PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CHURCH (Part One):
Laying a Foundation for Discernment

by Bob and Gretchen Passantino

Few topics spawn more debate and confusion among Christians as does psychology. While some accept it wholesale and others reject it entirely, most struggle to determine which aspects of it to accept and which to reject. Is it possible to put this knotty subject into clear biblical perspective? **Bob and Gretchen Passantino** answer *yes*, and are prepared to show us how.

Summary

Psychology, specifically psychotherapy, is one of the most controversial issues in the church today. Some Christians argue that psychology is a rival religion, others that inclusion of psychological principles into biblical counseling is essential, others that neither extreme is accurate. Psychology has adopted the scientific method, but that method cannot be consistently applied to its field of study. The theories that have developed from psychological research have given rise to three major schools and literally hundreds of psychotherapies (which are often unscientifically mixed in practice). Many Christians believe they have been abandoned by the church and consequently turn to psychology.

What are we to do when the problems of daily life seem insurmountable and no one seems to care enough to listen or suggest solutions? For millions of Americans — including many Christians — "professional" mental health workers are the expensive answer.

In 1988 Americans spent an estimated $273.3 billion on mental health services.[1] To handle this growth market, between 1959 and 1989 the number of practicing professional clinical psychologists increased by a factor of 16, from 2,500 to 40,000.[2] Additional kinds of mental health workers have proliferated, including licensed social workers, clinical workers, lay counselors, pastoral counselors, peer counselors, support group leaders, and other assorted caregivers. Nearly every American will at some time seek out — or be exposed to — mental health practices, whether through job application personality assessments, school evaluations, crisis counseling, or several of the literally hundreds of forms of mental health practices prevalent in American society.

Churches, Bible colleges and seminaries, Christian speakers, and Christian publishers across the country are promoting mental health programs to help Christians solve their personal problems and find personal fulfillment. Many Christian educational institutions have added psychology classes and majors, and some even have Masters and Ph.D. programs in psychology. Twelve Step programs patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) have been adapted by churches to address almost any kind of persistent personal problem, from obesity to "spiritual" addictions. Some churches offer a personality evaluation with membership forms to ensure that new members have their emotional and mental health needs met in addition to their spiritual needs. There are even study Bibles designed especially for people "in recovery." Indeed, some Christians argue that inclusion of psychological principles and teachings into a biblical counseling setting is the only way to provide competent mental health care to Christians.

A perusal of Christian publishers' catalogs reveals that for most publishers, books on self-help, recovery, addiction, personal emotional or mental health and growth, and relationships form the bulk of their best-selling new titles. Bible study and biblical reference books appear to be almost an afterthought at the back of most catalogs.

At the same time, there are those Christians who completely reject any psychological theories or therapies, denouncing psychology as a rival religion and substitute for the atoning and cleansing work of Christ. Authors such as Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Dave Hunt, and Jay Adams clearly demarcate between "the psychological way" and "the spiritual way." Some Christians not only condemn psychology as ungodly and reflective of fallen man, but also warn of spiritual deception and demonic attack as possible consequences of involvement in "secular psychology."

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEM

Many Christians are not prepared to embrace either of the above points of view. They see the issues as much more complex than total acceptance or total rejection, and have genuine concern about how best to resolve not only their own personal problems, but also problems for those they love and to whom they minister.

One of our Christian friends, who spent years as a drug and alcohol abuser, explained to us why he continued supportive involvement in AA, even though he also pursued a strong biblical counseling practice: "I know of very few churches where a fallen alcoholic can show up on Sunday morning, contrite but hung over, and be accepted in forgiveness and love, despite his sour breath and dirty clothes. Why do we wonder when Christians who abuse alcohol go to secular programs when they are not welcome in their own churches?"[3]

Another Christian friend, frustrated because his many attempts to help his wayward son failed, explained why his disillusionment hadn't caused him to dismiss psychology altogether:

> My son was in the in-patient treatment program for less than two weeks, and it cost us more than $10,000. They claimed it was a Christian program, and they claimed to understand him and his problems. But not only did I think their evaluation was dead wrong, my son did, too.
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> Even though he didn't really want to change, my son laughed at their futile attempts at accurate diagnosis, and I think his ridicule of them spilled over into his opinion of me, too. What kind of a fool was I for sending him to such a foolish place?
>
> At the same time, if I dismiss all psychology because it didn't work with my son, does that mean I must dismiss the Bible because biblical counseling didn't work either? I don't believe that the end justifies the means, so I can't really reject psychology until I know more about it and how it's supposed to work. To me, it seems like a bunch of guesswork fueled by personal biases and masked by scientific jargon, but I don't know. Maybe there's something to it after all.

A third friend is a mental health professional, and well respected in his field. Although he has several graduate degrees in psychology, he rejects much psychological theory and practice as worthless. Most of his counseling principles are consistent with biblical ethics and biblical truths, and his success rate with clients is impressive. He says his greatest reward as a professional is that many of his patients no longer need him. This friend came from a Christian family, was educated at Christian schools, and even completed graduate degrees and did intern counseling at Christian institutions. He hesitates to identify himself as a Christian, however, because his experiences in Christian environments were so painful and damaging to him:

> You wouldn't believe the hypocrisy, the cruelty, the spiritual manipulation that was rampant through most of my Christian experiences. Blatantly unbiblical practices were condoned or covered up by supposedly mature Christian leaders who tried to justify sin as "normal" or who denied there were any problems. Give me an honest nonbeliever any day. At least I know who I'm dealing with, I have no false illusions, and I don't get that sick feeling that I've learned to associate with "God's people." If I judged Jesus and the Bible on the basis of most of His people I've known, I'd reject Him and His Word in a second. I'm afraid to reject my faith totally, but how can I believe the Bible has all the answers for fulfilled personal living when people who "swear by it" are so messed up?

Each of these people represent thousands of Christians who have a wide variety of genuine concerns both about biblical counseling and psychology. Indeed, psychology is one of the most controversial and divisive issues in the church today. This is partly because it is a complex subject and the lines must be drawn carefully to produce a responsible and balanced evaluation of it.

A proper biblical consideration of the relationship between psychology and the church — the goal of this four-part series — cannot be attempted without a good understanding of several larger issues. This first installment will therefore lay a foundation for discussion by surveying the history and complexity of American psychology, and by searching out the parameters of a biblical counseling world view. Part Two will focus specifically on biblical counseling and will explore why some Christians turn from the Bible to psychology. Part Three will identify serious inadequacies in American psychology, both historically and as it is practiced today. Part Four will then attempt to sort out those psychological perspectives that may be compatible with biblical counseling and those that are not, concluding with a perspective on the future of psychology and the church.

THE SCOPE OF PSYCHOLOGY

The word *psychology* derives from two Greek terms meaning "the study of persons." Some argue that since the Greek root from which we get *psych* means "spirit" or "soul," psychology is religious in nature and involves the study of the spirit or soul. However, one must realize that because of the evolving nature of language, word origin or etymology does not necessarily point to what the word means in contemporary usage. Those who use the term psychology today do not generally mean to make any religious statements about the human spirit or soul, but instead are referring to the nontangible personal aspects of human beings.

Christians call this aspect "soul" or "spirit," and certainly the Bible affirms the reality of the immaterial human nature as "soul" or "spirit." Even biblically speaking, however, a significant function of this immaterial aspect involves reasoning, communicating, emotions, memory, and social interaction, all of which can be studied — to at least some extent — without full consideration of how these aspects relate to one's relationship with God. This is the focus of psychology.

Psychology is defined in a leading Christian textbook as "the scientific study of the behavior and thinking of organisms....the study of how living creatures interact with their environment and each other, and how they cope (successfully or unsuccessfully) with that environment."[4] This relatively simple definition represents a broad field that encompasses far more than simply psychotherapy (the direct interchange between counselor and counselee). It includes theories of personality, mind/body relationships, education, behavior, and socialization. It includes scientific testing and data gathering for each of these areas. It also includes theories of change in each of these areas, including the application of these theories in counseling situations.

Most of these categories of theorizing, testing, learning, and knowing are conducted at educational institutions and/or research facilities, and most people have little direct contact with such programs. However, psychotherapy — the *application* of these theories in counseling situations — not only accounts for the greatest number of practitioners and the greatest expenditure of funds, but also interacts directly with more people than all the rest of the processes combined. Because of this disproportion of interaction, our focus in these articles will be on (though not limited to) psychotherapy.

THE ORIGINS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology is among the youngest sciences. Physiologist Wilhelm Wundt founded a psychological testing center (or laboratory) in Leipzig, Germany. He is generally credited with first according psychology the status of being an independent scientific, academic discipline in 1879. "While his predecessors emphasized either the philosophy of the mind or the physiology of the brain, Wundt used both emphases to develop an experimental approach to understanding human behavior."[5] Wundt attempted to understand the components of consciousness.

Following Wundt were other scientists and philosophers who built on his experiments and theories, and developed their own schools. In 1890 William James wrote the first general textbook of psychology, *The Principles of Psychology*. James focused on how consciousness functions.

By the 1920s a third focus emerged from American psychologist John B. Watson, whose work reflected his commitment to understanding behavior. The most famous behaviorist was B. F. Skinner, whose generalizations and developed theories today characterize the psychological school of behaviorism.

European developments in psychological theories became dominated by Sigmund Freud's convictions about unconsciousness and early childhood experiences. His system came to be called psychoanalysis. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, had some significant differences with Freud (especially in his theories of the collective unconscious), but his theories also focused on the inner workings of the mind as affected by experience.

A fifth system of thought in psychology has developed over the past thirty years and is concerned with combining biological factors with personal responsibility and decision-making. This school, the cognitive, is one of the fastest growing schools in modern psychology.

Academic or research psychologists generally subscribe to one of these five schools of thought. However, most mental health counselors[6] do not subscribe completely to any one of them, but instead pragmatically choose what they like or think will work from any of the three major branches of psychotherapy that have developed from these schools (*see* below). This they do with little consideration to the rational underpinnings of a particular theory or technique of therapy. While this is neither scientific nor consistent, when clients get better, therapists assume it is because of the complex therapies applied in the particular case.

This eclectic approach gives mental health counselors flexibility in their counseling approaches, but it also often confuses important issues, since some of the schools' basic principles are mutually exclusive. For example, a strict behaviorist understands human behavior in terms of genetic, environmental, and experiential causes that *determine* an individual's subsequent behavior and/or mental state. A cognitivist, on the other hand, is convinced that humans are morally and mentally responsible beings who can choose against their backgrounds and experiences.

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

There are many ways of knowing. The branch of philosophy that concerns knowledge is called *epistemology* (the "theory of knowledge"). One can know through intuition, rational processes, revelation, direct experience, inferential experience (history and testimony), experimentation, and so forth. Different means of knowing are useful for different kinds of knowledge.[7]

Since science focuses on the material world, experimentation is the core of the scientific knowledge process. Of course, experimentation is not isolated from all other kinds of knowing. An experiment cannot be planned, conducted, and evaluated without using rational processes as well. However, experimentation has become so associated with science that it is often referred to as "the scientific method." The scientific method necessarily involves the threefold process of hypothesis, testing (experimentation), and evaluation. Encompassed within this threefold process are additional factors, such as observation, calculation, statistically significant repetition, elimination of other factors and/or causes, compensation for unavoidable biases, and critical review.

When psychology moved from the field of philosophy to the field of science, the scientific method was incorporated into psychological theory, research, and application. However, consistent, comprehensive application of the scientific method is impossible in psychology because of certain unique features.

For example, while replication of the experiment with consistent results is foundational to proper scientific methodology, such replication is frequently impossible in psychology. If a research psychologist wants to study the effect of violent kidnapping on a child's emotional stability and sense of security, social ethics preclude him or her from designing experiments where target children are violently kidnapped in large number to provide a large database for evaluation. The researcher is limited to working with data accumulated from actual kidnapping cases, which introduces other variables. No two actual kidnapping cases occur in the exact same framework, with the exact same kinds of violence, perpetrated by the exact same kinds of people who relate to their victims in exactly the same way.

Another reason why the scientific method is compromised when applied in psychology pertains to the *intangible* nature of the subject matter. While the scientific method is the tool of choice for learning about material reality, it is

far less useful for learning about immaterial reality. "Love," for example, is an intangible attribute and is difficult to test empirically, although a love letter or bouquet of roses might give some indication.

Because much of psychology relates to intangibles such as trust, decision-making, responsibility, moral values, and the like, the scientific method is limited in what it can discover. A research psychologist can study the tangible *effects* of intangibles — such as incidents of honesty as an effect of commitment to moral values — but he or she cannot study the intangible commitment to moral values itself.

This intangibility also makes it much more difficult to *prove* the causes of behavior empirically and univocally (i.e., to prove that only one explanation of the behavior is plausible). To return to our love-demonstrated-by-love-letters-and-flowers example, one cannot *prove* that these actions come from a love commitment. Perhaps the letter-writing flower buyer is actually tricking the object of his attention into *believing* she is loved so that the schemer can marry her and gain access to her sizable fortune. Or perhaps the letter-writing flower buyer is consumed by feelings of inadequacy and is incapable of a true love relationship, but he so craves the love and attention of another that he will go to great lengths to persuade someone to love him. The hypothetical causes of these actions are multiple, and the best scientific method will still have problems identifying a genuine intangible cause.

The third (and perhaps most significant) factor that inhibits the scientific method from yielding consistently valid results in psychology is the variable of human decision-making. When psychology studies human behavior as a scientific endeavor, it assumes the applicability of natural scientific laws that govern the material world, such as cause and effect. Most of these presuppositions, however, are not valid within a random or nondetermined setting.

We expect 1,000 experiments dropping nickels to affirm the law of gravity because we presuppose the invariant nature of the law of gravity and we presuppose that nickels do not have the inherent power to resist gravity. However, when we conduct 1,000 experiments exposing people to a chance to steal money, our results will not be uniform because *people make moral choices*. Some may steal because they can get away with it, while others may not steal even if they would get away with it because they believe it is wrong to steal.

Laws of cause and effect would be expected to predict accurately the actions of people from similar backgrounds, with similar abilities, in similar situations. The reality is, however, that while statistical patterns may develop, human decision-making precludes any of these patterns from revealing invariant natural laws. It may be statistically true that urban poverty-stricken minority children from broken homes tend to grow up to be gangbangers, but personal decision-making commitments can also produce, out of the same social situation, a Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Other problems with applying the scientific method in psychology are common to other kinds of scientific inquiry, such as inability to control all other factors or variables, biases in subject selection, placebo effects, experimenter bias, and so forth. It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate these more comprehensively, but we will return to this subject in Part Three.

Because of the varied, significant problems with applying the scientific method uniformly in psychology, some argue that psychology should not be considered a scientific discipline. Paul Meier and his co-authors summarize Christian author and former professor of psychology Mary Stewart VanLeeuwen's cautions concerning the narrow materialistic paradigm assumptions of psychology:

> VanLeeuwen doubts whether the approach used by physicists and biologists is appropriate for the study of human behavior and thinking. If the paradigm is faulty, the methods of research and theories that are produced by that paradigm are then also suspect....
>
> VanLeeuwen questions the strict cause-and-effect assumptions of natural scientists, and instead favors recognition of the freedom of choice people exercise. She notes the presence of reflexivity — the tendency of participants in experiments to think about the experiment and thus change their behavior from what it would be otherwise.[8]

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapy is the area of psychology people are the most likely to encounter and/or experience, involves the greatest number of participants, interacts more with the public, consumes a greater number of consumer and

government dollars, and consequently is what most people think of when the topic of psychology comes up. In 1987, 15 million Americans made 120 million visits to psychotherapists.[9] The numbers have increased dramatically since then.

The term *psychotherapy* — informally known as "the talking cure" — encompasses a variety of approaches to helping people identify, understand, and cope with the dynamics of their mental and emotional states, individually and in social interaction. Richie Hernick, editor of *The Psychotherapy Handbook*, defines psychotherapy as "an umbrella term for all activities involving one or more patients or clients and one or more therapists, which are intended to improve a patient's or client's feelings of psychological well-being."[10] Even this broad definition is somewhat inadequate, since it does not define "psychological well-being" and it promotes the subjective goal of improving one's "feelings." Some psychotherapies, especially some of the cognitive ones (and certainly we would hope ones practiced by Christians), intend to improve not simply one's feelings, but also one's abilities to act individually and socially in reality. Stanton Jones and Richard Butman define psychotherapy more descriptively: "We would describe individual counseling or psychotherapy as a dyadic (two-way) interaction between a client who is distressed, and perhaps confused and frightened, and a professional helper whose helping skills are recognized and accepted by the client."[11]

There are literally hundreds of different psychotherapies. As we've already noted, most counselors do not limit themselves to a single therapy but instead use in their practices a variety of techniques from a variety of different psychological "schools." Not only this, but their techniques can vary from patient to patient as well. One editor identified more than 350 different psychotherapies in his research, noting that "depending on how wide the net is cast, there may be said to be as many psychotherapies as there are therapists (or perhaps even as many as there are patients!)."[12] He narrowed the number to 250 for inclusion in *The Psychotherapy Handbook*.

The primary explanation for this wide variation and inconsistency in psychotherapeutic practice is that most counselors use what appears to work at various times with various patients, without strict regard to the foundational schools from which the techniques developed, and without the scientific objectivity and testing one would expect from a practitioner of a science. Jones and Butman explain:

> The varied theories and techniques are derived, for the most part, from clinical experience and reflection rather than systematic empirical research. This [inconsistency] helps to explain the unique experiences of the type of people he or she has seen for counseling, the types of problems they manifest, the cultural context of the therapist, his or her assumptions about how people change, and the core beliefs that shape the therapist's life philosophy.[13]

The benefit of such diversity is that counselors can acknowledge their clients' unique problems, emotional and mental states, and abilities to make changes in their own lives. Daniel Goleman, in the Foreword to *The Psychotherapy Handbook*, observes, "one force behind the vastness of the array of therapies may be the equally large spread of human suffering. Each therapy, as the entries here make clear, has its most appropriate domain. Each is a tool for a unique psychological job. The ecological niche each new therapy must find is the particular variety of mental anguish it best soothes."[14] This is the ideal.

This diversity, however, also exposes a serious weakness in the attempt to scientifically validate psychotherapy. If it is classified as a science, it must be *judged* as a science; but if it is subjective and inconsistent, it is not *good* science. The ideal of tailor-made counseling is all too often replaced by a mishmash of inconsistent, ineffective, and even destructive counseling. The confusion of therapeutic techniques — validated only through subjective, anecdotal experience — masks the reality that all too often the therapist has no reliable way to predict *who* will get better (or not), and *when* improvement will take place, if it does at all. Sometimes the counseling itself causes additional problems, even though the counselor has great faith in the therapy. Sadly, some counseling does worse than no good at all; it actually *harms* the clients.[15]

The many varied psychotherapies can be grouped under three primary categories developed from the schools of thought described earlier in this article. These three categories are behaviorism, analysis, and client-centered or humanistic psychotherapy. These categories provide the framework for the hundreds of different psychotherapeutic techniques ranging from Active Analytic Therapy to the Zaraleya Psychoenergetic Technique.[16] Some of the most popular forms of psychotherapy include Adlerian therapy, aversion therapy, biofeedback, co-dependency, cognitive therapy, crisis intervention, hypnotherapy, kinetic therapy, Neuro Linguistic Programming, past-life regression, psychoanalysis, reality therapy, and recovered memory therapy. (The most important groupings of the myriad of therapies will be examined closely in Part Three of this series.)

Despite the proliferation of psychotherapies, in varying degrees certain common elements are reflected in most psychotherapeutic techniques: "(1) offering reassurance and support, (2) desensitizing the client to distress, (3) encouraging adaptive functioning and (4) offering understanding and insight...."[17] These seem to be good goals, compatible with a more complete system of biblical counseling. It is no wonder, then, that psychotherapy is so attractive to Christians and non-Christians alike. Terence W. Campbell documents this enormous influence, noting that "in 1987, approximately fifteen million people in the United States made 120 million visits to psychotherapists. This is more than double the number of visits made to physicians specializing in internal medicine....In the 1950s it is estimated that only one person in eight involved themselves in psychotherapy....That number is now one American in three."[18]

BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Within our culture psychotherapy increasingly functions in the place of pastoral guidance, spousal support, friendship, applied Bible study, and parenting. Goleman explains:

> No doubt for many the therapist has replaced or supplements the clergyman as the place to turn to for counsel in times of distress. A case can be made that therapies are the current cultural response to a perennial human need, one served in former times by the shaman or the priest — even the physician, the family, or the good friend. Now that each of these supports has to some degree collapsed, modern doctrine has it that salvation is to be found in therapy.[19]

This may seem like welcome news to those who believe Christianity has failed to meet their personal needs, but it should alarm Christians who believe the Bible's promises that all our needs are met through Christ.

Christians who recognize this problem often focus their criticism on psychotherapy and exhort Christians to return to God's Word for the solutions to their problems. This approach has merit, but it is not only an inaccurate generalization, it also is inadequate. We believe that a far more critical concern is the *cause* of this turn away from God's Word to psychotherapy. When the church fails to minister in a complete and biblical way, people's needs go unmet and they turn to other sources for solutions to those needs. The ministry of the church should include support and nurture for its members, including biblical counseling.

The term "biblical counseling" is used in different ways by different authors. Some use it to refer to the preaching of God's Word apart from application. Some use it to refer to a counseling approach that "affirms the Bible as its *sole* source for authority concerning human nature, values and prescriptions for healthy living."[20] Some use the term to refer to counseling that uses the Bible as its foundation and standard, but also borrows compatible and testable information and principles from other sources, such as laboratory experimentation, statistical surveys, clinical experience, and so forth. In this series of articles we use the term in this latter way.

Our presupposition is that God works authoritatively and infallibly in His written Word, but also dynamically in the world and among people. While we look to God's Word as the standard by which to judge all things (1 Thess. 5:21-22), we recognize that the same God who preserved His Word also gave the world order and consistency, created natural laws, created humans with the ability to use logic and reasoning processes to apply biblical principles to new situations and to understand new experiences, and gave us the ability to develop testing tools to help us understand ourselves and the world around us.

For example, we don't expect to find a Bible verse specifically addressing the morality of Beavis and Butthead (popular MTV cartoon characters), but we do expect to be able to use the biblical principles of avoiding vain and profane speech, ideas, and activities, and of focusing on spiritually meaningful, good, and godly speech and activity. When we use the principles of God's Word as our standard (2 Tim. 2:16), and we understand how to evaluate claims (2 Tim. 4:2), we can confidently test the truth or falsity of a claim.

Biblical counseling seeks to help people worship and serve God to the best of their abilities with confidence and love toward God. The initial focus of biblical interpersonal intervention is, of course, the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The apostle Paul identifies the gospel as "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16), and assures Christians that when they have been saved the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit frees them from the worst sort of personal inadequacy — the bondage of their sinful natures (Rom. 8:1-9). Human suffering is explained and placed in the context of God's transforming work (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:35-39).

Christians are instructed to learn God's Word as the path to personal fulfillment and holiness (2 Tim. 3:15-17). The focus of a Christian's thoughts should be that which comes from God and reflects His perfect character and nature (Phil. 4:8).

God's Word gives us instructions regarding decision-making in the course of daily living (Pss. 19:7-8; 119:105). And when we have difficulty making a decision we can seek counsel from others. Biblical counselors are described and commended in the Bible (Prov. 11:14; 15:22).

In Part Two we will focus on biblical counseling and explore in greater detail the biblical wisdom that helps us cope with our inner, interpersonal, and social difficulties. Each of the biblical principles mentioned above — and those to be discussed more fully in the next article — is part of a comprehensive biblical pattern of spiritual, emotional, and mental growth by which the Christian can find fulfillment as a child of God. The result of using godly wisdom is described by Solomon:

> Keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught. (Prov. 3:21-26)

When the church fulfills its responsibilities for biblical community, nurture, and support, then Christians will not feel the need to turn to secular psychotherapy. By contrast, as the stories opening this article illustrate, when the church *does not* embrace the repentant alcoholic, the parent with the troubled teen, or those emotionally bruised by sinful behavior, then the hurting and needy will look *elsewhere* for help.

It is our contention that psychotherapy has become enormously popular among Christians primarily because the church has failed to fulfill its biblical obligation to nurture, protect, admonish, and mature its members. Should we have to pay $100 per hour for a friend? Of course not. And yet, if as Christians we turn our backs on those with problems, shun those who wrestle with sin, and denigrate those who struggle to follow Christ, why should we be surprised that hurting people turn to psychotherapy for answers? Even though the answers of secular psychotherapy pale in comparison to biblical wisdom — and at best borrow from biblical principles — if psychotherapy offers some help while the local church does not, can we blame those who turn to it for relief?

The popularity of psychotherapy in the church should not consume our critical attention: It is but a symptom of fundamental problems in contemporary American Christianity. In the next three installments we will describe and evaluate biblical counseling and psychotherapy, and then consider a scriptural agenda for restoring biblical counseling as part of a healthy church. When the genuine is available, people will no longer be attracted to the imitation.

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NOTES

[1]D. P. Rice, S. Kelman, L. S. Miller, and S. Dunmeyer, *The Economic Costs of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Mental Illness* (San Francisco: Institute for Health and Aging, University of California, 1990), 81.

[2]Robyn M. Dawes, *House of Cards: Psychology and Psychotherapy Built on Myth* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1994), 12.

[3]These friends' stories are meant as illustrations of the complexity of the issue. They are not presented here as proof or documentation for any position. Consequently, their privacy can be protected by not naming them and changing insignificant details of their stories.

[4]Paul Meier, Frank B. Minirth, Frank B. Wichern, and Donald E. Ratcliff, *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 17.

[5]*Ibid*.

[6]We apply the terms "counselor," "counsel," and "counseling" to not only lay or paraprofessional mental health work, but also to professional psychotherapy. Some differentiate between the two, but we have found in our research

that the lines between "professional" and "lay," and between "psychotherapy" and "counseling," have become so blurred as to make the terms almost interchangeable. Jones and Butman follow this same pattern, noting,

>Although some authors still prefer to make a distinction between counseling and psychotherapy, we have chosen to use the terms interchangeably in this text for two main reasons. The first is that clinical and counseling psychology, which were once substantially different disciplines and arose out of different historical roots, have grown closer together over the last several decades. The distinctions between the two subdisciplines are hard to make out today....Perhaps more importantly, we will not make the distinctions here because the very same theories are utilized as guides for the change process by psychotherapists and counselors. (Jones and Butman, 14).

To this we add that little difference is made from the perspective of most people who have been recommended for, or have received, professional counseling. In an informal survey we conducted of a dozen people who had received professional counseling, several were unable to tell us what kind of a counselor they had seen (psychologists; Marriage, Family, and Child Counselor [MFCC]; licensed social worker [LSW]; and so forth), and none could define for us the differences among the different professional counselor titles.

[7]For basic information about epistemology, *see* Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg's *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 83-163. For cogent discussion of the nature of scientific inquiry and the limits of scientific paradigms, *see* J. P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 185-224, and his *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 196-202.

[8]Meier, et. al., 24.

[9]Terence W. Campbell, *Beware the Talking Cure* (Boca Raton, FL: Upton Books, 1994), 7.

[10]Richie Herink, *The Psychotherapy Handbook* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 15.

[11]Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psycho-Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 12.

[12]Herink, xv.

[13]Jones and Butman, 11.

[14]Herink, xviii.

[15]This problem is explored in depth and documented in Part Three of this series, forthcoming.

[16]Herink, x, xiii.

[17]Jones and Butman, 12.

[18]Campbell, 7. Parts Three and Four in this series will comprehensively examine and critique psychotherapy.

[19]Herink, xviii.

[20]John H. Coe, "Educating the Church for Wisdom's Sake," presented at the 1991 International Christian Association for Psychological Studies.