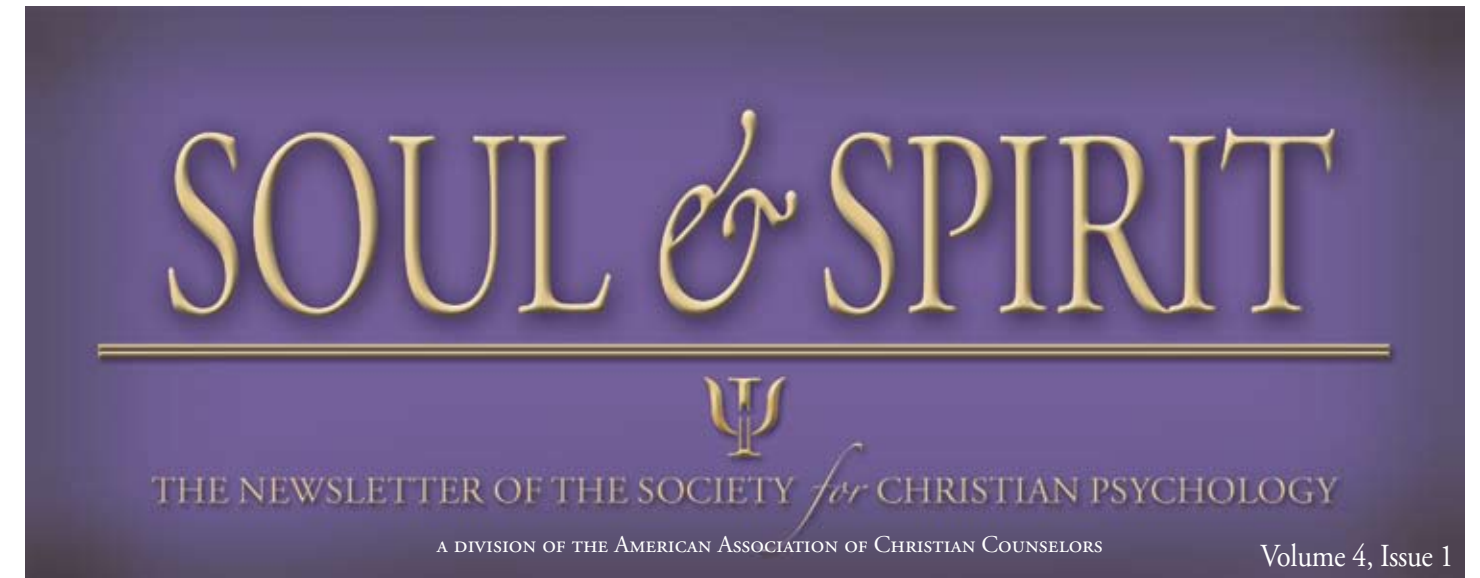


# SCP RESOURCES WORKING TOGETHER

## Resources = Website + Journal + Conferences + Newsletter + YOU

- **SCP Web site** answers your questions (www.christianpsych.net). Would you like to learn more about SCP? Would you like to read the latest blog? Would you like to know about future conferences? Would you like to know more about *Edification*, the SCP Journal? Would you like to acquire back issues of newsletters? Would you like to order recordings of previous conferences? Would you like to join? Go to our Web site.
- **Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology** challenges you to think more deeply about Christianity, psychology, and soul care. *Edification* offers provocative articles, responses to articles, and timely book reviews that are designed to challenge you to think deeply about the Christian psychology project.
- **SCP Conferences** are rich, educational, and diverse. Conferences meet along with AACC World Conferences in odd years and then independently in even years. The conferences include papers by psychologists, theologians, philosophers, counselors, and ministers.
- **Soul & Spirit** is the newsletter of the Society for Christian Psychology. In comparison to the Journal, it contains briefer articles, often with a greater focus on practice, book briefs, and interesting quotations from theologians, philosophers, and psychologists that are relevant to SCP, along with occasional interviews.
- **You**  
Without your reading, attending, participating and contributing, the above resources would be useless. You are a resource for SCP. If you are not a member, visit the Web site above and join. If you are a member, consider contributing to the literary output of SCP.

## WORLD CONFERENCE 2009 TO GO HERE



## SCOTT HOLMAN A PRAYER FOR LOVE:

A RAGAMUFFIN'S MEDITATIONS ON EPHESIANS 3:14-21

*I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us (Romans 8:38-39, The Message).*

*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.... So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 John 4:10, 16, ESV).*

It is reasonable to assume that the apostles' experience of the love of Christ was progressive. There was a process of being grounded in the love of God that increasingly penetrated their souls. Statements of confident trust in the unfailing love of God, such as those above, came with time and were the result of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. What I want to reflect upon here is: What was this "apostolic process" and how do we enter into it? How can we cooperate with the work of the Spirit in the pouring out of the love of God into our hearts until we are utterly defined by it? Paul answers our question with imaginative and reasoned prayer.

It is no small thing to love or be loved. From the beginning, God created us to live and breathe in an atmosphere of love. Since the Fall, however, our *experience* of love has fallen woefully short of God's intention. Simply by being born, we are cast into relationships

that were not chosen for us, and whether or not we are greeted with love seems arbitrary. God intended for us to be trained in receiving and giving love by our parents and siblings, and especially our fathers. Our fathers were supposed to image the strength and love of God to us. Paul seems to imply this when he addresses God as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named [*that Father from Whom all fatherhood takes its title and derives its name*] (Eph. 3:14-15 Amplified, emphasis mine). For some of us, our fathers fell short of passing on this awareness of loving authority. Thus, God's redemptive work often takes on fatherly flavor.

In Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church, we find that we are being fathered by God. These words cultivate space within us for our created desires for love to be healed and filled. It is possible to know God's love in a way that surpasses categories of knowledge, resulting in the imitation of God in a life of love (Eph 5:1f). As Paul states elsewhere, "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (2 Thess. 3:5 NIV), there is a spirituality (Spirit-reality) here that the Spirit wants to implant in our souls, as well as inflame in our minds and imaginations.

Sometimes I wonder if Scripture would unravel us if we were more broken and open-hearted readers. For example, it is dangerously easy for us to quickly pass over mysterious words such as, "Jesus wept" and "filled to the measure of the fullness of God," with shallow familiarity or merely an interest to parse and scrutinize. Somehow we must

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## An Interview with Ian Jones

Dr. Jones is Professor of Psychology and Counseling; Assistant Dean, Division of Psychology and Counseling; and Director of the Baptist Marriage and Family Counseling Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). He earned one Ph.D. at SWBTS and another at the University of North Texas. He is the author of *The Counsel of Heaven on Earth: Foundations for Biblical Christian Counseling* (2006), which attempts to call Christians to reconsider old battle lines and take a fresh look at counseling and Scripture.

### Editor: What are some of the problems you see with secular psychology?

*Ian Jones:* Secular psychology is unable to comprehend Genesis. They are unable to understand that humans are created in the image of God and yet fallen. Because of this, they are not able to develop a worldview that can address humans as temporal beings as well as spiritual beings.

### Editor: What is your understanding of Christian psychology?

*Ian Jones:* Christian psychology should begin with God and build a biblical worldview in order to recapture the

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retrain our minds and imaginations to enter into the world of the Scriptures to the extent that they redefine our world—the world in which we live, breathe, work and love. Our goal, then, is to enter into the sacred task of listening with the view toward participating in what is going on. So, may God grant you to *listen* in a fresh way, as you read the following passage:

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (NIV)*

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul described in glorious detail the eternal purpose and pleasure of God in saving a people for himself. All of God's salvation work has resulted in the creation of a new people whom he now indwells (Eph. 2:21-22). He is describing a new Temple, one that is not made by hands, but rather indwells hands and feet, heart and brain. At the end of chapter three, his theology becomes overwhelmed with desire and he must bare his heart in prayer.

Paul's chief desire for himself and for us is to know God and enjoy his love. *Nothing is more important than this, for nothing short of experiencing the love of Jesus will transform us into imitators of his love.* As we are intimate with our Heavenly Father, we begin to take on the Father's characteristics. Intimacy with the Father, however, is fraught with problems and challenges. *How can we experience the love of God in such a way that we are deeply, substantially changed?* It takes nothing less than the awesomely tender power of God.

Paul's prayer contains two primary petitions for us to engage with and enter into, and they both have to do with power. *Power* is a key word in Ephesians (Eph 1:19, 21; 3:7, 16, 18, 20; 6:10), always referring to the strength of God in making the dead come alive to God. Without the power of God we will not taste deeply the love of God.

*Petition #1: I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (v. 16-17a).*

What comes to your mind when you think of displays of power? Allow your imagination to present symbols of power to your mind. What do you see? Though we can easily think of displays of power within creation (earthquakes, Niagara Falls, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.), the Scriptures present the resurrection of Jesus as the supreme display of power in (the new) creation (see Eph. 1:19-23). When Paul prays for power in the words we are considering, we should keep the resurrection in mind. Resurrection is the greatest display of the power and tenderness of God, for by it we are made alive and intimate with Him.

The request for power so that Christ may "dwell in our hearts through faith" has often been taken to refer to maturity in the Christian life, and it is certainly not less than that. But what is often overlooked in this passage is the raw intimacy it contains. There is something incredibly intimate about Jesus making his home in us; something amazingly tender and warm about these words and the realities they represent. To merely categorize them in terms of "Christian maturity" and "growth in Christlikeness" doesn't do them justice. The conceptual containers are simply too small, too narrow. Through union with Christ in the Gospel, we have been raised from the dead and seated with Christ in God. Further, by his Spirit God indwells our very souls. He has made his home in our hearts, and he invites us to join him there, surrendering everything that gets in the way of our enjoyment of one another. From this inner dwelling, God the Spirit exerts power in the form of compelling love and grace that manifests itself in gospel fruit.

"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same

way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.... I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love" (John 15:4, 9-10, NIV).

"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5, NIV).

*Petition #2: And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (v. 17b-19).*

It would be revolutionary to rethink the doctrines of justification and sanctification in light of this passage. What would happen, for example, if we took the phrase "rooted and established in love" to refer to our secured stance in Christ in justification? Further, what difference would it make for our sanctification if we understood it in terms of growing in the experience of "this love that surpasses knowledge?" Our traditional theological categories would be transformed by relational intimacy with God, theology ending in communion.

The metaphorical language of Paul (width, length, height, depth) is rich in significance for us. Most likely he is alluding to the vast dimensions of creation, and the presence of God all around us as described in Psalm 103:11-12, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (cf. Romans 8:38-39). Spatial metaphors are provided as guides for our imaginations as we seek to know the love of God.

The fullness of God answers our perpetual emptiness. Our lives are "full" of emptiness, places where there is a gnawing sense of lack or need. The Gospel invites us to bring our empty containers of pain and need (and our sinful attempts to fill ourselves) to the fullness of God issuing from the risen

been specifically intended for students of the New Testament and religion, it may be of interest to those in the SCP.

***Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal.* Eric L. Johnson Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2008. p. 716.**

This book is composed of four parts with three to seven chapters per part. The four parts are entitled "Background to the Current Predicament," "Texts and Contexts," "Let There Be Humans: The Semiodiscursive Constitution of Human Beings," and "The Communication of God's Glory in Christian Soul Care."

In these four parts, Johnson defines the problem as he sees it, leads the reader into considering the role of texts and communities (both ancient and modern), describes God's created order (and thus humans) in terms of a semiodiscursive model, and then concludes with the longest portion of the book in which he explores how this understanding could be fleshed out into a Christian psychology, and thus a model for soul care.

The book also includes two appendices that readers should not mistakenly overlook. In the first, "A Biblical Coherence Theory of Truth in Counseling," he explains the form of idealism that separates traditional biblical counselors from other forms of Christian counseling (even progressive biblical counseling) in order to help readers understand why they see things as they do. In the second, "Toward a Christian Semiotics for a Christian Psychology," he argues for a Christian semiotics—a view of semiotics that begins with the Christian God and thus radically departs from Saussure.

This volume is a must-read for all Christians who are interested in understanding people and counseling them, whether those

Christians label themselves as biblical counselors, integrationists, or anything else. Johnson is a remarkable thinker, an excellent writer, and a Christian who craves unity within the body of Christ. He works at providing the reader a way of thinking about the topics that is at once smart, theologically sound, and practicable. [Editor's note: Eric Johnson, the president of SCP, is far too modest to promote his remarkable book. The editorial choice to include it in our book briefs was entirely mine.]

***One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus.* J.I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. p. 223.**

The theological quarrels among evangelicals have led some to believe that a theological consensus is lacking within this group. Packer and Oden, representing "two distinguishable [but] related wings of modern evangelical history" (p. 15), show in this book that there is a core set of shared beliefs.

The book is structured around 16 chapters, each addressing a theological topic. For each topic, the book offers numerous portions of various evangelical statements of faith that address that particular topic. Thus, one can see for oneself the broad agreement among many different evangelical groups. In their conclusion, Packer and Oden draw several broad statements that they see as flowing from this project. The authors model an irenic tone, while identifying the Christian beliefs that unite evangelical believers in the Christian faith and not denying that these believers also have their share of differences. The emphasis on shared Christian beliefs with recognition of normal differences provides a useful approach for all in SCP.

## OTHER VOICES

"Theology is to be practical. By this, we do not mean, practical theology in the technical sense (i.e., how to preach, counsel, evangelize, etc.), but the idea that theology relates to living rather than merely to belief." Erickson, M.J. (1998). *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, p. 24.

"Idolatry is the worship of things made by ourselves. Originally, these were external things made by human hands. But idolatry also means worshiping internal psychological objects constructed from our psychological needs. The danger of loving a humanly-constructed God who satisfies our beliefs and desires has long been recognized by great religious writers. The life of spiritual maturity is often portrayed as a struggle against interpreting God in our own terms." Vitz, P.C. (1999). *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*. Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing, p. 144.

"God is holy, happy, wise, good, by his essence; angels and men are made holy, wise, happy, strong, and good, by qualities and graces. The holiness, happiness, and wisdom of saints and angels, as they had a beginning, so they are capable of increase and diminution, and of an end also; for their standing is not from themselves, or from the nature of created strength, holiness, or wisdom, which in themselves are apt to fail, and finally to decay; but from the stability and confirmation they have by the gift and grace of God." Charnock, S. (1996). *The Existence and Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Vol.1, p. 319. (originally published as *Discourse on the Existence and Attributes of God*, 1853, Robert Carter & Brothers).

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to say that the passage is about cognitive therapy. One should be careful not to read theories developed after the close of the canon (even Christian ones) back into the ancient text.

This passage might have particular relevance in avoiding inappropriate relationships in counseling. Since such relationships are in some sense negotiated through subtle cues in communication, it would make sense that these subtle messages reflect the hearts of the counselor and counselee. It suggests that the counselor and counselee may say things that reflect who they are and want—things of which they are foolishly unaware of communicating. Counselors must constantly monitor their own words and hearts, as well as the counselee's.

This passage also says that we will be judged by our words and this would mean that we will be judged for what we say (and possibly fail to say) while we counsel. This concept of judgment may have implications for both establishing a sense of divine accountability in counseling and a sense of clear boundaries between the counselor and counselee, for each is individually responsible for the words spoken.

What does this mean for our academic work? We can take note of what words and sentiments come from various writers, for these would reflect their hearts (their interior life and moral disposition). These insights also caution us in how we might critique the work of others, because our critique of their work would then reflect our own interior lives.

Erickson, recognizing the self-referential nature of theological critiques, wrote:

Every critique is made from somewhere. And the validity of the perspective from which such an evaluation is made must be

considered in determining how seriously the evaluation is to be taken. We do well to consider any such assertion to be the conclusion of a syllogism, and to ask what the premises of that syllogism are. Sometimes we will find that we are dealing with an enthymeme—an assumption, perhaps a disputed or questionable one, has been smuggled in instead of being made explicit. (Erickson, 1998, p. 60)

Erickson's point is explicitly about theological critiques and not moral critiques as found in Matthew 12; nevertheless, the two points are quite similar. What we say and write is inherently self-referential and the criticisms we level against others may reveal more about us than those we critique. This insight provides a powerful reminder for us in our academic work and a useful way of interpreting the criticism of others.

My purpose has been to encourage us to examine a passage of Scripture that might enrich our understanding of Christian psychology. We have attempted to look through this passage and allow it to speak from its historical and literary context. Then we examined what Jesus communicated about the psychological relationship between our hearts and our words. Only then did we consider what this passage might have to say to us about biblical anthropology, Christian psychology, Christian counseling, and our academic work. The goal was to take the passage seriously and then move to the practical implications of this passage.

You are encouraged to memorize this passage and meditate upon it. Observe the ways your words represent your heart. Remember the goal, according to this passage, is not so much to filter our speech as it is to "make the heart good" so that the words

that proceed from our interior lives will be good. The tree imagery suggests nurturing the heart the way one might nurture an ailing tree. The storerone imagery suggests taking care store worthy things there.

As you meditate on this passage, take care not to read a view of the heart (whether theological or secular) developed after the close of the canon into the passage, but instead remain focused on the broad, non-technical usage native to the New Testament. We may view those more recent explanations as "helpful," but they will not aid us in understanding what our Lord said in an ancient linguistic and cultural context.

Writing this essay was challenging since at every turn I was reminded that what I wrote would reveal who I am. By the way, critiques are welcomed, but of course they will also reveal who you are. According to our Lord, that is exactly what words do.

#### References

(To simplify the citations above, the three lexicons referenced were identified by acronyms (BAGD, FF, and LN). The reader should assume that the information sought can be found in the lexicon under the word identified in the context. Louw and Nida employ a numerical code, and for those citations the specific numerical code was provided.)

BAGD – Bauer, W., Arndt, W.F., Gingrich, F.W., & Danker, F.W. (2000). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Erickson, M.J. (1998). *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

FF – Friberg, T., Friberg, B. (2000). *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Bible Works 7 [computer software].

LN – Louw, J.P. & Nida, E.A. (Eds.). (1988). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2nd ed.). NY: United Bible Societies.

*New American Standard Bible* (updated edition). (1998). Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications.

*New English Translation Bible* (1<sup>st</sup> beta ed.). (2001). Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press.

Christ, who dwells within us. The metaphors of creation are given to us to help us in this process. For example, I like to go outside and scan the vastness of the horizon or gaze up at the stars and take in the immensity of the space above me. I sometimes spend time imagining myself swimming in an immense, bottomless ocean of God's great love for me. Further, we can also understand this spatial language to apply to the dimensions of our souls. For believers in Christ, every aspect of our createdness is included in this language. There is no part of us at any time that is devoid of God's love for us in Christ: Our past, present and future, the realm of our thoughts, memories, hopes and dreams; our deep wounds and tantalizing delights; our hidden, as well as our publicized, parts, etc.

In order for us to actually experience the love of God beyond mere doctrine, we need the power of God to redeem us from deep indwelling sin and remove the soul debris that clutters our being. He longs to bring us

to the place where we "come to know and to believe the love that God has for us" (1 John 4:16, ESV). The tender power comes from within us, from the indwelling Spirit who has "rooted and established" us in God's love. Only the Spirit can enable us to know the love of Christ that is beyond knowing. Only the Spirit can fill every empty pot, every dry well. I try to imagine what that would look like for my life. I use disciplines that allow me to get in touch with these empty places, the memories and experiences, wounds and strands of a damaged soul that often cause pain and shame. I confess my sin and unbelief. I try to stay in that place long enough for holy desire for God and His fullness to be born, remembering that each of us has a unique capacity for God and His love. Like tiny thimbles dipped into a vast ocean, God's overflowing fullness is waiting and available to fill us.

Being rooted in, and transformed by, the love of Christ brings God great glory (Eph.

3:20-21) because it displays His resurrection power in ways that are unique to each one of us. Our individual stories become suffused with the light of His love in Christ for us. The horizontal and vertical dimensions of our souls are sections of the home in which Christ dwells by faith. Further, His capacity to fill and bless us in Christ far surpasses our wildest imaginations. We can dare to be known and defined as one of "the disciple[s] whom Jesus loves" (John 13:23; 21:7, 20).

"God's love is based on nothing and the fact that it is based on nothing makes us secure. Were it based on anything we do, and that 'anything' were to collapse, God's love would crumble as well. But with the God of the Jesus no such thing can possibly happen. People who realize this can live freely and to the full (Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*, 18).

#### An Interview... continued from page 1

historical and biblical understanding of the study and cure of the soul, while engaging in and recognizing the contributions made by later discoveries. This approach includes the recapturing and rediscovering the rich resources found in Christian history. People such as Stephen Evans, Ellen Charry, Robert Roberts and Eric Johnson have helped here. We, therefore, push toward this goal of a more biblical worldview in psychology, having recognized the secular redefinition of the term psychology.

#### Editor: How has this redefinition of psychology influenced our view of soul care?

*Ian Jones:* Definitions are always important. Everyone from the new age to the postmodern is talking about the soul; all the while the naturalistic sciences discount it and merely conceive it as the product of a premodern dualistic view. The ancient idea of the "cure of the soul" reflects the importance of the Church in caring for, and loving, one's neighbor as a reflection of our love of God. We need to engage in getting people reconnected to God and one another.

#### Editor: Help me understand how this is related to the Church generally and then more specifically to counseling.

*Ian Jones:* The Church is commissioned to take the Gospel into the world and to build up the body of Christ—and that takes more than adding numbers. It also requires developing Christians. I see counseling functioning in both areas. We need "missionary counselors"

who recognize the mental health field as a mission field and we also need to bring a healing message. Within the Church, we have a responsibility to help in reconciling and healing. As counselors we need to communicate in the language of the people we counsel. Consider Paul's language in Acts 13 and 14. He uses language differently as he appeals to different audiences. This should also be true of us today.

#### Editor: The program that you direct prepares students for state licensure. How do you, given this perspective, see this functioning within a licensed profession?

*Ian Jones:* Our graduates can be found working in the local church, on the mission field, in hospitals, in private and community practices, as well as teaching in colleges, universities and seminaries. Licensed counselors must respect the autonomy of the individual as well as the laws of the state and institutions in which they work. However, it does not mean that they are to hide their light under a bushel—we are called to be salt and light in the world.

Let me be more specific. The approach I teach means that one should look for an opportunity. That is, one should look for the location of the counselee and identify where God is working. For example, suppose a graduate is working in a psych unit in a hospital leading group therapy. It is appropriate to ask the following two questions: Who are you and what is your purpose in life? There is no specific religious content here, but these questions tend to generate discussions that raise questions of eternal importance. What we have found in our experience is this. God

has often providentially placed a Christian counselee within the group who then speaks up and shares the Christian message or some element of the Christian worldview. A secular counselor would try to shut this down. A well-trained Christian counselor would have anticipated this discussion and then use this opportunity to help the counselees explore the aspects of their worldview that they find comforting and meaningful. We have had reports of counselees coming to faith in Christ. This approach simply means asking questions about location, being discerning about the answers, and guiding a therapeutic discussion.

#### Editor: How is this related to your book?

*Ian Jones:* The book originated with a simple question: What are the foundational principles upon which one can build a biblically-based approach to counseling? It was, in part, a response to the contentious debates that occur where one group is often identified as nouthetic and the other as integrationist. After working and teaching in the field for 20 years and then finding myself in Australia in 2002 with a Bible, lexicon, and concordance, I asked myself where one should begin with Christian counseling. The obvious answer to me is that you begin in Genesis.

What I found in Genesis chapter three is the first crisis counseling intervention. After the fall, Adam and Eve found themselves separated from God. It is surprising what God does. He does not begin by judging, disciplining, correcting, instructing or comforting. He begins with a question and follows it with other questions. His first



#### Book Briefs:

***Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity.***  
Mikeal C. Parsons. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. p. 191.

Parsons argues that the culture within which the New Testament arose commonly embraced physiognomy—the belief that one's physique communicates to a discerning observer something about the character of the person observed (i.e., the body reflects a person's soul or inner psychological life). This belief is documented in the first three chapters. The remaining four chapters provide examples (i.e., a bent woman, a short man, a lame man, and a eunuch) that appear to Parsons as an intentional attempt by Luke to subvert this commonly held belief. If Parsons' assessment is correct, then when children today sing about Zacchaeus, "the wee, little man," they are learning to reject this ancient approach

to psychology and are leaning to embrace a more Christian view of people (i.e., a Christian psychology).

This book may be of interest to those in SCP for several reasons. It provides an enlightening glimpse into an ancient diagnostic psychology. It shows how Luke may have responded to these beliefs by intentionally choosing counter examples in order to teach a profound Christian truth. It shows how early Christianity took in the outcasts as it redefined the concept of character. It possibly shows how early Christianity responded to a popular view of ancient psychology. It also reminds us that psychology has a very long history. Although this book may have

question is, “Where are you?” *Clearly* the answer is not for His benefit. He knew. It was a question that required an answer and it was about the *location* of Adam and Eve.

If this is a good starting point for God, then I thought it was a good starting point for me. Thus, I wanted to know where people are in their relationships to God, to self, and to others. I also concluded that if I were to be like Christ, then I needed to look at the traits of Christ. It dawned on me that in Isaiah 11:2, we find the traits of our Lord, the Perfect Counselor. Thus, the book

is about locating where counselees are, where they need to go, and what type of people counselors need to be to help them move along that journey.

**Editor: So who was your intended audience?**

*Ian Jones:* Good question. Everything has to be compared to Eric Johnson’s book now. Books such as his remarkable contribution are written for the academic community who understand something of our history, philosophy, theology, and psychology. I love

academic books, but my book is written for pastors, college students, lay counselors and seminarians. One should pursue education, but one should begin with, and not forget, the ABCs. I saw a basic need and wrote a basic book to address this need.

**Editor: Thank you. This newsletter wishes to help address the need for the practical and practicable. You have been very helpful in doing this.**

## A PSYCHOLOGY OF HEART AND WORDS

Mike McGuire

**Matthew 12:33-37** <sup>33</sup> “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. <sup>35</sup> The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. <sup>36</sup> But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (New American Standard, Updated)

A young adult male in his first counseling session intended to say, “The main problem is...” and then follow that with a list of work related issues. In that first session, he in fact said, “The *maiden* problem is...” and followed that with his work issues. He was oblivious to what he had said; the counselor was not. The counselor listened intently knowing the “maiden” would soon show up in the conversation. This counselor’s insight is not a new psychological idea. It predates modern psychology. It predates the term “Freudian slip.” It is an idea embedded in the relationship of the heart and the words that come from the heart. To examine this, let’s focus our attention on a paragraph found in Matthew 12 that provides remarkable insight into this relationship.

Matthew chapter 12 often garners attention because it mentions the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22-32). The paragraph to which I wish to direct our attention (i.e., Matt. 12:33-37) immediately follows that passage. Let’s work through this paragraph and understand it in context and then let us see what Jesus has taught us about the heart and words. And finally let us examine how the truths found there might contribute to our understanding of biblical anthropology, Christian psychology, Christian counseling, and even our academic work. If you will take the time to understand the passage, I believe you will find this passage relevant to what you do.

First consider the structure of the

paragraph. Jesus provided a statement about trees and fruit (v. 33) and then He applied and explained this statement to those who had blasphemed (v. 34). Jesus provided a second statement, this time about people, their treasuries, and treasures (v. 35), and then He explained and applied this statement (vv. 36 and 37). By comparing the statements with their explanations, we can discover what Jesus meant by these symbols (i.e., the trees, fruit, treasuries, and treasure) and begin to unravel what this passage tells us about the relationship between the heart and words.

With the context and structure identified, let’s dig a bit deeper into the wording. The words “tree” and “fruit” are straightforward translations. In v. 33, the word bad (*sapros*) likely means rotten, but since it modifies both fruit and tree it possibly carries the idea of diseased (LN 65:28; BAGD). If bad, in this context, specifically refers to diseased, then from within the semantic range of the word “good” (*kalos*) it would be reasonable to focus on the more specific meaning “sound” (i.e., healthy being the contrast of diseased). If this is correct, then Jesus mentions a sound tree with sound fruit and contrasted it with a diseased tree with diseased fruit.

Now what does Jesus mean when He says one should make the tree and the fruit good or diseased? Is He saying that one can at the same time make both the tree and the fruit healthy (or diseased), or is He saying that if one makes a tree sound, it will provide sound fruit, and if one makes the tree diseased, it

will provide diseased fruit? Although the wording in the Greek text does not provide a clue to the timing, our experience with trees and fruit to which Jesus appealed does help us. Thus, the New English Translation provides this: “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad.” Thus, this insight makes sense of Jesus’ explanation, “a tree is known by its fruit” (v. 33). The condition of the fruit tells us about the condition of the tree that produced it.

Immediately following this statement, Jesus asked those who had criticized Him, “How can you, being evil, speak what is good?” and then explains, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (v. 34). Jesus has shifted His language slightly. He has changed from symbols (trees and fruit) to both “you” and “speaking” and “hearts” and “speaking.” He thus explained His symbols. Just as trees produce fruit, people speak and their hearts produce words. His point is this: just as the fruit tells about the tree, the speech tells about the speaker and the words tell about the heart that produced the words.

In this verse, He changed the words He used for good and evil (He shifted from *kalos* and *sapros* to *agathos* and *poneros*). This slight change could be stylistic or purposeful. If it is purposeful, He changed to synonyms with different semantic ranges from the first pair. *Poneros* particularly carries the idea of worthless (which diseased fruit would be), but in moral contexts it refers to things that

are morally worthless, that is, things that are evil (BAGD). This change would then be appropriate for a shift from speaking of trees and fruit to speaking of hearts and words (and as we will see, the idea of worthlessness is particularly appropriate to His next illustration).

Jesus then asked those who criticized Him how anyone could expect those who are morally evil to speak things that are morally good and went on to explain that the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart. Just as there is a link between the health of a tree and the quality of its fruit, there is a link between the moral condition of a heart and the statements that emerge from that heart.

In verse 35, Jesus introduced new symbolism. We are now moved from trees and fruit to treasuries and treasures. In this illustration, we have two people who have each filled their respective treasuries (storehouses) with treasures and then, at times, remove these treasures. Again, one set of human-treasure-treasure is good (*agathos*) and the other set is evil (*poneros*). In this illustration, the heart is likened to a treasury or storeroom where words and ideas are stored for later use. In this illustration, the good person fills his heart (i.e., treasury) with good things and thus speaks good things (i.e., he brings good things out of the treasury); whereas, the evil person fills his heart (i.e., treasury) with evil things and thus speaks (or brings out) evil things. Thus Jesus, by use of this second illustration, explained what He meant by the phrase “what fills the heart” in the previous verse, a phrase that is more congruent with the storeroom illustration than the tree illustration.

Since the word translated evil carries the meaning morally worthless, Jesus observed that some people have stored worthless things in their treasury—a rather foolish use for such a valuable room. So we learn that some people store morally worthless things in their hearts, and then when they speak, they bring out these morally worthless judgments for everyone to see.

In verse 36, Jesus added that each person will be judged by the words spoken because these words reflect the heart. What is surprising here is that each person will actually be held accountable for each “idle” (*argos*) word. This might strike us as an unusual adjective with which to describe a “word.” Since *argos* means to be idle, unemployed or lazy, it could be picking up the nuance of “useless” (BAGD; LN, 30.44). According to Friberg and Friberg, it likely means in this context, that which is said “*without careful thought*” (italics in the original). Thus *argos* may be translated here as careless (see also BAGD; LN, 30.44). Jesus’ point is clear. If you want to know what is in the hearts of people, do

not merely listen to what they intend to say, but to the ideas they communicate carelessly or unintentionally.

What Jesus said in these verses begins to make sense when one takes note of what prompted Jesus’ monologue on hearts and words. When some in the crowd considered whether Jesus could be the Messiah (v. 23), the Pharisees scoffed at the idea and casually offered the explanation that Jesus had cast out devils by the power of the chief devil (v. 24). They had not intended to say this. It is merely what spilled out. Jesus was not offended at their accusations concerning Him (v. 32), but recognized that they had unintentionally equated the Holy Spirit with the chief of the devils (cf. vv. 24-31). Thus, his detractors had thoughtlessly blasphemed the Holy Spirit (v. 32). It is those “careless words” to which Jesus referred.

At the very end of the paragraph, Jesus concluded with this: “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (v. 37). Since the words spoken by His accusers had accurately reflected their hearts, then they will be judged according to those words. Their testimony against themselves meant that no other evidence was needed at their trial.

So what do these insights concerning the heart and words contribute to biblical anthropology? To answer this, it is important to consider the heart in the context of the broader linguistic framework of the New Testament. Examining a few New Testament lexicons will provide that context.

According to Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, the word *kardia* has two major meanings: (1) “heart as seat of physical, spiritual and mental life (as freq. in Gk. lit.)” and (2) heart as the “interior” or “center.” Louw and Nida say that *kardia* refers to “a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts.” Friberg and Friberg say *kardia* refers to the “interior self.” Thus, the words we speak emerge from this interior place, this psychological life, this interior self. Given this, Jesus is saying that there is a clear relationship between our psychological life (who we are at our core or in our interior self) and the words we speak.

We might note that these illustrations assume consistency in speech, for consistency fits the point that Jesus wanted to make to His detractors. So how do we understand Scriptural portrayals, as well as our own life experiences with inconsistencies in speech? If we were to draw this particular principle into a broader framework, it appears likely that since words reflect the heart, that inconsistent speech reflects an inconsistent heart. This inconsistency is seen as inappropriate.

Consider Jesus’ exhortation to “make the tree good” (v. 33). Consider also James’ warning against such verbal inconsistencies (cf. James 3:9-12 with 3:13-18). Inconsistencies can exist and we should seek to eliminate them.

What does this mean for Christian psychology? Christian psychology clearly overlaps with the concerns of biblical anthropology, but psychology is also interested in memory and speech in ways that theologians are not. Those among us who are particularly interested in how ideas appear to be stored, cross-referenced, and later accessed might find the parallel between this passage and other research interesting. In addition, those interested in psychological model making should take note that Jesus uses multiple images (biological and financial) to elaborate nuances. This may suggest that adequate articulation of psychological relationships in human languages may require multiple models, each of which articulates some particular aspects of complex human psychology.

What does this mean for the practical aspect of psychology, such as soul care and counseling? This suggests that the counselor cannot forget about “making the heart good.” Christian counselors should be careful concerning how we nurture our interior psychological lives (drawing from the tree illustration) and what beliefs we store in our interior self (drawing from the storehouse illustration). This is true of the counselor, for it is from this tree/storehouse that we speak in counseling sessions. This also suggests that what we say and do not say in counseling may reflect far more than we intend to reveal (an insight appreciated by everyone who functions as a supervisor of counselors). This insight is also true of the counselee. It appears that the discerning counselor can assess the nature of the counselee by listening to the counselee. Thus, counselors should learn to be discerning listeners and learn strategies for drawing out those we counsel. The more we know about the interior self of the counselee, the more we are likely to get to the deeper issues. When counselees are talking about the pains and disappointments in their lives, they are revealing how they see God, themselves, and their relationship to Him.

Those preferring a Christian approach, which may parallel cognitive behavioral or rational emotive therapies, may be tempted to see support here, but such a finding would necessarily go beyond the passage itself. The passage is specifically related to the heart and the words or ideas that emerge. It is not talking about all behavior and does not refer openly to emotions. However, since speech is an act and includes the expression of emotions, it is possible that this passage is relevant to this discussion, but it is too much