

A comic strip from the Peanuts series by Charles Schulz features Lucy in her make-shift stand with its posted sign: “Psychiatric help 5 cents. The doctor is IN.” Charlie Brown has once again visited Lucy’s booth for some counseling:

Lucy: “I’ve been thinking about your case a lot lately.”

Charlie Brown: “That’s gratifying.”

Lucy: “You know what your trouble is, Charlie Brown? You don’t have a personal philosophy. You need to develop a philosophy that will carry you through times of stress. Can you do that? Can you develop a personal philosophy? Think, Charlie Brown, think!”

Charlie Brown: (Contemplating) “Life is like an ice cream cone. You have to learn to lick it.”

Lucy: (Running away hysterically) “That’s the most stupid philosophy I’ve ever heard! I can’t do anything for someone who has a philosophy like that! You’re hopeless, Charlie Brown!”

Charlie Brown: “It’s hard to develop a real personal philosophy in less than twenty minutes.”<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, Lucy was never trained to handle the troubles of good old Charlie Brown! She did have a point, though: we need a personal belief system that will carry us through times of stress. But when our understanding of ourselves, life, and the Lord still leaves us with chronic mental, emotional, and relational problems, we can look for some counseling help.

One of the challenges in deciding to get help, however, is to sort out what kind of counseling approach to use. One way to put counseling options in context is to identify three broad categories of formal treatment of mental and emotional disorders.

First, the *psychiatrist* is trained as a medical doctor that is oriented to treat clients through medication. This doctor specializes in organically based problems and uses drugs such as antipsy-

chotics (as in treating schizophrenia), lithium (as in treating bipolar disorders/manic-depressive cycles), antidepressants (for treating endogenous depression), and anti-anxiety drugs (for treating extreme anxiety).<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the *psychologist* is trained as a therapist to diagnose and treat problems of the “soul” (Gk. *psyche*). Secular models of psychological counseling include: Psychoanalytic Therapy, Existential-Humanistic Therapy, Client-Centered Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Behavior Therapy, Rational-Emotive Therapy, and Reality Therapy. There are also versions of such secular models in which therapists, who identify themselves as Christians, seek to counsel in a way that is compatible with their faith.

Thirdly, the *pastoral counselor* should be trained to diagnose and facilitate recovery from spiritual problems that also affect the soul, and usually the body as well. Pastoral counseling extends beyond “clergy”, including the ministry of any equipped believer who provides biblical counsel. This assistance ranges from vocational biblical counselors to others who are ministering on an informal basis.

Paul identified three aspects of our makeup that correspond to the three categories of counseling just noted: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole *spirit, soul, and body* be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

What are the distinctive features of these parts of the human being? The human *spirit* is the immaterial aspect of a person that includes the faculties of conscience, intuition, and communion. The *soul* is the immaterial part of us that includes the faculties of mind, will, emotions, and affections. The *body*, of course, is the material aspect of our makeup, which includes our organ systems, senses, appetites etc. These parts of the human being also have distinctive roles in our relationships. We primarily relate to *God* via the human spirit (Rom 8:16, John 4:23,24); we primarily relate to other *people* via the soul, and we primarily relate to the *material world* through the body. Although we are one in personhood, these aspects of our makeup need to be accurately discerned.<sup>3</sup>

Although much pastoral counseling is eclectic and psychology-oriented, the biblical role of pastor/discipler leads to a model of counseling that is Christ-centered and grace-oriented. Such ministry should function as remedial discipleship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—the ultimate Therapist.<sup>4</sup>

In his book, *Called to Counsel*, John Cheydeur identifies the value of interpersonal counseling and then notes pastoral counseling’s relationship to the spiritual life:

Pastoral counseling often includes the concerns of other counseling disciplines, but the purpose is holy and requires a more complete sensitivity than the other three approaches psychiatry, psychotherapy, and clinical social work. The focus of spiritual counseling is nothing less than the reconciliation of the three dimensions of life with the powerful and critical fourth dimension of the spirit.<sup>5</sup>

One’s view of redemption and sanctification is foundational to clarifying one’s counseling strategy. Note this observation by a secular writer on the centrality of one’s belief system in determining the right counseling model:

It is my conviction that our views of human nature and the basic assumptions that undergird our views of the therapeutic process have significant implications for the way we develop our therapeutic practices...a central task is to make our assumptions explicit and conscious, so that we can establish some consistency between our beliefs about human nature and the way we implement our procedures in counseling or therapy.<sup>6</sup>

A. B. Simpson’s book, *Christ in You: The Christ-Life and the Self-Life* deals directly with the issues of deeper life sanctification. Commenting on Christ’s high priestly prayer in John 17, Simpson observed, “This was the last prayer that Christ offered for His people: ‘That I myself may be in them’ (v. 26b)...Oh, if we want this prayer fulfilled, we must enter into the meaning of this message and never stop short of its actual experience.”<sup>7</sup> Drawing on the heritage of deeper-life writers, Dr. Charles Solomon developed a model

of counseling that focuses on sharing this message and helping believers appropriate their union with Christ experientially. He formulated a strategic, short-term model of biblical counseling following his own spiritual breakthrough.<sup>8</sup> This process helps the counselee understand:

1. The root cause of problems such as inferiority, inadequacy, insecurity, worry, doubts, and fears
2. Basic spiritual needs that only God can meet
3. The formative influences of being overtly or covertly rejected by others
4. The root causes of emotional tension (depression, anxiety), and mental dysfunction (fantasy, paranoia, obsessive thoughts etc.)
5. The role of personal identity
6. The biblical teaching of the believer’s union with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension
7. The necessity of applying the work of the Cross in exchanging the “self-life” for the “Christ-life”.<sup>9</sup>

Although psychiatry can assist individuals with genuine, organically-based problems, and temporary medical support to help address root issues, the Christ-centered counselor does not merely seek to merely alleviate the counselee’s symptoms, or help them strengthen their coping mechanisms. In fact, often the believer’s desperation best prepares them to give up on themselves and trust Christ absolutely as their source of living! (Rom. 7:15-8:11).

It is fascinating to see how people’s lives begin to change for the better when Galatians 2:20 is appropriated: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Turmoil in the soul is replaced by peace, joy, and contentment to the extent that the believer is focused on Christ as Savior, Lord, and Life (2 Cor. 12:9). This approach is simply profound and profoundly simple.

People can also expect to recover from stress related health problems when *the Christ-life* resolves the root causes—namely, *the self-life*. Such psychologically-induced conditions may include tension headache, nervous stomach, ulcers, hives, skin rashes, allergies, asthma, spastic colon, heart palpitations, breathing ailments, fatigue, insomnia etc.

While writing this article I received a phone call from a counselee who had a dramatic deeper life experience. He had a history of chronic tension headaches and was always popping Tylenols. However, in the year since he appropriated his identification with Christ he has had no more headaches! Then he counseled a brother who was hospitalized with symptoms of Crohn's disease who rapidly improved—to the amazement of the doctors.

*Spiritual therapy* credits the Holy Spirit Who uses the Word of God to progressively sanctify the believer, illuminating the fuller implications of the disciple's union with Christ. God's Spirit can give care *and* cure; He indwells every true believer (John 16:12-15). Truly the Doctor is IN.

Presenting counseling seminars internationally, I often hear believers testify of the radical benefits they experience as the truths of their identification with Christ begins to sink in. One sister who attended an event in Romania was depressed to the extent of suicidal thoughts. The following day—after being led to the foot of the Cross to appropriate her spiritual identity in Christ—she was radiant with His joy and Life!

All glory for restoring the soul goes to the Spirit of God. Cheydleur testified, "The better we become at spiritual counseling, the less pride we will take in it. Every time God uses us to release joy in a previously troubled person, we will realize that the power that has healed the person is of God and does not stem from our righteousness or ability. It is most effective when we empty ourselves and allow God to bring healing and wholeness through us."<sup>10</sup>

In counseling, consider the how the physical, psychological, and spiritual parts of a person are involved. Seek the Lord's wisdom and His abundant provision in Christ. The Doctor is IN! There is hope because of our Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6).

<sup>1</sup> Charles M. Schulz, *Peanuts Classics* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston; N.Y.)

<sup>2</sup> R. J. Salinger, 'Psychopharmacology' in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. David Benner (Grand Rapids: Baker), 944-949.

<sup>3</sup> John Woodward, *Man as Spirit, Soul, and Body: A Study of Biblical Psychology* (Pigeon Forge, TN: Grace Fellowship International, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Solomon, *Handbook for Christ-Centered Counseling* (Sevierville, TN: Solomon Publications, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> John Cheydleur, *Called to Counsel* (Tyndale House, 1999), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1977), 185.

<sup>7</sup> A. B. Simpson, *Christ in You: The Christ-Life and the Self-Life* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1997), p.33.

<sup>8</sup> Gerlad E. McGraw, *Launch Out: A Theology of Dynamic Sanctification* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications) 253-54.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Solomon, *Handbook to Happiness* (Tyndale House). cf. *Handbook for Christ Centered Counseling*.

<sup>10</sup> Cheydleur, 59.

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## THE GREAT PHYSICIAN JOHN 16:24



PRESCRIPTION FOR  
AN IDENTITY THAT  
IS EQUALLY VALID  
IN TIME OR ETER-  
NITY

In answering the question, "Who Am I?", looking around us will cause confusion; looking inside could cause depression; setting our affections on things above (Colossians 3:2) and searching His Word for our true and unchangeable identity will set us free.

In the following passages, underline any mention of in Christ, or its equivalent: in whom, in Him, crucified with Him, etc. You will be bathing yourself in the truth regarding your identification with Christ and trusting the Holy Spirit to make it real in experience.

- 1) Romans 6, 7, and 8
- 2) Galatians
- 3) Ephesians
- 4) Philippians
- 5) Colossians

Directions:

Take one section of scripture daily and repeat as necessary for full effect. Possible side effect: you may become sick of yourself. This is a good sign that the prescription is taking effect. Continue until symptoms are alleviated.



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