger in your home? Or, maybe you grew up in a home where there was anger, either in the form of outbursts—that's easy to recognize—or the form of the "silent treatment," and people walking on eggshells. Have you been taught the humanistic methodology of, "If I am really angry, just shut up"? That's better than throwing things, better than hitting people, better than committing murder—but it is still anger, and it is still unresolved.

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My friends, it is not primarily about what your mother did to you; it's about the fact that you are "thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think," and the Bible hits *that* nail right on the head. Let me show you a passage you have probably seen many times—maybe not have thought of it in this way: James 4:1-3. James writes: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." You say, "Well, that passage doesn't apply to me! I haven't 'murdered' anybody!" Alright, you understand: "anger" is the same sin as "murder" (Matt. 5:21-22), just like "lusting" is the same sin as "adultery" (Matt. 5:27-28). Oh, there is a difference in how far you *carry* it. There are differences in the earthly consequences. But this is about *all* of us!

Now, take those thoughts and work it backward. You could think of it this way: If there *are* "quarrels and conflicts among you"—in your marriage, in your home life, in your church, in *any* other relationship—if there are "quarrels and conflicts," *that shows* that *someone* wants something more or something different than what they have, and they are *ticked* about it because they don't have it! It shows that there is *some kind* of "envy" in play (Titus 3:3). It shows that there is some kind of motive in play that values personal pleasure or comfort *more* than wanting what is *best* for everybody else in the situation—for the other parties involved (cf. Phil. 2:3-4).

As one excellent Biblical Counseling author put it—I'm pretty sure that the book is titled "Peacemaking," and I can't remember the title, so ask Scott Freeman; he will probably make you read it—[this author] says that when there is a conflict simmering in your marriage or your family or your church, it is because someone has this attitude—and he even made it a ditty: "I *want* what I *want* when I *want* it; and when I *want* it, *it better be there!*" Do you want to live with a person like that? Maybe you have. Maybe you *are* that person. Are you willing to explore the possibilities?

My friends, we simply want to be able to pray, along with those words of King David that I read to you before. Remember the end of Psalm 19: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Yahweh"—it says "Lord" in the New American Standard; the word is "Yahweh"—"O Yahweh, my rock and my Redeemer."

And let's pray:

Father, that is our prayer: "Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight." We know we cannot be acceptable in Your sight by any other way than by Your grace poured out upon us through Jesus Christ. So we thank You for Him. We cling to Him. Father, we pray for each of our homes. We pray for Heritage Bible Church. We pray for all of our other relationships, that we would put into practice that which You have provided, so that in all facets of "life and godliness," You would be the One who receives the glory. Teach us to help one another in those ways, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.