

COMMON GRACE, PART TWO

In the first half of this essay, I argued that the fundamental "psychological" trouble with human beings comes from the Fall, the breach between God and man. At that time, human identity became fundamentally disordered.¹ And, as Lintz argues, the disordered identity creates a human being a series of basic unmet desires which cannot be met in this world outside of the restoration available to us in God. To take the most basic, we are under a sentence of death. We therefore desire life which cannot be obtained. We create idols to somehow "satisfy" or placate that desire. The idolatrous desire further distorts human identity.

As a result of the judgments pronounced by God following Adams sins, human beings live in the midst of other human beings who are equally distorted and injurious to others (Gen. 3:16). We are placed in the midst of a spiritual war. (Gen. 3:14; Eph. 6:10-19; 2 Cor. 10:4-5) We live in a world of death, famine disease (Gen. 3:18-19; Rom. 5:12); a creation subjected to "futility" (Rom. 8:20) in which our work is necessary, difficult and frustrating (Gen. 3:19). As Ecclesiastes puts it:

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 (ESV)

² Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

³ What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?

In short, we are distorted, defective creatures set in the midst of like, dangerous creatures, surrounded by malignant spiritual beings, in a world subjected to unvarying entropy. Not surprising, we suffer serious "psychological" and "emotional" maladies, in addition to the physical insults we suffer.

God has provided a means whereby in this world, the fundamental injury can be remedied and our identity will begin to be restored. We are promised an undying life in a re-created world. That blessing of "special grace" (if you will) and special revelation (in the Scripture) resolve the greatest issue.

¹ It is interesting how this concept of self, of identity is understood to lie at the heart of human psychological troubles, and yet even self-professed Christians fails to the importance of this as a matter of redemption: "The 'self' is a central construct in psychology; much has been written about the nature and development of the self. For counselors, helping counselees to form a healthy self is an important task in the counseling process....This leads to the question, what is the self? For the Christian, the self, or the core of the person, was created by God in his image (Gen. 1:26-27). Theologians, philosophers and biblical scholars have written volumes on the *imago Dei*." Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, *Skills for Effective Counseling: a Faith-Based Integration*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 35. They see the importance and admit the fact and yet fail to see the implication: You, "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Col. 3:10 (ESV). How could that fact not be the center of a counseling methodology which acknowledges the "image of God" and the importance of self perplexes me.

However, special grace and special revelation do not resolve the hostility of environment and the certain death of our body until the resurrection and re-creation. For those who do not experience the blessing of salvation in this life, there is not even the appropriate and true hope, nor the promise of a renewed mind (but rather the increasing effects, both personally and corporately of sin).

In fact, it is a wonder that human beings -- the "many", who never come to know God savingly (not to mention the fact that even the redeemed are vexed by indwelling sin) -- have not utterly ended our existence. W

Common grace is an inference based upon the paradox created by the tension between the doctrine of total depravity and the experience of human flourishing:

So we are placed on the horns of a dilemma, a paradox that, as Murray said, poses "very insistent questions," a riddle that, as Kuyper said, seems "in itself insoluble." We cannot deny what the Bible teaches about man's total depravity and need for the Spirit's regenerating power in order to submit to God's truth. Therefore, we cannot deny that a radical spiritual antithesis places Christian thought and non-Christian thought in diametrical opposition to each other. Yet we cannot dismiss the testimony, not only of our experience but also of Scripture itself, that people dead in sin in fact *do good, love others, and know truth.*²

There is a second stage of conflict between the judgment of Genesis 2:17 & 3:14-19 and the continued existence of human beings, and even a degree of human flourishing.

We stop here to acknowledge that all human sorrow and suffering flows directly from sin, its productions and its punishments. First, we suffer from our own sin. Second, we suffer from the sins of others. Third, we suffer due to the effects of sin more generally: the futility of the creation, death, disease, et cetera. In short we are broken, rebellious people living in a creation under a curse. In such circumstances it is no surprise that we suffer what is now commonly called "mental illness" (which includes both that which is and that which is not physiological illness).³

Broken (an irrational heart lodged in a dying body) people in sinful rebellion against God (and thus at war with one-another) trying to scrape by a cursed planet should not long last -- especially when God has decreed death in no uncertain terms. But when we look about us, we

² Dennis E. Johnson, "[Spiritual Antithesis: Common Grace, and Practical Theology.](#)" *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 1 (2002): 76.

³ I dislike the phrase "mental illness" because it confuses disparate problems under a common label: a disease of the brain goes by the same name as a sinful habit. It confuses etiology: the word "mental" refers to the psychological state of a human being in subjective self-awareness, which means one refers psychological states (who one perceives themselves or their environment) as "diseased": which confuses physiological deterioration with moral and spiritual states. In effect, it has the tendency to reduce every "defective" human state, which physical or sinful, to broken wiring for which no one has moral culpability. This is not to deny the real existence of physical states which lead to confusion or delusion; such things I readily affirm. I merely reject the confusion of sloppy language.

human have continued to exist. We have stood on the moon and looked at the ocean's floor. We have built astounding buildings, written beautiful plays, and organized our efforts across generations. We have not disappeared; far from it from. How then can we balance God's judgment and our existence?

There are a few ways in which one can resolve this paradox. First, we can bracket the effects of the Fall. Rather than understand the Scripture to teach a radical derangement of the human heart, we can bracket the effects of the Fall to some sort of "spiritual" category. While we may not be able to rightly enjoy God (and will be eventually damned), the intellectual capacity of humanity remained essentially the same before and after the Fall. Thus, human advancement presents little challenge.⁴ Second, one could deny human ability. Finally, one could posit the full judgment of God coupled to a limited reprieve: this is the solution of common grace.⁵

The Limitation and Purpose of Common Grace

Since human ability and human depravity coexist on this side of the Fall, orthodox protestant theologians -- at least since Calvin has argued for God's goodness to an unbelieving world exhibited in the form of "common grace".⁶ This "common grace" is of tremendous

⁴ This strategy seems lie to behind much of the conflict between Biblical Counseling and other Christian schools of counseling and psychological understanding.

⁵ Common grace is not the only method for positing some form divine assistance. "So a Wesleyan may understand psychotherapy as a means of grace in which the grace of God is mediated to the patient through the therapeutic situation [citation], wooing them toward love of self, other, God, and all of creation." Earl D. Bland and Brad D. Strawn, eds., *Christianity and Psychoanalysis: a New Conversation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 73. Eric Johnson has a theory of something called "creation grace". John Coe argues, "According to the Old Testament sage, if a person is honest and open to reality, that reality will inform the person regarding the fact that there is an extrenal world created by God that can be known and its dynamic structures discovered (natural law and the human psychological dynamics)." John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology*, Christian Worldview Integration Series (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010), 133. These theories all operation quite differently than "common grace" which is an overt work of the Holy Spirit, as explained herein. These other theories operate by bracketing the effects of the Fall in some manner and thus contend that something is left over from Eden. " One option is to envision therapy as analogous to natural processes that God, in his transcendent wisdom, created a priori as available methods for the healing of psychological and relational infirmities. In other words, these healing processes were created ex nihilo, and humans have discovered their efficacy as a means of therapeutic healing -- not unlike the discoveries of penicillin or the polio vaccine." Earl D. Bland and Brad D. Strawn, eds., *Christianity and Psychoanalysis: a New Conversation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 30. While a rebuttal of these various theories goes beyond the scope of this paper, it must be noted that none of them are consistent with the doctrine of common grace. If they are to theological coherence and validity, they will need to make their stand on some other ground

⁶ John Frame questions the use of the phrase "common grace":

importance for the history of humanity, "The effects produced by common grace, or this influence of the Spirit common to all men, are most important to the individual and to the world."⁷

Having pronounced judgment in Genesis 3, God delays the full execution of the judgment; but a reprieve is not a pardon. Life still persists on the planet; human beings have not exterminated the race; eternal death is not upon all humanity; the final judgment has not come -- but it will.

The writer of Hebrews tells us, "[I]t is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." Heb. 9:27. He continues, for those who persist in rebellion, there is "a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury that will consume the adversaries". Heb. 10:27 Paul begins his explanation of the Gospel in Romans 1 with the proposition that judgment is coming, "[T]he wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness". Rom. 1:18.

The delay in God's final decree does not mean that judgment is not coming; rather, it means that God in his mercy and goodness is giving space for repentance:

⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Romans 2:4–5. Peter explains, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." 2 Peter 3:9. That patient goodness and mercy of God lies at the heart of common grace. Gerald Bray gets to the heart of what is taking place here:

God's willingness to preserve the fallen spiritual creatures in spite of their rebellion is matched by his desire to keep the human race in being. This is a mystery that can only be explained only by his deep love for his creatures. Looked at in a purely rational light, it would not have been surprising if God had decided to wipe us out and start again.⁸

We have seen that although God directs his goodness and love especially to believers, there are also senses in which God's goodness and love are universal. "The Lord is good to all." (Ps. 145:9), and he loves even his enemies by sending them rain and sunshine (Matt. 5:44-45). So many have thought that the said made be said of grace, that there are forms of divine grace that God gives to the nonelect.

To my knowledge, Scripture never uses *ben* or *charis* to refer to his blessings on creation generally or on nonelect humanity. So it would be perhaps better to speak of God's common goodness, or common love, rather than his common grace. The word *grace* in Scripture tends to be more narrowly focused on redemption than *goodness* and *love* though the latter terms also have rich redemptive associations.

John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2013), 246.

⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 670.

⁸ Gerald Lewis Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 473.

Abraham Kuyper explains that common grace was given primarily to give the church a place to be, but also for broader purposes of God:

In the *fourth* place, the blessing of the new situation was intended not only for God's church, but for *everything that is human*, indeed for the *animal kingdom*. It was not that the church was saved in order to abandon everything outside the church to general ruin. But the grace shown here extends to the entirety of human life. Most surely the purpose was so that the God's church could find a place to set its foot, and also so that the church of the new covenant would gather together believers from all peoples and nations. But its purpose was also so that in a proper sense God the Lord would continue his work in that broad sphere of human life, not unto the saving of souls but no less unto the praise and glory of his great name.⁹

So as we consider the doctrine of common grace, we need to understand the basis of the claim: God brought judgment upon human beings, and thus upon all creation. Rom. 8:20. Yet, in his goodness and mercy, God spared the full immediate implementation of that judgment upon human beings: (1) to permit time for repentance; (2) to give space for the existence of the church; (3) generally for his glory and praise.

Thus, when we consider common grace, we must be careful how we understand its extent. Since the extent of common grace entails an inference as well as exegesis (as we will see when we look at Calvin's initial statement of the doctrine), we must be careful not to over-claim, or to claim such things as would be inimical to God's glory for common grace.

Common Grace is an Operation of the Holy Spirit

Since all the world lies under the judgment of God, only God himself can withstand and withhold the scope and effect of that judgment, accordingly, it has been the position of orthodox protestant theologians that common grace is an operation of the Holy Spirit (as will be demonstrated herein, and is apparent from the inference that it is a temporary mitigation of God's judgment). Charles Hodge asks what would be the case if the Holy Spirit were not the agent working upon all mankind:

The effects produced by common grace, or this influence of the Spirit common to all men, are most important to the individual and to the world. What the external world would be if left to the blind operation of physical causes, without the restraining and guiding influence of God's providential efficiency, that would the world of mind be, in all its moral and religious manifestations, without the restraints and guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press :, 2016), 107.

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 670.

Of particular importance for our consideration is his observation that the Spirit effects all that is good in humanity, " All the decorum, order, refinement, and virtue existing among men"¹¹ is the result of the Spirit's work. If we refuse this proposition, we are left with a bare deism or rationalism. As Hodge notes, if we do not make the Spirit the proprietor of common grace, then we are left with deism, " According to the mechanical theory, adopted by Deists, Rationalists, or (as they are often called in distinction from Supernaturalists) Naturalists, there is no exercise of the power of God on the minds of men. As He leaves the external world to the control of the laws of nature, so He leaves the world of mind to the control of its own laws."¹²

Just as I fear that many Christians have effectively a Pelagian view of the Fall, in their effort to preservation secular theories of the human mind; I fear that many Christians have a Deist's view of science and history so as to "plunder the Egyptians". As I will make clear below, I do not presume for a moment to that unbelievers do not make correct and true observations about human beings. However, we must realize at all points, that such ability is a good gift of God; not a bare operation of some laws invested in the creation and operating by their own continued strength.¹³

Common Grace Permits the Orderly Functioning of Nature

In Genesis 3:18-19, God pronounces a judgment upon the ground and upon human bodies. In Romans 8:20, we learn that this futility extends to the creation. Eccl. 1:2. And yet, the world is not dissolved and destroyed.

Jesus tells us that the rain and sun comes to all, the "just and the unjust". Matt. 6:45. There is an order to nature which does good to all humanity and all nature. Gen. 9:9-10; Jer. 33:20 (God's covenant with day and night). This orderly functioning of nature is an affirmative act of God's goodness. Vern Poythress explains that the "laws" of nature are affirmative acts of God in space and time:

In addition, let us remember that we are speaking of real laws, not merely our human guesses and approximations. The real laws are in fact the word of God, specifying how the world of creatures is to function. So-called "law" is simply God speaking, God acting, God manifesting himself in time and space. The real mistake here is not a matter of divinizing nature, but of refusing to recognize that the law is the law of God, nothing less than God speaking. We are confronting God.¹⁴

When we come to nature and make observations of regularity, we are seeing what God is doing. The fact that there is continued goodness in the creation tells us that God is good being to us. God has subjected the creation to futility; the ground will produce thorns; human bodies will grow will, be subjected to decay, and will die. But God does not permit the creation to exhibit

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 671.

¹² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 658.

¹³ In a future article, I plan to respond to the claim of "Creation Grace", which seems to partake of this Deistic view of Creation.

¹⁴ Poythress, Vern S.. *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Kindle Locations 329-332). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

the full extent of his wrath. One day the world will be "burned up and dissolved" (2 Pet. 3:10), but that day is not yet come.

This is a critical element of God's common grace as it pertains to the field of "psychology". Were it not for the regularity and comprehensibility of the creation, no one would ever be able to observe the firing of neurons nor study how many chunks one can hold in short term memory.

God causes the world to persist and to be livable and comprehensible. The underlying structure and functioning of the world is God's doing. Heb. 1:3.

Common Grace Restrains Sin

Genesis 3:16 hints at conflict between human beings. Genesis 3:12, already exhibits blameshifting, the willingness to press another human being into God's judgment. Genesis 4:8 brings us to the first murder. Genesis 4:23 brings us to Lamech¹⁵ who threatens evil upon others. Without the restraint of the Spirit, the world became so wicked that, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence."¹⁶ Gen. 6:11. The evil of the world became so great that God found it necessary to "to make an end of all flesh". Gen. 6:12.

As a result of this flood, only eight human beings remained alive. Yet, even after God had purged humanity, God observes, "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." Gen.8:21. Unless God had acted at that time to forcibly restrain sin, humanity would have quickly destroyed itself.¹⁷ However, Scripture records many instances where God intervened to prohibit sin. See, e.g., Gen. 12:17-20, 20:3.

Abraham Kuyper posits that common grace fundamentally changes and is clearly established with the Noahic covenant:

The fixed historical starting point for the doctrine of *common grace* lies in *God's establishment of a covenant with Noah after the flood*. In the past, inadequate attention has been paid to this significant and decisive event.¹⁸

¹⁵ As John MacArthur notes, this Lamech has wives "A to Z". [Citation?]

¹⁶ Just a note here: While I am not a pacifist (as much as I long for such a world), I do see that many Christians are far too sanguine about violence. I remember a review of a movie from nearly 30 years ago, where the reviewer said that while he liked the movie, he had to wonder about a culture that found the deaths of so many human beings "entertainment". Another note, "From 2010-2014, an estimated 25% of global pregnancies (including spontaneous miscarriages) ended in abortion." "Worldwide Abortion Statistics," *Abort73.com* (blog), n.d., http://www.abort73.com/abortion_facts/worldwide_abortion_statistics/ (accessed February 3, 2018). That means that most human beings die by violence inflicted at the insistence of one's mother.

¹⁷ It takes little knowledge of history to realize how easily such an end could come. Human beings have shown the utmost diligence in learning how to destroy one-another. Were it not for a supernatural grace, how could we still survive? What has kept North Korea, China, the Russians, the United States from not destroying all life?

¹⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press: 2016), 10. This is a practical point for much of the discussion about common grace. Mr. Kuyper is often thrown about with little analysis of the content of his statements nor an understanding of his doctrine. In a later place, Kuyper modifies

Kuyper sees that God intervenes in a particular manner to restrain sin:

But through the increase of common grace, sin will be restrained with bridle and rein, so that sin will never again before the end of the world develop into such gruesome, hellish outburst and tyranny. If after the flood the earth had become less hellish than earlier, this is not because the sinner has essentially improved. Before and after the flood the sinner is just as evil in the core of his being. But the difference lies in this, that the restraining power proceeding from common grace against sin, has become increased from God's side after the flood. The beast within man remains just as evil and wild, but the bars around its cage were fortified, so that it cannot again escape like it used to.¹⁹

Common Grace Has Permitted Some Understanding of the World

The continued operation of nature and the restraint of sin are uncontroversial in the debate among Christian counselors over the scope and nature of common grace. It is the scope and nature of our understanding of the world -- particularly the human heart -- which leads to the disagreement.

We can start with objective observations about the physical world. Everyone can only acknowledge that human beings have and do observe and describe the physical world; we can predict future events based upon past observation. Cain tilled fields; Abel cared for sheep. Gen. 4:2. That requires a high degree of sophistication in understanding the operation of the natural world. Jubal learned of musical instruments. Gen. 4:21. Tubal-Cain begins metallurgy. Gen. 4:22. At the very earliest stage of human life outside the Garden, we see human beings able to understand their world. As Solomon writes, "It is the glory of a king to search out a matter." Prov. 25:2. Solomon studied and understood many things about the physical world, plants and animals. 1 Kings 4:33.

In matters of counseling, we can acknowledge that there are physiological aspects of human life which can be seen and understood. These observations will include much of what falls within the discipline of "psychology". The physiological functions of the nervous are as open to observation as the accretion of crystal. Likewise, we can observe the functioning of the senses and memory. We can test short term memory. We can study the physiological basis of sensory perception. We can learn that certain optical illusions are the result of training in observation.

This ability -- even in unbelievers -- is work of the Spirit of God, albeit not a saving work; as John Calvin explains:

16. Human competence in art and science also derives from the Spirit of God
Meanwhile, we ought not to forget those most excellent benefits of the divine Spirit, which he distributes to whomever he wills, for the common good of mankind. The understanding and knowledge of Bezalel and Oholiab, needed to construct the

this explanation and gives room for a more limited form of common grace prior to Flood.
[CITATION]

¹⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World: The Historical Section*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor, Melvin Flikkema, and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, vol. 1, *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Acton Institute, 2015), 26.

Tabernacle, had to be instilled in them by the Spirit of God [Ex. 31:2–11; 35:30–35]. It is no wonder, then, that the knowledge of all that is most excellent in human life is said to be communicated to us through the Spirit of God. Nor is there reason for anyone to ask, What have the impious, who are utterly estranged from God, to do with his Spirit? We ought to understand the statement that the Spirit of God dwells only in believers [Rom. 8:9] as referring to the Spirit of sanctification through whom we are consecrated as temples to God [1 Cor. 3:16]. Nonetheless he fills, moves, and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit, and does so according to the character that he bestowed upon each kind by the law of creation. But if the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God's gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths. But lest anyone think a man truly blessed when he is credited with possessing great power to comprehend truth under the elements of this world [cf. Col. 2:8], we should at once add that all this capacity to understand, with the understanding that follows upon it, is an unstable and transitory thing in God's sight, when a solid foundation of truth does not underlie it. For with the greatest truth Augustine teaches that as the free gifts were withdrawn from man after the Fall, so the natural ones remaining were corrupted. On this, the Master of the Sentences and the Schoolmen, as we have said, are compelled to agree with him. Not that the gifts could become defiled by themselves, seeing that they came from God. But to defiled man these gifts were no longer pure, and from them he could derive no praise at all.²⁰

Common Grace Permits the Exercise of Wisdom Outside of Salvation

This moves another step closer to the nature of disagreement between Biblical Counseling and other Christian counselors and counseling systems. There is some of this hinted in the description of Solomon, he was wiser than Ethan, Mean, Darda, et cetera. 1 Kings 4:33. If there were no wisdom outside of special revelation, than this comparison would be nonsensical. However, the presence of such wisdom is still a work of the Spirit.

Indeed, it is just at this point that John Calvin's reference in *The Institutes* helps define the question:

4. Uprightness is God's gift; but man's nature remains corrupted

^bNevertheless the problem has not yet been resolved. For either we must make Camillus equal to Catiline, or we shall have in Camillus an example proving that nature, if carefully cultivated, is not utterly devoid of goodness.⁵ Indeed, I admit that the endowments resplendent in Camillus were gifts of God and seem rightly commendable if judged in themselves. But how will these serve as proofs of natural goodness in him? Must we not hark back to his mind and reason thus:⁶ if a natural man excelled in such moral integrity, undoubtedly human nature did not lack the ability to cultivate virtue? Yet what if the mind had been wicked and crooked, and had followed anything but uprightiness? And there is no doubt that it was such, if you grant that Camillus was a

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 275.

natural man. What power for good will you attribute to human nature in this respect, if in the loftiest appearance of integrity, it is always found to be impelled toward corruption? Therefore as you will not commend a man for virtue when his vices impress you under the appearance of virtues, so you will not attribute to the human will the capability of seeking after the right so long as the will remains set in its own perversity.

Here, however, is the surest and easiest solution to this question: these are not common gifts of nature, but special graces of God, which he bestows variously and in a certain measure upon men otherwise wicked. For this reason, we are not afraid, in common parlance, to call this man wellborn, that one depraved in nature. Yet we do not hesitate to include both under the universal condition of human depravity; but we point out what special grace⁷ the Lord has bestowed upon the one, while not deigning to bestow it upon the other. ^eWhen he wished to put Saul over the kingdom he “formed him as a new man” [1 Sam. 10:6 p.]. This is the reason why Plato, alluding to the Homeric legend, says that kings’ sons are born with some distinguishing mark.⁸ For God, in providing for the human race, often endows with a heroic nature those destined to command. From this workshop have come forth the qualities of great leaders celebrated in histories. Private individuals are to be judged in the same way. But because, however excellent anyone has been, his own ambition always pushes him on—a blemish with which all virtues are so sullied that before God they lose all favor—anything in profane men that appears praiseworthy must be considered worthless. Besides, where there is no zeal to glorify God, the chief part of uprightness is absent; a zeal of which all those whom he has not regenerated by his Spirit are devoid. There is good reason for the statement in Isaiah, that “the spirit of the fear of God rests” upon Christ [Isa. 11:2 p.]. By this we are taught that all estranged from Christ lack “the fear of God,” which “is the beginning of wisdom” [Ps. 111:10 p.]. As for the virtues that deceive us with their vain show, they shall have their praise in the political assembly and in common renown among men; but before the heavenly judgment seat they shall be of no value to acquire righteousness.²¹

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 293–294. Due to the difficulty of some of Calvin's references, I have retained Battles' footnotes:

^{21 b} edition of 1539

⁵ Catiline's evil nature is described by Sallust, *The War with Catiline* iii. 5; LCL edition, pp. 8 ff. He was assailed by Cicero, and was held up to reproach, while Camillus, the noble but unrewarded patriot, was celebrated with praise by Horace, Vergil, and Juvenal. Cf. Augustine, *City of God* II. xvii, xxiii; III. xvii (MPL 41. 61 f., 96 f.; tr. NPNF II. 32, 37, 54).

⁶ Augustine, *Against Julian* IV. iii. 16 ff. (MPL 44. 774 ff.; tr. FC 35. 179 f.).

⁷ On the expressions “*speciales Dei gratias*” ... “*specialis gratiae*,” cf. II. ii. 17, notes 63, 64; II. iv. 7, note 13; and above, on Camillus, in this sec. 4. Those special endowments that make possible admirable and heroic actions by nonelect persons are by Calvin referred to God's special grace.

^e edition of 1559

What Calvin says here is that God, for his own good purposes, will engender a better apprehension and behavior in one man than another. While all men are depraved and would be utterly so but for God's restraint, some men exhibit remarkable characteristics. These of a "nobler" nature are so due to peculiar operation of the Spirit of God.

When we consider this light of the purpose of common grace, we can easily conclude that such men and women are necessary for the perpetuation of human existence -- indeed without such people we would have doomed ourselves. We get Charles Manson and Abraham Lincoln; we get Hitler and Churchill. That is Calvin's point.

Does Common Grace Get Us an Operative Psychology of the Human Heart?

No.

Let us consider this matter carefully. Common grace is given to ameliorate certain effects of the Fall. If you will note, the primary effects of common grace have been to limit the effects pronounced in Genesis 3:14-19. If the ground will be in rebellion, we will learn how to work it. If our bodies will decay, we will learn how to slow that decay. If human beings will be in conflict, there will be restraints upon those conflicts.

But common grace, for all its beauty, never once reverses any effect of the Fall and the subsequent judgment. You will die despite the wonders of medicine. You may be killed by a murderer or in a war, despite the restraint of sin. Droughts may come despite our technological prowess. Wise men act like fools.

The Trouble with Equivocation

Since psychology as a discipline concerns the understanding of the human being as a psycho-somatic being,²² it necessarily partakes of matters which are properly the subject of human observation (the human body), and those matters which are substantially more problematic, if not impossible: the consciousness of the human being, the subjective mental experience.²³ Moreover, as will be detailed more below, human beings cannot see clearly what is wrong with man nor how to resolve that problem.

p. paraphrase, designates a Scripture quotation or near-quotation, not conforming fully to any as yet ascertainable source; many of these are in *oratio obliqua*.

⁸ Plato, *Cratylus* 393 f. (LCL Plato VI. 38–45).

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²² "Since Scripture presents a person as a unified yet complex self, the designation 'complex unity' is preferred. The material (body) and immaterial (soul/spirit) function together in one person, embracing both unity and diversity." John MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 424.

²³ We cannot simply move from neurological observation to an understanding of the subjective conscious state. Octavio S. Choi, "What Neuroscience Can and Cannot Answer," *Journal of the*

Yet, psychology claims to be a science based upon observation²⁴: "In an era of evidence-based practice, all mental health professional must be up-to-date on the science behind clinical interventions."²⁵ "Yet psychology, as a science, rigorously attempts to rely on observable data in developing and evaluating theories."²⁶ "But Christian psychologists will have as a second important goal to investigate human beings empirically in a manner common to contemporary psychology, and to practice such research in conformity with their broader commitments."²⁷

I chose these three quotations because the professing Christians who offered these observations come from fundamentally different schools of psychology. What they each have in common is a commitment to empirical observation as a fundamental tool of caring for the human soul; and then based upon such observation to determine theories and methods for treatment. The work of unbelievers about human nature, purpose and the means for effecting change first come from the unbeliever.²⁸ The observations may be squared or correlated in some manner with the Scripture. But the movement is from the observation is "scientific" and true; and while the

American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online 45, no. 3 (September 2017): 278-85.

Moreover, there is the fact that as a Christian, I cannot posit that the soul is reducible to the body. Yet, Moes & Tellinghuisen, professing Christians and professors of psychology at Calvin College present evidence of the degree to which human consciousness is affected by the brain, and the need to be careful to not discount the body when understanding the human being. Paul Moes and Donald J. Tellinghuisen, *Exploring Psychology and Christian Faith: An Introductory Guide* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2014), 49-61. "As we have seen, the heart is the non-material, non-observable inner life of the human being when alive bodily." Jay Edward Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resource Library, 1986), 116.

²⁴ Moes and Tellinghuisen explain that Christian psychologists rely upon a "methodological naturalism": They are not actually deists, but they pretend to be deists when they perform experiments. Paul Moes and Donald J. Tellinghuisen, *Exploring Psychology and Christian Faith: An Introductory Guide* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2014), 24.

²⁵ Thomas Plante, "Levels of Explanation of Approach," in *Counseling and Christianity: Five Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Greggo and Timothy A. Sisemore (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 69.

²⁶ David N. Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity: An Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations, and Models of Integration* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 137.

²⁷ Robert C. Roberts and P.J. Watson, "A Christian Psychology View," in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 164.

²⁸ "Rather than accepting any of the four models entirely, it may be better to adopt an eclectic approach, taking the best features of each of the four models. Crabb (1977, 47-52) speaks of "spoiling the Egyptians," referring to the Old Testament account of the Israelites taking gold and other precious materials from Egypt and leaving the leeks and onions behind. Perhaps we as Christians should make use of those psychological concepts that are useful and compatible with Scripture and leave behind those that conflict with our faith." Paul D. Meier M.D. et al., *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling: Christian Perspectives and Applications*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 29.

Scripture may provide some framework or touchstone, it is not directly helpful to understanding and addressing the human need.

When they operate in this manner, they are little different than unbelievers. Erickson explains that "Psychology endeavors to establish what is demonstrably true in human behaviorReligion, on the other hand, elaborates on what feels profoundly true, even though it is not demonstrable".²⁹

Biblical Counseling does not deny that unbelievers can make observations accurate observations. For example, I came upon this in an article I am reading for work, "Wolf and colleagues found that 81 percent of adults who were abused in childhood could be distinguished correctly from nonabused controls because of differences on 11 items on the schizophrenia (Sc) scale."³⁰ I am not surprised by the finding, nor do I have any reason to doubt the finding. While such an observation may be true, it does not tell may (1) what has actually taken place in the heart of these people;³¹ (2) since a secular explanation will be made without reference to sin, to God, to the human heart (as understood biblically), the explanation will be fundamentally wrong; (3) the explanation cannot tell me what a person should be, nor (4) how the Word of God and the Spirit God can transform the human heart.

Thus, a commitment to "methodological naturalism" leads to the goals and observations which are very difficult to square with anything which would have been recognizable to Peter, Paul or James:

Addressing Jake's spiritual needs and perhaps feelings of alienation are important too. Jake may feel distant from his faith tradition and from God for a variety of reasons, including his losses and stresses in life and his conflictual relationships with his parents, or perhaps from feeling like God has not blessed him in the ways that he expected.³²

²⁹ Erick H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), 21.

³⁰ Bethany L. Brand, Gregory S. Chasson, Cori A. Palermo, Frank M. Donato, Kyle P. Rhodes and Emily F. Voorhees, "MMPI-2 Item Endorsements in Dissociative Identity Disorder vs. Simulators," in *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online* March 2016, 44 (1) 63-72 [63-64].

³¹ As Adams writes, we must not read such findings as proving a "deterministic" theory of human development. "Christians do not accept the deterministic views of psychologists and psychiatrists, who think that early socialization or early environmental conditioning so fixes the course of his life that all of a child's future behavior is virtually determined by those forces." Jay Edward Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 139. Human beings are not determined robots; but this does not mean that our environment has no affect upon us. One of the most remarkable things about a Scriptural basis for soul care is that it requires us to consider all of the aspects of human life from the bodily to the spiritual. A great fault of most secular psychology is its tendency to be reductionistic.

³² Thomas Plante, "Levels of Explanation of Approach," in *Counseling and Christianity: Five Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Greggo and Timothy A. Sisemore (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 73.

Or, "The Christian Psychologist will want to know how one become poor in spirit, a peacemaker and so on. What is the therapy for those who are not?"³³

The fault here lies in an equivocation: Equivocation is a logical error of mistaking a common reference for a common identity: If I have two friends both named "John", I cannot impute the birthdate, shoe size or hair color of John 1 to John 2 simply because they have the same name. Likewise, the fact that an observation about effects of sleep on learning ability is an aspect of observational psychology does not mean that Freud's observations about hysterical women in Vienna should be given equal validity because it is also called "psychology."

But the problem is even more troublesome. Consider the human under observation: We can observe the environment to some extent; we can observe the human body to some extent; we can observe the behaviors exhibit to some extent; we observe the reports of internal consciousness to some extent (and all the problems and arguments have centered around this issue in the history of psychology).

There will some patterns because human beings learn; because human beings have habits; because sin begets sin and it forces human beings into patterns; and because sanctification itself shows certain movement and progression. 2 Pet. 1:5-7. The patterns and learning which are common to human beings are common due to the operation of the Holy Spirit in restraining sin and permitting a certain level of human cultural functioning to permit the continued existence of human beings.

However, we cannot draw a line from a psychology which observes the body to a psychology which observes the entire human being and equate one-with-the other. There is a categorical difference between the functioning of the body and the functioning of the soul.

What Cannot be Observed

As a practical matter, we simply cannot observe every environmental and physical variable which effects the human being. Even if we discount all spiritual effects, we are left with an impossible number of variables to consider as an input to the human being. Then when we consider the output, the thoughts, affections and behaviors, we are left with an equally impossible number of variables. This, however, is a limitation on psychology as a science which is apparent to even a materialist.

The materialist position is peculiarly problematic when it comes to questions of psychology, because the materialist position cannot adequately address the problem of a mind, "Materialism as a metaphysical perspective fails on countless levels. Nowhere is that failure more clear than in the understanding of the mind and the brain."³⁴ And yet, psychology to be a science and to hold to determinism [CITATION], necessary must hold to positions which are directly contrary to reality.³⁵

³³ Robert C. Roberts and P.J. Watson, "A Christian Psychology View," in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 164.

³⁴ Michael Egnor, "The Representation Problem and the Immateriality of the Mind," *Evolution News* (blog), February 5, 2018, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://evolutionnews.org/2018/02/the-representation-problem-and-the-immateriality-of-the-mind/>.

³⁵ "So too the humanistic psychologists have said some very beautiful and true things about man, but there is no foundation for what they say. We can go one step further: there is a foundation, but it contradicts what they are trying to build." William E. Wood, "When Is It 'Too Late' to Change?," ed. Jay E. Adams, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 1 (1987): 40–41.

Moreover, if we are going to take the Christian worldview seriously, we must understand that there is a great deal which a materialist cannot see and which no experiment or observation can ever understand:

Cornelius Van Til (1955), the noted Christian apologist, argues that true knowledge is possible only in its relationship to God, and without the existence of God true knowledge is an epistemological absurdity. Van Til (1956) states: “Our argument for the objectivity of knowledge with respect to the universe can never be complete and satisfactory unless we bring in the relation of both the object and the subject of knowledge to God. We may debate endlessly about psychological problems without fruitage if we refuse to bring in the metaphysical question of the nature of reality” (p. 60). Without the objective truth of God’s revelation, we are trapped in the phenomenalism which has characterized Western thinking since Kant. The Christian counselor’s advantage is that he has revealed in the Scriptures the objective truth about reality and man’s relation to it.

Gary G. Plumlee, “A Questionable Union: Adlerian Theory and Pastoral Counseling,” ed. Jay E. Adams and Howard A. Eyrich, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 3, no. 4 (1979): 32–33.

What Common Grace Cannot Do

Any counseling psychology must address Anthropology, Teleology and Methodology. Common grace does not provide help with any of those problems. Common grace was given to permit the continued existence of the world, and to gain space for special grace to open the eyes of the spiritually blind. But common grace cannot and will never provide a right understanding of man, of man's chief end, nor who to care for man.

Yes, without question, common grace may provide some alleviation of the pains of this life -- but only in part and only for a short time. It cannot provide any remedy to the true cause of our "psychological" ills, because such ill is caused by our rebellion against and separation from God.

There is a general epistemological which results from the Fall, and that issue deserves its own analysis. For purpose of this paper, I am going to bracket that problem and address the question of what a methodological naturalism in psychology necessarily misses.

If we are going to understand human beings correctly, we will need to properly consider human beings as they are in relationship to God -- and particularly as human beings exist in rebellion or in covenant with God. I have read any number of books on psychology and counseling which address the question from any number of integrationists positions.³⁶ I could cite them here at length, but I think it fair to say that Christians who are working in the area of psychology and counseling acknowledge that our state is profoundly affected by the Fall.

Yet, having said that, I do not believe they understand the implications of truth when it comes to making psychological observations or in providing counsel. They (and I know this is a

³⁶ “In his analysis of current state of integration, Brian Eck identified twenty-seven models of integration.” David N. Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity: An Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations, and Models of Integration* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 163.

generalization) will point to some finding of an academic psychologist say here is a fact of common grace, we must bring this fact in and use it for our good.

But let us consider what the research has discovered. First, when we look at human beings who live in rebellion against God, we are examining cursed creatures who are not in their proper "environment" to use Jay Adam's apt description. To examine a human being in rebellion against God is akin to examining a fish on land: yes you see things, but you will completely misunderstand fish if you think that you examining anything "normal".

Thus, it is not surprising when Professor Warren Brown of Fuller Seminary writes,

Finding resonance between Christian theology and modern neuroscience is challenging, particularly with respect to views of human nature. It is increasingly difficult to hold a traditional Christian view of persons in a world of modern neurobiology, cognitive science and neuropsychology.³⁷

In fact, the problem of man is even more profoundly difficult that we are examining human beings in the wrong environment: we are not merely fish out of water, we are cursed fish in rebellion against the source of life: we are like fish who are out the water and who hate the water.

Yes, all sorts of scientists and psychologists and sociologists see all sorts of things accurately, but they cannot see a human being in relation to God.³⁸ The necessary methodological naturalism requires pretending that human beings are bare objects without interaction from God (or even any other non-physical being). This methodology means that what they see is wrong, because they cannot see the whole picture. Ambrosiaster commented upon Paul's line "The foolishness of God is wiser than man" (1 Cor. 1:25) as follows:

Rather he is saying that since God's way of reasoning is in accord with things of the spirit, it confounds the reasoning of this world. It is wiser than human reasoning, because

³⁷ Warren Brown, "Resonance: A Model for Relating Science, Psychology, and Faith," in *Integrating Psychology and Theology: Research and Reflections*, ed. Winston Gooden (Pasadena: Fuller Seminary Press, 2006), 305. And by the way, I am aware of what Mr. Brown means by the divergence. There is another fundamental flaw in this way of thinking, which I cannot address at length here. But the mistake is akin to the atheist who thinks that proof that temperature difference in two locales leads to air movement disproves God makes the wind blow (Ps. 147:18).

³⁸ "In the first chapter, attempting to reconcile theology with psychology, Brien makes this interesting statement: "The seeming antagonism between theology and psychology is not based on the psychological discoveries themselves. It is based on the interpretations of these discoveries which are influenced by psychologists' educational and religious backgrounds and personal values" (page 13). His evaluation of the interpretations of the discoveries is absolutely correct, but he does not go far enough. It is also true that the antagonism between theology and psychology is based on the presuppositions of psychology, the psychological anthropologies proposed, and the goals of those psychological studies. When one understands theology correctly, it is readily seen that these 'psychological discoveries' are not really new truths but are only examples of biblical truth about human behavior or faulty human reasoning." Robert D. Smith, "Review of You Are What You Think by Robert C. Brien," ed. Jay E. Adams, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 8, no. 3 (1986): 55.

spiritual things are wiser than carnal ones. Spiritual things do not exist through carnal ones, but the other way around. Therefore carnal things are understandable in relation to spiritual ones. Similarly, what belongs to heaven is stronger than what belongs to earth.³⁹

The perspective gained by a human being without immediate reference to the God's reasoning will always be flawed -- particularly when it comes to human psychology -- because the information is in the wrong context. The things observable by common grace can only be rightly understood in connection with the context provided by special revelation.

The blindness of man -- even with the benefits of common grace -- is so profound that a human being without supernatural aid is unable to see that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God when Jesus was standing right before him. 1 Cor. 2:8; Matt. 16:17. When Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, the Pharisees and the Herodians conspired on how to kill Jesus. Mark 3:6.

Moreover, common grace does not overcome the willful blindness to the barest facts of God. Rom. 1:18-25. Yes, the integration position tries to reincorporate those facts and add that data back into their observations. However, that is fundamentally insufficient to address the problem.

The correlation between some particularly environmental experience (say being adopted at the age of six after three years in foster care) and later behavior is not solely a matter of "psychological" forces and changes in brain function. Such things can be observed, but there is much that can never be seen by normal "psychological" investigation. How can these events even be correctly understood without reference to sin, being sinned against profoundly, suffering the effects of sin generally, and one's own sin response? I have looked through the DSM-V and have thus far been unable to find the category of sin.

Moreover, methodological naturalism cannot ever see the effects of God. Consider the folly of Rehoboam in 1 Kings 12. One could understand this story in terms of economics, politics, and some sort of personal psychology driving Rehoboam. But all such explanations would miss what really took place:

So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

1 Kings 12:15; see, e.g., Is. 19:14. God was an actor in this event; but Professor Warren would never be able to see that from the position of any cognitive science. Where in neurobiology can we see God working in me "both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Phil. 2:13. I have read volume upon volume of psychology and have yet to read,

Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God
before his eyes.

Ps. 36:1.

³⁹ Gerald Lewis Bray, ed., *1-2 Corinthians, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 16.

Common Grace Cannot See the Purpose of Man

The chief end of man cannot be known without the special revelation of God. The telos, the end of man can only be known by special revelation of God.⁴⁰ When a psychologist without reference to God seeks merely to alleviate some discomfort (and not that alleviating suffering is wrong per se), he may easily have missed the point. Where repentance was need (Ps. 32:3), emotional relief was prescribed (Is. 22:12-13).

And I am not saying that every trouble requires repentance. What I am saying is that any psychology which does not *begin with* the relationship between God and man, can never understand that the purpose of man is the worship of the true God. Indeed, a psychology which merely seeks to give a psychological peace to a man at war with God is a hateful thing. Amos 4:9.

Common Grace Cannot Provide a Proper Remedy for Man's Distress

A counseling psychology must have an anthropology, a teleology and a methodology. The method's will be prescribed by the nature of man and the end which we seek to achieve. The Scripture prescribes a complete manner of life, how we live with family, friends, government; what we are to believe, what we are to hate and love. It creates a comprehensive network of relationships (through the church) to bring about his end. It involves thinking, singing, praying, eating, sleeping, et cetera. It also entails things like medical care (as a benefit of common grace). It also involves the promise of God's own involvement.

Indeed, it is such a comprehensive and efficacious mechanism for care of a human being, it is bizarre that any Christian would think this an ineffective way to address problems and that somehow we need to ask advice of those who hate God to help. And yet, Christians write sentences such as "Spiritual issues arise frequently in psychotherapy....Many psychologists have observed that clients do not separate moral from religious issues by tend to intertwine them....In short, one cannot separate psychotherapy from spirituality, either in theory or practice."⁴¹

One's relationship with God is not simply some additional "spiritual issue" which is intertwined with psychotherapy. The Godward relationship is the defining characteristic which determines all other aspects of one's life.

As stated in the first half of this essay, the cause for psychological ill stems from the breach between God and man. When man, without fundamental reference to God's special

⁴⁰ "Of course, try as it might, the science of psychology will never explain the purpose and meaning of human existence. Such questions go beyond the level of the science of psychology to engage the field of theology. To expect that the science of psychology might reveal the answers or even that the scientists who study psychology could comment accurately about such questions is a misunderstanding, not necessarily of science, but of the levels of explanation we can have for certain questions in life. Ultimately, the questions of human existence are theological questions for the Christian, grounded in faith and the Word of God. Ideally, the explanations of science and the Christian's understanding of the Bible should complement one another." Paul D. Meier M.D. et al., *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling: Christian Perspectives and Applications*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 33.

⁴¹ Neil T. Anderson, Terry Zuehlke, and Julianne Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy: The Practical Integration of Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 47.

revelation, attempts to remedy the effects of that breach, man has engaged in profound foolishness. Indeed, there is nothing in such a psychology which can escape the pronouncement of God upon their work, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" 1 Cor. 1:20. The psychologist who is trying to remedy the effect of the fall upon the heart of man without making recourse to the God who has cursed man, is in rebellion against God.⁴²

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. Prov. 1:7 & 9:10. What wisdom is there without the Lord. How can a methodological naturalism provide wisdom to care for the human soul? Ps. 14:1.

What Then Do?

Admittedly, this essay is not exhaustive. In fact, it likely raises more questions than it answers. And, if I were to take a contrary position, I could easily raise, "Yes, but" objections. Moreover, I am certain my brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with me on certain points will believe I have given such short shrift to their positions as to distort them. I acknowledge these shortcomings and ask for your indulgence in perhaps a longer dialogue in the future.

What I wish to affirm is this: Common grace is a great wonder of God. However, common grace does not and cannot address what are commonly called "psychological" problems. Yes, unbelievers can make accurate observations about human beings and may even be able to provide some emotional and physical relief. This is not denied. I am particularly thankful for medical help.

However, common grace was never given to see into the true trouble with human beings: the breach between God and man. Common grace can therefore neither see the truth about man, what we are and why we suffer; nor can it see our end and purpose. Common grace can therefore never help to prescribe a remedy for that fault.

And so we have a situation where there are benefits of common grace, which biblical counselors can and should avail themselves. However, there are other propositions of "secular psychology" which are both antithetical to the Scripture and for which we there is no basis in common grace to assert. How do we sort out the matter:

The critics of nouthetic counseling forget (and perhaps even those who like our opposition to secularist thought forget) that Jay Adams spoke from the beginning of a legitimate role for psychology. Right from the introduction of *Competent to Counsel* the door was open for a properly constructed relationship between secular psychology and biblical counseling:

First, I am aware that my interpretations and applications of Scripture are not infallible. Secondly, I do not wish to disregard science, but rather I welcome it as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling in generalizations with specifics, and challenging

⁴² "Given the incredible diversity of Christian groups, we must also suspect that a great deal of the 'wisdom' we hear even in the church must be all too human. Just because a minister says something from a pulpit and mentions a few words from the Bible does not mean that he or she truly has the mind of God." Kenneth Schenck, *1 & 2 Corinthians: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 47.

wrong human interpretations of Scripture, thereby forcing the student to restudy the scriptures.

Biblical counseling has never developed in any detail what that properly constructed relationship would look like or do. We have been busy establishing and defending where we stand.⁴³

Here, I would like to propose a structure for beginning to discern the aspects of psychological research which can be rightly considered the fruit of common grace -- and thus utilized -- and those matters for which there is no warrant to claim as a benefit of common grace:

I propose three categories of information which move from information most accessible to common grace to information which cannot be known by common grace.

Common Grace	Special Revelation
<p>Category One: <i>Observations The physical environment; including the human body. This includes study of the nervous system, functioning of the senses, et cetera.</i></p> <p><i>Information from this level is often leveraged as an attack upon the Biblical Counseling position as unscientific for "refusing" information learned here.</i></p>	
<p>Common Grace is most effective here. Common grace does permit one to see the environment, the understanding is limited by the failure to take God's creation and providence into account. However, due to the ability of unbelievers to 'borrow' from Christian presuppositions, reasonably accurate observations.</p> <p>Thus, human physiology can be observed and reported. This area of "psychology" (neuropsychology, the operation of senses, et cetera) can be utilized with the normal sort of skepticism necessary for review of any scientific work</p>	<p>Special Revelation: Informs us of the fundamental nature and existence of the physical environment, but does not provide much detail. We know that it is the creation of God and maintained by providence, but the mechanics of the operation are not treated in detail. This is the place where Special Revelation offers the least information and common grace the most.</p>

⁴³ David A. C. Powlison, "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling," ed. Jay E. Adams, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 74.

<p>Category two:</p> <p><i>Social science observations. With a markedly lesser degree of reliability, social scientists can make observations of patterns in human behavior and reported internal psychological states. Thus, we can see that people under certain circumstances, and/or with certain physiological conditions, will have a tendency to display certain behaviors and/or expressions.</i></p>	
<p>Common grace makes it possible to observe patterns. However, there are serious limitations on the usefulness of such information.</p> <p>These observations are fundamentally limited by (1) the inability to observe the internal workings of the human heart (observations of neurology and one's self reported subjected experience are of some value, but cannot correlate to the depth of the human heart); (2) these observations are fundamentally limited in that they cannot include the effects of the Godward relationship of the human being (observations which are commonly accounted as "the psychology of religion" are limited to objective observations and cannot provide information about the working of God); (3) these observations cannot take into account the effects of the "flesh" and the Spirit (this is related but not perfectly coextensive with point (2)).</p>	<p>Special revelation is critical at this stage, particularly in any attempt to "make sense" of social science observations. Understanding the deceitfulness of sin, for instance, may help to make an observation understandable.</p> <p>The biblical counselor can use such observations as data points: for example, a study may suggest a line of inquiry; knowing that there is not a determinative relationship between one environmental circumstance and a future manner of life -- even if there is a positive tendency toward a certain outcome.</p>
<p>Category 3:</p> <p><i>This category consists of what most people mean when they say "psychology". Here we find theories which concern the matters are both (1) inaccessible to common grace and (2) involve explicitly theological anthropology, teleology and methodology for change (ATM). These are the aspects of human life which are</i></p>	

<p><i>most directly affected by the breach between God and man.</i></p> <p><i>While this category may make reference to elements of category 1 & 2, it goes further and assigns values. This aspect specifically concerns "spiritual" concerns: matters of sin and sanctification, the action of God (and even evil spirits) upon human beings: these are precisely the matters which the Scripture claims as for its authority.</i></p> <p><i>When biblical counselors reject "psychology", they are referring primarily to information from this category.</i></p>	
<p>Common grace is least valuable at this stage. Common grace was not given to heal the primary aspects of the Fall.</p>	<p>Special Revelation is needed for work here</p> <p>First, this concerns anthropology: What constitutes a human being: this is beyond observations concerning the human body and human behavior. It is consists of the "manishness of man" to use Francis Schaeffer's phrase. This concerns the human heart: the spiritual aspects of humanity and in particular human interaction with God.</p> <p>Second, this category concerns teleology: what is the purpose of being human. For instance when a psychologist speaks of what is "healthy" for human sexuality, the psychologist is speaking to what is the purpose of a human being. The purpose of a human being cannot be known by observations, since, as Jay Adams notes: we are living in an abnormal environment under abnormal conditions (being on this side of the Fall).</p> <p>Third, this concerns methodology: those things which are necessary to change the direction of the human heart.</p>

