

DOES THE BIBLE HAVE A PSYCHOLOGY?

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We know that the Bible speaks authoritatively to matters of theology, doctrine, and history. Christians are in agreement that the Bible is completely trustworthy on all the matters to which it speaks. But the question is, “Does the Bible attempt to address the matters we know today as psychology?”

In order to answer this question, we must first understand what is meant by the word psychology. The word psychology has its origin in two Greek words. The first, *psuche*, means “soul.” The second, *logos*, means “word” or “study of”. Therefore, psychology is the study of the soul.

Understanding the soul has been the objective of psychology since Sigmund Freud formalized the field in the late 1880’s. But strangely enough there is no unified psychology. In fact there are at least 250 distinct theories of psychology. College courses in psychology highlight the more reputable of these theories of the soul.

When you go to a psychologist today, chances are your counselor will work from an eclectic enmeshment of these theories. In effect most counselors today select buffet-style from the smorgasbord of psychologies. Their aim is to provide the best possible counsel for each unique individual they see.

In Christian circles, “All truth is God’s truth” is the motto used to support this method. While this statement is true, it does not avert us from the larger question, “Does the Bible have a psychology; a theory of the soul?” If the Bible does have a psychology, it would likely prove these secular theories to be the type of wisdom that God considers foolishness (I Corinthians 1:20, 25).

What are the key components of a psychology? What questions would the Bible have to address in order to have a bona fide psychology?

Basic Questions of Psychology	Corresponding Bible Doctrine(s)
1. What is the nature of man?	Image of God, soul, heart, worship.
2. What is the basic problem of man?	The Fall, sin, the flesh, depravity.
3. What is man’s prerequisite for change?	Salvation, regeneration, repentance, justification.
4. How does man maintain that change?	Sanctification, renewing the mind, the new self.
5. What are the means of that change?	Discipleship, disciplines, fellowship, mortification.
6. What is the goal of that change?	Holiness, righteousness, purity, fruit of the Spirit.

A NECESSARY BIBLICAL REVISION

Many people are surprised to see how comprehensively the Bible addresses the basic questions of psychology. What implications does this have for the way a Christian counselor ought to build his practice?

First and foremost, it means that he does not have to build off the foundation of secular psychology. If the Bible has its own psychology then man's theories can only serve to distort God's truth. But isn't all truth God's truth? Yes, and all lies are Satan lies. The way to avoid distortion is to build from our surest foundation — God's Word.

Second, it means that Christian counselors ought to be able to articulate how he developed his counseling theory and practice without relying upon the misleading truism "All truth is God's truth." Someone with a biblical psychology must be able to demonstrate how his counseling theory and practice emerges from the Scriptures. This emergence ought to stem from the use of historically sound principles of interpreting Scripture.

A NECESSARY BIBLICAL RATIONALE

What then is a biblical psychology? The following comments give a brief summary. They are intended to expand your thinking in this area, not to be comprehensive in this brief article. Each piece should allow you to study the Bible with new questions to generate answers to life's struggles.

1. What is the nature of man? Man is made in the image of God, enduing him with great potential (Genesis 1:27). Man acts out of the overflow of his heart — the intellectual, emotional, and volitional core of his being (Matthew 12:34; Mark 7:20-23). The purpose of man is to worship; every facet of his being [heart, soul, mind, body] was created to this end (Mark 12:30).
2. What is the basic problem of man? When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil there was a permanent change in man (Genesis 3). All of mankind had their heart bent towards sin when their eternal representatives chose to disobey God (Romans 5:17-21; Jeremiah 17:9). This means that from birth (Psalm 51:5) man is lured to sin by his own desires (James 1:14-15) as the flesh does battle with the implanted Spirit of God (Galatians 5:16-24). The result is the destruction of peace of mind, fragmentation of relationships, and that man is unable to fulfill his purpose of bringing glory to God (Romans 3:23-26).
3. What is the prerequisite of change? Based on this diagnosis of the problem, meaningful change is impossible apart from God's grace (Isaiah 64:6). The beginning of change is to have the fundamental bent of our heart change back to pleasing God (Ezekiel 11:19-20). This is done through the regenerating effects of salvation (Titus 3:4-7). At salvation we become God's children (Romans 8:15) and can begin to act out of our new identity (Ephesians 4:17-6:20; Colossians 3:1-17).

4. How does one maintain change? Our final state of perfection is secured at our salvation, but we are continually in the process of sanctification until we meet Christ (Hebrews 10:14). Central to the will of God for every believer is his sanctification (I Thessalonians 4:3). Man is to actively obey the revealed will of God while realizing that his obedience is possible only through the enablement of God (Philippians 2:12-13).
5. What are the means of change? This is where many people say that the Bible is not practical. However, the Bible contains a plethora of strategies to affect change at the emotional, personal, and interpersonal levels. In the church these methods are often subsumed under the title “discipleship” rather than “counseling.” We need not make this distinction. Counseling is specific, targeted discipleship.

Below is a taste of the biblical methods of change to assist you in building your repertoire.

- ? Repentance and forgiveness to overcome bitterness or estrangement (Matthew 7:3-5).
 - ? Prayer and intentional thought control to overcome anxiety (Philippians 4:6-8).
 - ? Accountability (II Timothy 2:22) and the radical removal of temptation (Matthew 5:27-30) to overcome lust.
 - ? The consistent “one another” fellowship with the church to overcome apathy (Hebrews 10:24-25).
 - ? Mortifying [putting to death] sin (Romans 8:13) through the put-off/put-on process of change (Ephesians 4:22-31).
6. What is the goal of change? The goal of change is holiness (I Peter 1:14-16) and Christ-likeness (Philippians 2:5-8). Holiness, as the goal of change, means that our lives cannot be compartmentalized. In order to be holy the whole person must be addressed. Partial obedience to the will of God is unacceptable (e.g., Saul in I Samuel 15). All our problems are inextricably linked at the heart level; therefore, holiness must be the goal to overcome any component of a problem.

Christ-likeness refers to our example of holiness in Jesus. Jesus makes the abstract of the biblical psychology concrete. In Christ we find how we are to interact with fellow believers (John 13:1-20), to face temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), to forgive (Ephesians 4:32), to love our spouse (Ephesians 5:22,25), to discipline our children (Ephesians 6:1), and to work (Colossians 3:23).

A NECESSARY BIBLICAL RESOLUTION

What are we to take away from this information? The Bible was given to us by God to help us understand all of life. It even answers those questions raised by secular psychology.

As you study your Bible in the upcoming months keep the six questions addressed in this article in mind. Be intentional about trying to understand and *apply* the biblical psychology. The Bible is sufficient for all the non-medical problems in living. It is a resource of infinite value. Read it, study it, treasure it, and use it for all that it is capable of.