

Chapter Six

Man - As Seen by Man

When we look at the hurting, twisted lives around us, distortions of God's beautiful design for the lives of men, we hurt for them. That is because God has given us some understanding, through our relationship with him and our own experience, of what causes pain. Because we can see that only the Lord Jesus can save them from destroying themselves, we long to impart his redemptive, healing word to their hurting hearts. But in doing so, we wonder what place psychology should have in our thinking and in our approach to men's problems. And it seems to me that men, in attempting to alleviate men's problems and hurts apart from God, have made one futile attempt after another to break through to the central causes of human problems. The result is that secular approaches usually end up merely rearranging symptoms, for the world has no truly remedial answers.

A Christian friend of mine, after getting his Master's degree in psychology, sat in my office one day and said, "Well, I sure learned one thing. Now I see how bankrupt psychology is." And he proceeded to tell me about all the problems it *couldn't* handle. As far as he could see, the only valid uses for psychology were to help the counselor understand human behavior, especially neurotic behavior, and to teach parents how to raise their children. These insights are not insignificant, but *understanding* the problem doesn't necessarily *remedy* it.

At this point I would like to make eminently clear that I am *not* against psychology. I am for anything that can truly help people be free from their hurts and hang-ups. The Lord knows, and so do I from what I see, that this poor, bleeding race needs all the help it can get. So I'm happy to acknowledge those areas where psychology can really help. But on the other hand, neither do I want to place any unfounded confidence in the practice of psychology. I am not a psychologist, nor can I claim to be any kind of armchair expert on the subject. But in my office I have sat across from too many people, emerging from a psychological or psychiatric counseling experience, who have been badly bruised in the process. They are often more confused than enlightened more burdened with guilt than free, and far more desperate for peace than they were before they sought help.

As I indicated earlier, many psychologists have been evaluating results and reevaluating the validity of their approaches and methods. In my reading I have come across several psychiatrists who have a genuine honesty and humanitarian desire to help people. And in some cases this desire has caused them to revise or reject some of their traditional approaches and to be openly critical of their own field. So if *they* can take a position of critical analysis without being considered harsh and judgmental, I think we Christians should be allowed the same position, even though we are admittedly biased in favor of redemptive Christian truth. We need to keep the value of psychological approaches while recognizing their limitations, and the greatest limitation psychology has is its lack of truly remedial answers; for the most part it gives no credence to biblical truth about the *fall of man, the flesh, and the reality of satanic forces, to say nothing of the redemptive value of life in Christ.*

Value--And Limitations

I think secular psychiatrists are of all men most to be pitied.

They get all the pain and problems laid on them, but they don't know what to do about them or where to take them. That must be utter frustration. So we are not being condemning, just factual, as we try to analyze where *real* help lies. We need to recognize that there is limited value in psychology and that value lies basically in helping us to understand ourselves. Psychologists have studied human nature and have tried to understand why we behave the way we behave, or misbehave the way we misbehave, whichever it is. So we need to use

whatever advantage that offers. But we need to recognize that usually they don't know what to do with us after they find out what's wrong. Many times the best they can do (being just factual and honest) is to say, "Well, you poor guy, I feel sorry for you. Go home and try to learn to live with yourself. I don't envy you the process. But go ahead--have fun, if you can." We need to recognize value as well as limitations and then remember that we who know Christ are not stuck with the limitations of psychology.

Let's look briefly at a few of the major schools of thought in the fields of psychological counseling. Our idea here is not primarily to put these disciplines down but simply to be able to retain what is truly valuable and discard what is not genuinely therapeutic. We need to recognize a *false basis for counseling* when we see it and to see how we have all been influenced to some degree by these philosophies. We want to be able to discard any false approaches and seek, instead, a proper basis of counseling.

Here is a layman's view of some of the psychological approaches--probably oversimplified but with the results amply verified by my own observations.

Freud's Approach

Freud seems to have led us to the conclusion that we can excuse any aberration in our behavior by blaming others: our parents, a repressive religious background, and/or other early influences. Psychoanalysis is the proffered answer, which may go on for years but which never seems to accomplish more than a holding action. Often the recommendation is release of repression which only increases the problem.

I remember clearly one situation in which a man having marital difficulties had been advised by his psychiatrist to have an affair with another woman. I had to try to help him at the end of the line, to be free from the load of guilt acquired by his adulterous action. Here, at least, Freudian psychology compounded the problem, rather than solving it. So it appears that looking back into the past and seeking escape from its conditioning influences--Freud's way--is a dead-end street; the result is permissiveness, the backdrop of our permissive society. This approach leads to denial of personal responsibility or ability to change to better conduct. This is not God's way.

Men or Mice?

B. F. Skinner offers another way: that of conditioning man's behavior by training his responses through punishment and reward. His view of man is apparently that he is nothing more than an educated animal who can be manipulated, bred, and controlled by other men. Behavior modification is demonstrable with mice and rats, no doubt, but are we mice or men? Who is to regulate the behavior of the men who regulate other men's behavior? And according to whose standards of behavior?

Non--Directed Counseling

Then there's Carl Rogers' approach, the verbal-mirror method' in which the counselor simply reflects back the counselee's statements without affirming or denying them, Admittedly, there is some help rendered by simply listening to the counselee's tale of woe, but unless some constructive direction is offered, the value of such counseling is nonexistent or at best short-lived. Rogers' approach assumes that man has within himself all the resources he needs to solve his problems; he only needs a verbal mirror to help him see himself. No outside help from God and his Word are needed. The futility of this approach is patently obvious in light of the Christian view of man.

A Grain of Truth

We can see the fallacy in each of these philosophies because we understand something of the truth of God. But we need to recognize that in *some* ways Freud is right--our past *can* condition us so that we express the hurt that it inflicts. So he has a point--up to a point. But in Christ we are not stuck with our past history. When Christ comes in, he comes to redeem the life, to make all things new. So if I revert back to "I am emotionally disturbed because my father was a bum," I'm not counting on Christian truth. You recall God's Word in 2 Corinthians: "...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are

become new. And all things are of God..." (2 Cor. 5:17-18a, KJV). Sometimes we stop too soon in this verse. There is a conjunction after "all things have become new." It adds "and all things are of God." Why are all things new? Because *God is* in the picture now. Since I have Christ, he is the mediator in my life. Now that I have been reconciled to God through Christ, I have a new source of strength from which to operate. So now I don't have to be stuck with my past history.

This truth is very important to me personally. I come from a broken home. My dad was an alcoholic, was unfaithful to my mother, and deserted his family when I was in my teens. Now, that could mark me for life either one way or the other, couldn't it? Well, it did mark me for life; I learned some very valuable lessons from my dad. Unfortunately, they were all negatives, but I still learned from them how *not* to go. Difficult or ugly things in our past can affect us either way. We can be conditioned either negatively or positively, depending on how we react. I learned *how not to live* from my dad. I got some pointed moral lessons from seeing the devastation his conduct produced in our home, and I wasn't even a Christian at that time. Even in the non-Christian world we don't have to be stuck with the negative effects our circumstances bring us, but as Christians, this is all the more true! Christ, living and reigning in us, makes all things new! We have a clear basis for rejecting much of the Freudian system on the simple Christian premise of ~ Corinthians 5:17.

Now, let's take a look at Skinner's approach: Skinner is also right up to a point. Man *will* respond to the stimuli of punishment and reward, and a lot of people operate on that basis. There is even teaching on punishment and rewards in the Scriptures, isn't there? But these aren't the *only* stimuli that God uses--not even the main ones. Man is much more than an animal; *he is made in the image of God!* And this, by the grace of God and the power of the life of Christ in us, is much deeper motivation than Skinner could ever employ with rats in a maze. We aren't just rats in a maze; we are men! So, though Skinner has a certain basic premise that is right, we have to reject his approach, too, because he, like Freud, doesn't have the whole picture together.

As for Carl Rogers, he is right, as far as he goes. He emphasizes that bombarding a person with well-meaning advice violates his personality by preempting his power of choice. And that has certainly been done many times. Giving advice is like applying Band-Aids to cancer, and it is to be avoided by all means because it ends up merely treating symptoms. But Mr. Rogers fails to recognize that an authoritative Word from God isn't just well-meaning advice. The Bible gives us life-and-death instruction on the way God designed the world to operate, particularly the way he has designed man to function. In that inspired Word, God teaches that even he, sovereign God that he is, will not violate our power of choice. So we have to observe that same rule in counseling and refrain from telling people what to do. God lets us choose, but he also warns us that we will inherit the results of our choices. This is the approach we must take in a counseling ministry. Though we can learn from Carl Rogers, as well as from Freud and Skinner, we also see that God has something to offer that the non-directed approach leaves out: the application of redemptive truth.

[Go to Chapter Seven](#)
[Back to Table of Contents](#)