

Lesson 6: Psychology as Soul Care

Introduction

Psalms 147:2-4

There is sympathy: Healing the brokenhearted is as difficult as gathering exiles or naming the stars.

There is hope: “Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite” (v. 5).

Proverbs 20:5 – God often uses skilled counselors to *draw out* the hidden, deep plans of the heart.

For example, consider the challenge of dealing with a depressed individual:

“One knows not how to deal with such persons; they turn every thing that is said to them the wrong way, and most to their own disadvantage. There is nothing that the devil seems to make so great a handle of, as a melancholy humor; unless it be the real corruption of the heart” (Jonathan Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*).

Deep emotional states open the soul to the devil’s influence:

e.g. “overmuch sorrow” (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

e.g. excessive, prolonged anger (Ephesians 4:26-27, “a foothold”)

How should we care for the souls of others?

Psychology is the science on mental health (*psyche*, Gr. “soul”), and as in medicine, there are symptoms and causes.

Symptoms versus Root Causes

Iceberg – the symptoms (e.g. consciousness) hide the deeper causes (e.g. subconsciousness)

Often the feelings are treated through medication, but underlying root causes are left unidentified and untreated.

Three Divisions in Secular Soul Care – Theories about the Whole Iceberg

Psychoanalysis – Freud, dream analysis, depth psychology (e.g. AIDS son of an admiral, figure skating dream)

Carl Jung – symbols in dreams from the collective unconsciousness

Psychology – counseling – many theories:

Abraham Maslow – a hierarchy of needs pyramid, culminating in self-actualization (Tim Sanders quote)

B. F. Skinner – behaviorism (cf. Pavlov’s dogs)

Carl Rogers – client-centered therapy (unconditional, positive regard, reflective techniques, egalitarian)

Psychiatry – medical training – prescriptions (next week’s lesson)

Assessment of Secular Psychology

With regard to symptoms (the “pain” or dashboard warning light), psychology can be helpful.

Psychologists are correct in asserting some feelings are dangerous:

Depression (hopelessness, despair) → prolonged inactivity, possible suicide

Severe guilt feelings → loss of energy (Ps. 32:3-4), even loss of life (e.g. Judas Iscariot)

Inordinate fears (phobias) → irrational behavior

Psychoanalysts are correct in asserting there is much more to a person than consciousness:

Repressed memories, suppressed conscience (Romans 1:18)

Psychology is correct in asserting that much of present behavior has been conditioned by the past:

Cultural conditioning (e.g. 1 Cor. 8:7 – “accustomed”), parental training or lack of training

Psychiatry is correct in seeing some sort of psychosomatic connection between the soul and the body:

Clear evidence – mentally disabled, Alzheimer’s, drug abuse, brain injuries

Even the religious psychology of William James is correct in cataloging psychological benefits of religion.

Psychological health is not the same thing as eternal security (Jer. 6:14).

With regard to root causes, psychology has limited value:

Self-focus, self-flattery, rationalizing away of objective guilt, denial of the supernatural, and over-medication.

At best, psychology trains a counselor to ask better probing questions, but answers depend on a worldview.

Psychological Triage of Root Causes

Body – injury, illness, medication

Mind – troubling thoughts, uncontrolled fears, unmitigated guilt feelings, anger issues, hope deferred

Spirit – the spiritual world can plant thoughts in people and even possess unbelievers (e.g. Judas for both)

Possible Combination: e.g. guilt feelings hurt the body (Psalm 32:3-4)

Test Cases: Panic Attacks – due to thinking? Hearing Voices – due to medication?

Pastoral Care of the Conscience

Much of psychological disorder is due to the conscience:

Francis Schaeffer saw conscience as one of the principal keys to the psychological “problem of man’s separation from himself, and his relationship to himself in the world of thought” (*True Spirituality*, p. 109).

In the realm of conscience, pastoral soul care is particularly helpful:

Real Guilt – the blood of Christ perfects and cleanses the conscience (Hebrews 10:1-4, 22; 1 John 1:7, 9).

This is where true, deep, and lasting psychological healing begins, with the cleansing blood of Christ.

Some Christians, especially perfectionists, need further training than simply to run to the blood of Christ.

False Guilt – the authority of God’s word exposes the false duties we (or others) place on ourselves

Conscience – a sensor to detect right or wrong, but it needs calibration by faith in the truth (Romans 14).

“You desire truth in the innermost being” (Psalm 51:6)—truth about *both* what happened and what is right.

God bless you with joy and peace in believing all that is true about Christ and yourself in Him (Romans 15:13)!