

# Psychology and The Bible – As I See It

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## A. Introduction

### 1. What is Psychology?

- a. **Definition:** Psychology is a broad field that encompasses the study of human thought, emotion, behaviour, development, personality, motivation and more. It delves into the realm of the MIND which is immaterial, complex and mysterious. It also includes biological influences, social and environmental factors that affect how people think, feel and act; the **science of the mind** or the science of human behaviour and thought processes.

Today, there are more than 20 different fields of psychology.

- b. How do people in general – Christians in particular - view Psychology? Do most Christians – especially evangelical Christians - view Psychology with acceptance, or reservation, suspicion and even condemnation? Is Psychology intrinsically evil, and something to stay away from? More importantly, how is Psychology to be viewed from a Bible standpoint?

### c. A brief **History of Psychology**

- i. Psychology began as human wisdom and philosophy. Greeks Socrates (399 BC), Plato (347 BC) and Aristotle (385-322 BC) searched for understanding, logic, reason and answer to man's life, existence, ethics and moral dilemmas, etc.
- ii. The late 19th century marked the **start of psychology** as a scientific enterprise. Psychology as a self-conscious field of experimental study began in 1879, when German scientist **Wilhelm Wundt** founded the first laboratory dedicated exclusively to psychological research in Leipzig, Germany.
  - In 50's: believed to be good for some people.
  - In 60's: believed to be too good to be wasted on some mentally sick people (in the meantime, mental health professionals were convincing pastors they were inadequate to counsel into mental health issues!).
  - In 90's: rise of **Biblical Counselling** as a Christian alternative to secular counselling; nouthetic counselling: Evangelical Protestant counselling centred solely on the Bible and the work of the Cross.

- Today: Psychology is well-respected; it is believed that Psychology can help many in the pursuit of mental health and its development, happiness, success and in building good relationships. Psychology is able to provide man with practical skills and tools to help him survive and thrive. Examples.

“During the past 15 to 20 years a dramatic shift has taken place in American Christianity: Psychology has flooded into the Church. Christian psychologists are now the ones many Christians primarily look to for guidance in the Christian life. Christian psychologists write many of the best-selling books and dominate much of Christian radio. Many pastors use psychological terms and concepts in their sermons.”

Steven J. Cole

2. Christians who reject “psychological counselling” are quick to denigrate or denounce the wisdom of man, asserting the sufficiency of the Bible as the only BASIS for all thinking and belief. They dismiss secular or worldly thinking and their applications - like the theories of psychology - as profitless and even dangerous!

**Psychology - at *best* - is QUESTIONABLE**  
**Psychology - at *least* - is SPIRITUAL COUNTERFEIT or DECEPTION**

“Psychological counselling is attempting to supplant the true counsel of the Lord Jesus Christ that people so desperately need. This psychological counselling clothes itself with Christian terms to disguise its true identity. Its practitioners believe that the Word of God by itself is inadequate. So, they presume to integrate God’s Word with **humanistic, atheistic philosophy**. What results is supposedly **Christianized therapies**. But these therapies diminish the Lord Jesus Christ while exalting man. Many Christians are being led astray by these seductive therapies – which amount to a new gospel that heals their brokenness superficially (Jeremiah 8:11).”

Total Life Ministries

“Homosexuals need salvation – they don’t need healing – homosexuality is not a disease. They do not need therapy – homosexuality is **not a psychological condition**. Homosexuals need forgiveness because homosexuality is sin.”

John MacArthur

“The Christian life is pictured as warfare, and war is never easy! But God wants each of us to learn that He is the all sufficient One who knows us and can meet our deepest needs. We don’t need the **insights of worldly men** to grow up in Christ.”

Steven J. Cole

It is, therefore, believed that the Bible is sufficient for dealing with our deepest spiritual, emotional and physical needs (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16), and that there is no problem under the sun for which Christ is not sufficient to resolve (Colossians 2:10).

“His divine power has been given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.”

2 Peter 1:3

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

2 Timothy 3:16

“And you are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power.”

Colossians 2:10

## B. Four Ways We Acquire Knowledge

“For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (deity), so that they are without excuse.”

Romans 1:20

1. **Intuition:** The ability to understand something instinctively without the need for conscious reasoning; subjective and unreliable as man’s mind is fallen (Jeremiah 17:9).
2. **Reason:** The cause, explanation, justification for an action or event; unreliable as the mind tends towards suppressing the truth, the heart being deceitful.
3. **Experience:** Practical contact with, and observation of facts or events; unreliable as lacking in objectivity.
4. **Revelation:** The making known of something that was previously secret or unknown; in Christianity, everything we know about God and our world came by inspired REVELATION, outside of fallen man. Nature provides a more general revelation about God, whereas, the person and work of JESUS CHRIST, a specific revelation revealing God’s attributes and character. The Bible is, therefore, the only Source of Truth and Knowledge because it came from God and God alone (2 Timothy 3:16).

## C. Research and Educational Value

1. All true knowledge comes from God. He has given men minds (and hearts) to observe, **reason**, rationalize, investigate, test and judge. This is the **doctrine of common grace**. He blesses sound mental activity and exercise, and, especially, the fruit of investigative research that comes out of sound, righteous and godly minds.
2. Good psychology has produced, over the years, a great deal of useful and enlightening data and information on helpful life skills and techniques for good mental health. Studies on cognition and intelligence; emotions and moods related to thought processes leading to certain actions and behaviours; childhood mental, emotional and social developmental stages; conditioning and stimuli; parenting and family issues; relationships, addictions, studies on the brain, etc. are all very educational and informative.

## D. Some Psychological Terms and Meanings

1. **Psychotherapy**: The application of the theories and discoveries of Psychology to the treatment of mental illnesses, particularly in the form of some sort of relationship between the psychologist/therapist and the client.

Psychotherapy deals with deeper issues than counselling as it looks beneath current complaints to the internal dynamics that constitute the disorder or illness needing correction.

2. **Psychoanalysis**: The first form of Psychotherapy pioneered by **Sigmund Freud**. He taught that there were psychological forces within the personality (usually not conscious) that had the power to cause behaviour and mental/emotional disturbances.
3. **Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT)**: A popular form of therapy where it is believed that by changing cognition (thinking, knowing, believing, perceiving, intuition, etc.), a person's behaviour can be changed; the Christian counterpart of CBT is the RENEWAL OF THE MIND (Romans 12:1-2)

Interestingly, "Renewing the Mind" (Romans 12) is strongly supported by **Neuroplasticity** which declares that the human brain is not hard-wired

but constantly changing. The brain has the ability to undergo structural or physiological changes even as our thoughts and thinking change.

## E. Dangers and Pitfalls

1. **Conflicting Worldviews:** Most psychologists are atheists or humanists – FALLEN men studying the minds of FALLEN men; most reject the Bible. Psychology is the wisdom of man; the Bible is the wisdom of God. The findings of Psychology are not necessarily always compatible with the Bible.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are ways My ways, for as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8

Scripture exhorts us to hold onto the PURITY and INTEGRITY of the Word and to discern and reject what is false. We are admonished to not be carried by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and by craftiness in deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:14).

2. **Supernaturalism versus Naturalism:** Psychology denies spiritual realities and the realm of the unseen – God, angels, the Devil, and his fallen angels, supernatural and the paranormal, etc.

“Psychology looks no deeper than the soul of man for answers. It totally ignores the spirit realm: our spirits, God’s Holy Spirit, and demonic spirits. The Word of God is replete with teachings and examples of the influence of God, demons, and our spirits on our actions. Any “answer” that **doesn’t take the spirit realm into account** isn’t going to the root of the problem.”

Andrew Womack

**“No God, no human spirit, no Devil.”**

In Christianity, the Truine God – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit – is the Healer (Yahweh-Rapha).

3. **The Practice of Mixing:** It is said that there are more than 500 psychotherapies propounded (with their corresponding 10,000 methodologies) – ranging from mundane to bizarre, from sensible to outright dangerous!

Psychological philosophies can be confusing as there are no absolutes or reference points against which their assumptions and theories can be

tested or evaluated! Most therapists use **the eclectic approach** – mixing and combining different theories and methodologies.

Today, the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders** (DSM-vol V, 2013) lists more than 370 mental disorders (from the initial 106 in DSM-vol I, 1952), including social anxiety disorder (debilitating shyness) and non-compliance to treatment disorder, even mathematical and reading disorder.

4. **Conflicting Processes and Goals:** Processes and goals (based on theories) of Psychology often conflict with Scripture. On the one hand, the goal of Psychology is the strengthening of the mind to achieve greater personal happiness, peace and contentment. Christian counselling, on the other hand, focuses on “**Renewing the Mind**,” discipleship and maturity in Christ, godly character, and the priority of relationship with God to live significantly and effectively. Consider the following -
  - God calls disobedience SIN; psychology calls it weakness or failure.
  - Bible warns against bondage to evil; psychology says it is addiction/compulsion.
  - God demands REPENTANCE (change of mind and heart); psychology settles on symptom management, behaviour change or resolution.
  - God’s goal is healing and restoration; psychology’s goal is recovery and maintenance.
  
5. **Not Deep and Effective Cure:** Psychology, at best is SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT, but, at worst, is proven to be outright dark and even demonic e.g. Jungian psychology. Founder **Carl Jung** – was himself a channeler of demons and spirits (Philemon, Anima and Animus)!
  - a. **Carl Rogers** brought occult elements into his therapies (yoga, chanting, meditation, out-of-the-body experiences, altered states of consciousness, visualization, guided imagery, hypnotism, mystical and transcendental experiences).
  - b. **Sigmund Freud** was himself hardly to be considered a healthy balanced man with good morals and wholesome behaviour to offer. Hence, Psychology did not have good healthy roots, in which case, it follows that the **fruits themselves cannot be wholesome and healthy** (Matthew 7:17-18).

**Psychology - at *best* - is QUESTIONABLE**  
**Psychology - at *least* - is SPIRITUAL COUNTERFEIT**  
**Psychology - at *worst* is – DOCTRINES OF DEMONS**  
(1Timothy 4:1)

6. **Dark Psychology:** By definition, it is the phenomenon by which people use tactics of MIND persuasion, manipulation, control and coercion to get what they want. It is one of the most powerful forces at work today. Mind programming is being used by powerful influencers, and worse, by criminal psychopaths, scientists, religious cults, the military and governments for their evil ends.

## F. Five Popular Psychological Theories on Man's Nature

1. **Sigmund Freud** (1856-1939; neurologist; **psychoanalytical**): Man is NEGATIVE; his primary motivation is self-gratification.
2. **Jean Piaget** (1896-1980; **developmental** psychologist): Children's cognitive development is based on stages. He believed children create their own understanding of the world through the blending of factors from his inner and outer worlds.
3. **Carl Rogers** (1902-1987; **humanistic**): Man is intrinsically good and POSITIVE; he has self-actualizing tendencies when inhibitions are removed; he can find help within himself to change; client-centred psychological counselling approach.
4. **Erik Erikson** (1902-1994; **social psychology**): Man is NEGATIVE but with a positive embryo awaiting psychosocial development; social interactions and relationships play a role in development and growth of human beings; coined the term 'identity crisis'.
5. **B.F. Skinner** (1904-1990; **behaviourism**): Man is NOTHING; nothing more than a complicated dog!.

## G. Man's Basic Nature from the Bible (Revelation)

1. Man is created in the IMAGE OF GOD - tripartite: spirit, soul (mind, emotions and will) and body; made the crown of God's creation; was sinless before the Fall; made with dignity, and has tremendous creativity and potential.

Man is a free moral agent with the GIFT OF FREEWILL - having the freedom to choose; with choice comes its commensurate consequences.

2. After the Fall, man became corrupted and REBELLIOUS; his greatest problem is his **sinful nature** which inherently carries a tendency to do evil, to be God and to play God. Consequences of sin is death (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

Sin is clearly the Bible's diagnosis of what is wrong with man, and why the world is so broken today. Sin separates him from God, himself, and others.

**Derek Prince:** "It is not just the big sins that man commits, it is essentially **the failure to give God His rightful place** in our lives, living lives that withhold the glory and honour all creatures owe to Him."

**Neil Andersen:** "All sinful behavior is a wrong attempt at meeting basic needs (identity and significance). The **essence of sin is man living independently of God**, who has said that He will meet all our needs as we live our lives in Christ."

**Larry Crabb:** "Sin is not (just) what you do wrong – it is looking at God and saying, '**You are not enough**, and I'm going to find some way to make my life work without You."

3. Man has a "beginning" and an "end". Man needs REDEMPTION from his sinful nature – to overcome the PENALTY of sin, the POWER of sin and PRESENCE of sin – which is so deeply embedded within his nature. Through Jesus Christ, man can be reconciled back to God, love and live again in peace with himself and others.

Beyond this earthly life, is eternity with Jesus in the New Heaven. And the promise of a new body, the perfection of our sanctification called GLORIFICATION! This is our Greatest Hope.

## H. Conclusion

1. It is so important than any healing modality be built on right and godly foundations – God and His Word.

God is man's Maker. Man, and his problems, society and issues must thus be viewed from the grid or lens of biblical revelation. In other words, a **Biblical Worldview** is an indispensable prerequisite to a true understanding of God and Man. A right, adequate and accurate doctrine of man - as is revealed in the Bible - is fundamental in the cure of man's corrupt and debased soul.



**Raphah Ministries** is a Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-filled ministry - focussing on God's agenda (and not man's agenda) for the hurting and broken.

Our 3 pairs of emphases are:

- a. **Wholistic and Integrative:** tripartite man; Bible and Science (approach)
  - b. **Word and Spirit:** Truth and Power (content)
  - c. **Discipleship and Equipping:** maturing of believers ready for our Lord's Return (goal)
2. While it would be inappropriate and hasty to condemn all of psychology, we nevertheless need to adopt a cautious position, especially if one believes in the Bible as authoritative and sufficient in all matters of faith and Christian doctrine.

What this means in daily life is that we must NOT let Psychology speak with a greater, higher, and louder voice than the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16)! We are not to be misled, deceived, or destroyed, by ignorance or the lack of knowledge or truth (Hosea 4:6; Isaiah 5:13).

“It is true, of course, that there are many points at which secular psychology not only does not support traditional Christian teachings, but often contradicts them in very destructive ways. For this reason, believers need to exercise discernment in seeking psychological treatment. In fact, we strongly recommend that they receive therapy *only* from practitioners who share their Christian faith... We are concerned that the counselling we provide should be **thoroughly biblical in character** as well as **scientifically sound**. Ultimately it is **not the wisdom of man but the work of the Holy Spirit that heals.**”

Focus On the Family

3. There is a growing movement towards integrating Theology and Psychology (and Spiritual formation or Spirituality).

“Scripture does not provide all that we need in order to understand human beings fully.”

Stanton Jones

However, there can never be a full and deep integration as it is obvious that the views of Theology and Psychology ultimately clash or conflict. They point in different directions – Psychology towards self-determinism and self-effort, and Christianity, towards greater reliance upon God.

“Contemporary (pop) psychology instructs readers to look out for their own needs, to give up silly ideas of altruism and forgiveness and get out of relationships that are not fulfilling. The message is that happiness comes by avoiding discomfort, sacrifice and pain.”

Mark R. McMinn

4. Human lives can only be transformed and healed by God in the **power of the Holy Spirit!** God’s solution for man is Jesus Christ ALONE; and to really live abundantly and meaningfully on Earth, man must conform himself to the teachings of the Bible. And to live lives yielded to the Lordship of Christ, being led by the Holy Spirit.

The **greatest healing** that can take place in any one’s life is the healing of one’s relationship with God, with self and with others.

“The Good news of Christianity is that God brings us out of our brokenness and draws us into relationship. The Christian message is one of Hope. We have been restored to God through the work of Christ.”

Mark R. McMinn

5. The Bible is God’s operating manual for mankind. It is **divinely inspired, God-breathed, all-authoritative and inerrant.** A supernatural book filled with miraculous happenings, signs, and wonders. We need to return to God’s Word and exalt it to its highest place.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on it he meditates day and night.”

Psalms 1:1-2

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”

Psalms 19:7

“Your testimonies are also my delight and my COUNSELORS...the law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver.”

Psalms 119:24

“For You have magnified Your Word above all Your Name.”

Psalms 138:2

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