

Scriptural Pastoral Counselling or The Spiritual Model

Several scholarly analysis and assessments of Western society have taken place over the last few decades which have warned us that we are witnessing the decline and demise of our once great Christian culture. Such studies have warned us that the widespread rejection of the Judeo/Christian foundations of society are opening the doors to a "new barbarism."

What we are seeing and experiencing today is an attempt to reverse our inherited intellectual and moral heritage of the teaching of the Bible, the Christian world view with an outlook based on secular humanism. What we are also seeing with increased clarity is the failure of the secular outlook to form an adequate basis for man's spiritual, emotional and moral well-being and we are witnessing the enormous havoc such a failure is wreaking on the lives of individuals and upon society at large.

We might express the same truth another way and say that Western affluence masks the fact of our widespread spiritual and moral bankruptcy.

All this is manifested in an alarming increase in neurosis, nervous disorders, anxiety, depression and mental breakdown. We see these effects amongst all types of people young and old affluent and not so affluent and even including some Christians. (It was reported in April this year that there had been a 40% rise in the use of antidepressant drugs here in Great Britain.)

Jeremiah the prophet described how in his day a godless and selfish, pleasure seeking attitude to life had become the prevailing philosophy of the people. He described a society that was trying to sustain itself from cisterns that could hold no water. Jeremiah 2: 13. Secular humanism is a system that can hold no water, it cannot sustain us.

We are all conscious of this decline. The very air we breathe seems to be tainted with unbelief. We live in a society that is alienated from God and alienated from itself.

It is no wonder that depression, frustration, loneliness and despair are so prevalent. It is no wonder that living in such an atmosphere can get even the strongest believers down.

One has described times in which we live as follows:

Western culture is fast sinking, even now, into bitterness and savagery as our hopes of happiness through material advance vanish. The frantically optimistic voices which still sound, like phonograph records stuck in the same groove, are heeded less and less; ... behind the ballyhoo, despair, strident or quiet, is taking over. Facing this onrush of cynicism, this universal and seemingly unstoppable epidemic is creeping through Western culture as rabies is creeping through Western Europe, we may well ask: have Christians anything useful to say?

J. I. Packer Christianity: The True Humanism p.87

What I have been asked to do in these two lectures is to remind us all that the Bible does have a great deal to say to these issues, and to remind pastors and Christians in generally of the vast stores of encouragement, counsel, support, direction, guidance, warning, and help we have here in the Scriptures.

1. I want to emphasize the enormous resources we have in the Word of God to support those who are cast down in spirit. And indeed to enable us to prevent us from being too often cast down.
2. I want to try and remind us all that there is a Biblical pattern for living and coping with the demands of life as it is in this world; **and that this is the only remedy, pattern and workable model for man's predicament today.** We as pastors and teachers have responsibility to know this model and make it known.

Our Puritan forebears developed a massive and profound literature on a vast range of pastoral and personal difficulties. They had a well developed diagnostic system and were well aware of the tensions, struggles and difficulties ordinary men and women faced in living out the Christian life. They gave counsel in all the same sort of areas and difficulties that arise today addictions to sex, food, alcohol as well as marital problems, family relationships, depression/ melancholy etc.

Timothy Keller has written:

The Puritans probably would not find themselves fitting in comfortably to most of the existing "schools" in the evangelical counselling field. They probably would find some counsellors overly concerned to "raise self esteem" when man's main problem is self worship. Yet, on the other hand they would not be in agreement with those who completely ignore or even reject the importance of reprogramming the self understanding through the penetration of Gospel truth. They would find many biblical counsellors are being far too superficial and that treatment problems by merely calling for surface repentance and behavioural change. But they would be quite uncomfortable with the "inner healing" approaches which virtually ignore behaviour and the need for mortification. In fact, the Puritans would be quite unhappy talking about peoples "unmet needs" because at bottom they believe a man does not have abstract, only a necessity for worship.

Above all, the Puritans would differ quite a bit from other counsellors today. Most modern evangelical counsellors simply lack the firmness, directness and urgency of the Puritans. Most of us talk less about sin than did our forefathers. But, on the other hand, the Puritans were amazingly tender, encouraging, always calling the counselees to accept the grace of God and extremely careful not to call a problem "sin" unless it was analyzed carefully. One of their favourite texts was: "A bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench."

(Internet article)

I emphasize *only workable model* because it alone gives us a right understanding of man's nature and man's predicament. As any good doctor will tell us, **it is sheer madness and a waste of time to attempt any kind of treatment without an accurate diagnosis, without a proper understanding of the patient's condition.**

The Secular humanist view of man is entirely inadequate

The secular humanist view of man sees man as merely an evolved animal with no spiritual dimension (in the Biblical sense) at all.

The secular humanist also denies that man is made in the image and likeness of God, and is therefore is not accountable for his actions, indeed the secular humanist does not think that there is an ultimate right and wrong anyway.

The secular humanist does not see man as made a noble being, made a little lower than the angels, but also a fallen being, spoiled and ruined by sin, a rebel against God and that all these things deeply affect our thoughts, emotions and our actions. All of which was so well expressed by Augustine when he said, *Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless, until we find our rest in thee.*

The secular humanist has a mistaken false view of man and therefore when he seeks to provide an answer and a remedy for the predicament of man he is bound to fail because his diagnosis is completely wrong.

The secular humanistic view of man has penetrated the church

We also need to be aware that this secular view of man has penetrated into teaching and ministry of the church. Whereas the Bible believing Christian was taught and is taught that the chief aim and end of man is Godliness. *Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.* This has been replaced in many churches today by aims altogether influenced by modern secularism ie. the goal of self fulfilment, the pursuit of personal happiness, personal well being, personal success, good personal relationships and freedom from trouble.

The shelves of many Christian bookshops are full of titles claiming to teach Christians how to develop successful relationships, even of how to find success in their sexual lives, business lives or professional lives. The *me* generation, the *me* culture and outlook has very much invaded the church.

One extreme example of this kind of thing is Robert Schuller's ministry at the Crystal Cathedral, California. Schuller says he believes in salvation by grace, but what he actually believes is that salvation is being rescued from poor self-esteem. He has said such things as "*classical theology has erred in its insistence that theology be "God centered," not "man centred."* "*The core of original sin is lack of trust, or it could be considered an innate inability to value ourselves. Label it a "negative self image" but do not say that the central core of the human soul is wickedness.*" Self-esteem: The New Reformation p.67

Another important factor that we need to touch on in our introduction is the that this secular view of man has profoundly influenced the so-called Christian Counselling Movement.

It could be argued that its first origins go back as far as the heresies of the early church, particularly Pelagius' view of man, who argued that man by his own strength and determination could bring about his own salvation. The same teaching can be traced through the so called "*New Methods*" of Charles Grandison Finney in the early and mid 19th century. Certainly it was an aspect of the teachings of Harry Emerson Fosdick in the USA and Dr. Leslie Weatherhead in England who began to introduce modern psychological therapy teachings into their sermons and used them in the counselling of troubled souls in the middle years of 20th century.

The present day Christian Counselling Movement whilst claiming to be Biblical has in some cases been massively influenced by the outlook, world views and methods of 20th century psychotherapists.(The 20th century might well have been called the century of psychotherapy) **There is cause for concern when it is remembered that many of the founders of the psychotherapy movement were positively anti-Christian in their outlook.**

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) said to be the Father of movement, was clearly motivated by a self-confessed desire to subvert Christianity. One has said of Freud, "*Freud is a secularist or atheist, and his therapeutic work is an idolatrous substitute for the kind of self understanding that comes only through Revelation.*" (Peter Homans, *Theology after Freud* p.13). We might remind ourselves that Freud's thought is everywhere in the secular world, it has affected the social sciences, the humanities, the professions it is in the "culture". Freud thought has been to use a Freudian term "integrated" into the fabric of many fundamental disciplines. Freud was certainly one of those who laid the foundations of what is now called the Permissive Society.

Alfred Adler was a humanist who supported the anarchic philosophies of Nietzsche.

Carl Rogers rejected all moral authority other than his own experience.

Concern that the methods of psychotherapy are not scientifically proven have been voiced from both Christian and non-Christian sources. We would certainly not be alone in claiming that psychotherapy is not a science. Martyn and Derdrie Bobgan have stated that "psychotherapy is not a coherent science in principle or in theory, diagnosis or treatment."

Jay Adams was one of the first to identify the so-called Christian Psychotherapy movement as a threat to evangelical Christianity. He argued that Scriptural teaching on sanctification and holiness, and walking in the way of God, was being undermined and replaced by the secular gods of personal awareness, psychological healing, wholesomeness seeking, and self actualization. That spiritual renewal was being replaced by psychological renewal. (Highly respected as Dr, Adams is, some have argued that in his later works he himself embraced some of the principles of the psychotherapy school)

Through the influence Psychotherapy Movement many evangelicals have in fact (no doubt in many cases unwittingly) fallen into the ways of the 19th century and early 20th century liberals who abandoned the belief in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, taught that salvation was a natural thing something that man himself played a large part in, and also believed in the innate goodness of the human self.

Many discerning individuals have rightly pointed out that in late 20th century evangelicalism there had come about a shift in emphasis from being God centred to being excessively human centred. Whilst there is a right and proper self esteem, the emphasis amongst modern psychotherapists have emphasized the importance of the self-esteem beyond all proportion.

Dr. D.S. Williams puts it like this in his book *The Dark Side of Christian Counselling*.

One of the fruits of the Christian counselling scene is the emergence, over the last three decades, of a new therapeutic "gospel" that aims to meet the psychological needs of the congregation. Such is the impact of the "psychologising" of the Gospel that the message from the pulpits of many Bible – believing churches has undergone a subtle change, their being a growing consensus that traditional teachings about sin, wrath and judgment make the Gospel message sound unattractive in a modern world.

In Today's Gospel – Authentic or Synthetic? Walter Chantry describes the message of the modern evangelist. "Audiences are reminded that they are sad, lonely, discouraged, and unsuccessful. Life is a great weight to them. Troubles encompass them. The future holds dark threats. Then sinners

are invited to come to Christ, who will change all of that and put a smile on their faces. He is pictured as a cosmic psychologist who will patch up all problems in one session on the enquiry couch. There is no reminder of the discipline which Christ demands. No suggestion is given that following Jesus Christ is sacrificial and painful.

Contemporary worship has also become a vehicle for expressing the contemporary psychological way. The modern songs that have replaced traditional, doctrinally sound hymns in the majority of evangelical churches, have a strong focus on "me" my emotional needs and longings. In "Losing our Virtue" David Wells draws attention to the therapeutic nature of modern songs. God is valued "to the extent that he is able to bathe these wounds, assuage these insecurities, calm these fears, restore some sense of internal order, and bring some sense of wholeness.

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Words and expressions such as self-esteem, dysfunctional family, co-dependency, support, unconditional love, needs, and damaged emotions, and victimization have suddenly become well-known and well used words and expressions in many modern evangelical circles.

The implication behind much of this thinking seems to be that for 2000 years the Bible as being insufficient to provide counsel for troubled souls or to encourage believers to live the sanctified life, but now the insights of the psychotherapists have come to make good this deficit.

Now in the light of this brief introduction, let us turn to what our forefathers in the faith can teach us about the counselling of men and women in this great matter of living out the Christian life, and of coping with the cares, discouragements and difficulties we will meet with on the course of every day life in the word.

Putting it this way we might mention the Pilgrims Progress and the Holy War, John Bunyan identified most of those difficulties and gave us directions for avoiding them and remedies for curing them, out of his great knowledge of Scripture and his knowledge of the human heart which he learnt by observing God's dealings with his own heart in the light of scripture... To quote Kipling's poem on the Holy War.

He mapped for those who follow,

The world in which we are-

This famous town of Mansoul"

That takes the Holy War.

Her true and traitor people,

The Gates along the wall,

From Eye-Gate unto Feel-Gate,

John Bunyan showed them all.

*All enemy divisions,
 Recruits of every class,
 And highly screened positions
 For flame or poison gas:
 The craft that we call modern,
 The crimes that we call new,
 John Bunyan had 'em typed and filed
 In Sixteen Eighty-two.*

The Holy War, p.286 Works

I mention this at the beginning to illustrate the main point of what I am trying to bring to you in these two sessions that our forefathers looking to Scripture for their understanding of and dealing with the problems of the hearts of men and women have a tremendous store of knowledge and understanding to teach us today. Like them we need a Scriptural approach as opposed to a secular approach, or as we might say a Scriptural approach as opposed to a Secular approach thinly discussed as a Scriptural approach.

The Biblical Model of Sanctification

First theologically/ pastorally this whole subject comes under the heading of sanctification. Bringing the mind and heart into its right state, traditionally comes under the title of Sanctification

We need briefly to remind ourselves of the definition of sanctification.

Describe the doctrine of sanctification. The Westminster Confession describes the doctrine of sanctification as follows:

1. They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part: whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

3. In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the Saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Points to note.

1. Sanctification is ours as the reward and fruit of Christ's death and resurrection. *He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free.*

2. Sanctification works in us through the Word and Spirit dwelling in us.

3. It requires us to be conversant with the Word of God and subject to the Word of God. *Sanctify us through thy truth.*

4. Thomas Watson says: *The Word is both a glass to show us the spots of our soul, and a laver to wash them away.*

5. The Spirit of God works within us. It is very necessary to make it clear that it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies us. It may be asked how can this be the case when we ourselves are called to wage a relentless conflict with sin. How can struggle which engages every ounce of our strength and will, be the work of the Holy Spirit? The answer is of course that "*It is God (the Holy Spirit) who worketh in us that we might "will and do."*" Philippians 2: 13.

6. It is God which creates that *new nature* which must engage in the conflict with sin.

7. *His work does not make our work unnecessary but the rather makes it certain.*

G.I. Williamson. The Westminster Confession of Faith p.116

Now we must come to the main part of our study that is to set out a biblical model or pattern of sanctification or Christian living and see, take careful note, of how it radically differs from the model set out by the advocates of the so called Christian psychotherapy movement.

1

The first element of the Biblical model/pattern of sanctification is that in life we must put God and the Life of holiness first; this must be our chief priority.

Here now we are seeking to set out the various elements biblical sanctification. A Biblical, Puritan or Reformed model of sanctification.

1. The great aim and purpose of life is the pursuit of holiness, not self fulfilment, not self satisfaction etc. man could be made for no higher purpose, no higher blessing, no higher fulfilment than to glorify God. To have God at the centre of life and to make God our all in all is the goal and purpose of the call to sanctification. *Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee.* (Augustine).

We might think of the first 3 of the 10 Commandments. Thou shalt have no other gods before me, thou shalt not make any graven image, thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

One important truth that these Commandments teach us is that God and not me is supreme.

We might also note that these first Commandments teach us that it is God who delivers us and brings us out of the slavery of sin.

The God of the Bible is a God of reason. He gives the reason for the First Commandments. He reminds Israel that he is the Lord their God, who brought them out of bondage in Egypt. So he reminds them that He loved them, saved them and that He gave them freedom.

Christ gave us a summary of the first Commandments. He made it even plainer; that we should love God with all our hearts, minds, soul and strength. And the reasons, too, are even stronger; that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

First Things First Fred Catherwood p.21

Calvin has defined piety as the right attitude of man toward God. It is an attitude that includes true knowledge, heartfelt worship, saving faith, filial fear, prayerful submission, and reverential love.

The goal of piety is that God may be glorified in us, that is the end for which we were created. Those that know Christ as Saviour long to live out the purpose of their original creation. The pious man, confesses according to Calvin, "We are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.

See Jonathan Edwards..... Dissertation on the End (purpose) for which God created the World.

God in seeking his glory, seeks the good of his creatures; because the emanation (outflowing) of his glory (which he seeks and delights in, as he delights in Himself and his own internal glory) implies that communicated excellency and happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself; because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing, but the emanation and expression of God's glory: God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself: and in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused and expressed, he seeks their glory and happiness.

p.105 Works vol. 1

What Jonathan Edwards is saying is that God is like a fountain of goodness, and delights to spread his own goodness and happiness. This is not to say that God is choosing to do any of this for his creatures as such. God had this delight before he had ever chosen to create. Rather, God's great aim is to express his goodness and happiness. Thus God's acting for himself, or making himself his last end, and his acting for his people's sake, are not to be set in opposition.

In this Jonathan Edwards has brilliantly cut through a quandary. For if we say God's sole aim in creation is himself, we make God sound selfish, as if he is merely using us for his own purposes; but if we say God's sole aim is us and our good, we sound selfish, as if we were using God. But for Edwards, God's great goal is his own glory (God is not subservient to some higher purpose than himself); and yet that highest purpose is self giving, not self-serving.

Based on Jonathan Edwards, On Giant's Shoulders Michael Reeves p.110

Therefore we see that it was the great aim and business of our forefathers in the faith, to seek God and to make God central and God foremost in their lives. If we are going to live life in the right way

we must begin with God and we must make the aim of all life the pursuit of holiness to his glory. This is completely opposite to the modern emphasis on the gratification of self and the gospel of self-esteem.

We begin to see how this putting God first in life begins to work out in the practicalities of daily living and coping with the trials and tragedies of life in the well-known story of Martin Luther and the farmer.

Luther travelling one day finds a farmer sitting by the roadside with his head in his hands and looking as if all the troubles of the world were laid upon his shoulders.

"What is the matter?" Said the warm hearted – pastorally hearted Luther.

The farmer told his sad tale. "Last night my farm was destroyed by fire, my house and all my farms, a lifetime's work have gone up in flames. I've lost everything, I don't know how I can carry on."

Luther looked at him and with great feeling said:

"Do you know the Apostles Creed?"

Surprised, perhaps taken aback by the question, nevertheless the farmer replied that he did.

"Then say it," said Luther, "and say it with conviction."

What Luther was doing is bringing back to the despondent farmer's mind the truths of the Gospel he professed. That the only way out of despondency was to once again set God before his eyes and all that God had done in Christ for his sake and salvation. He was causing him to think about his problem view his problem in Biblical terms, in the light of Biblical reality.

I believe in God the father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth,

And in Jesus Christ his only Our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified dead and buried:

He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, The holy catholic church; The communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen

This is a very simple illustration of the fact that the great Christian doctrines are the antidotes to worldly despondancy. *Nil Desperandum Auspice Deo*. Never despair under the auspices of God. When God is on our side there is no cause for despair. (Motto of Sunderland)

Thinking of the great Christian doctrines as being antidotes to despondency I might quote the Puritan Robert Bolton's words when he said that a believer standing upon the solid ground of justification, furnished with grace and fortified with a sense of God's favour is "*able to pass through the pikes and conquer all, comers.*"

In contrast with the spirit of a justified man or woman, which can be mightily strengthened in the day of trouble, there is the spirit of a man and a woman who has no comfort whatsoever because he or she is at odds with God. The torture of a troubled conscience is intolerable. In all other afflictions, says Bolton, "*we have to do but with man, or with devils; but in this transcendent mystery we are in conflict with God himself: frail man with Almighty God, sinful man against most holy God... Who can abide the fierceness of his anger?*" If God's wrath is against a man all other comforts fail; wife, friends, honours, success or pleasures all are of no avail.

Eroll Hulse Foundations 1982 p. 10

The doctrine of original sin the great antidote to pride.

The doctrine of providence is the great antidote to despare.

May I emphasis this seeking to live to the glory of God the life of holiness as the great goal of life by just a few more illustrations.

The well-known Robert Murray McCheyne of Dundee, Scotland, once said:

"My people's greatest need is... (Not as might have been answered today by many pastors... My people's greatest need is that I should have greater counselling skills or expository skills or other ministerial accomplishments.) but... "My people's greatest need", "is my personal holiness." We don't so much think like this today. Our forefathers took the whole business of sanctification far more seriously than we do.

We are already seeing that the 17th-century Puritans saw the pursuit of holiness as the chief business of their lives.

Later John Wesley was to state his priority not as we might have suspected to evangelize the nation or some similar statement but rather to "*spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.*" I know some of the 18th Century Pietists got the balance between justification by faith alone and the pursuit of holiness quite wrong, as others in its pursuit mistakenly thought it to be found through the rigours of the monastic life, but this is not to say the pursuit of holiness in the right way for the right motive is the chief business of the Christian.

One of the great Christian books of the 19th century was the Anglican Bishop JC Ryle's **simply titled "Holiness."**

see Calvin's The Golden Booklet

"Let us therefore not seek our own, but that which pleases the Lord and is helpful to the promotion of his glory. There is a great advantage in almost forgetting ourselves and in surely neglecting all selfish aspects; for then only can we try faithfully to devote our attention to God and his commandments.

This runs contrary to the excessive man centeredness of much of modern evangelicalism and its over emphasis on techniques and "how to" methods and strategies for running our lives and our churches. We forget our Lord said *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

In seeking to construct a Biblical model of sanctification and of Christian living let this be our first point and emphases. God first, seeking to give him glory through a life of faith and holiness.

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II

We Must Seek to Conform our Lives to the Pattern of The Word of God

Our second point of emphasis must be on the Word of God. Our forefathers in the faith and especially and outstandingly the Puritans were absolutely clear about the source of knowledge for the cure of souls, pastoral counselling, for knowing how to live life, and that source was unmistakably the Word of God. They were committed to the functional authority of the Scriptures.

The Bible was and always should be supreme the matter of the cure of souls. John Owen gave this sober and balanced advice to all engaged in the cure of souls, that there was no substitute for:

A diligent study of the Scriptures, meditation thereon, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things and temptations of their own souls with prudent observation made of the work of his grace in them. Without these things, all pretences unto the ability and duty of the pastoral office are vain.

Quoted by Daniel Webber. Office and Work of the Minister. Westminster Conference Papers 1986.

John Flavel has a sermon entitled, *The Character of a Complete or Evangelical Pastor as Drawn by our Saviour*. It is based on Matthew 24:45 – 47.

Flavel comments, *The labours of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten old age and death.... How many truths have we to study! How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption to detect! How many cases of conscience to resolve. Yea, we must fight in defence of the truths we preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them unto faintness: but we will spend head, heart, lungs and all; welcome pained breasts, aching backs, and trembling legs, if we can by all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servant, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, "Well done, good and faithful servant."*

Works volume 6 p. 568.

William Perkins makes the same emphasis on diligence and labour in discovering the doctrine of the text and its spiritual message and application to the lives of the people. All diligence in private study is to be used, again emphasizing that a pastor must labour to show himself approved of God, a workman who need not be ashamed.

Westminster Conference Papers 1986 p. 63

The Westminster Directory states:

(The preacher) is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the Word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.

Public Worship Denver and Ferguson p.48, see also p.64

The Puritans spoke of "painful preaching" by which they didn't mean preaching that was hard to follow or understand, or keep awake under, but preaching in which great pains had been taken in preparation and application.

The applying of the Word to the Conscience

In order that they and their hearers might live in a right way they sought to apply God's word to the conscience. They believed in the healing and restorative power of God's truth. The revealed truth of God had very much to do with living life in the world. The Word of God teaches us how to live.

Perkins spoke of theology as, "*The science of living blessedly forever*". (P.84 Packer Among God's Giants) he went on to say, "*theology is essentially a practical matter.*"

Similarly Richard Baxter said, "*God's revealed truth is for health giving practice.*" Or in other words how to live a spiritual, morally healthy and good life.

A common maxim amongst the Puritans was "*Truth obeyed will heal.*"

The Word fits us, because we are all spiritually sick – sick through sin which is a wasting and killing disease of the heart. The unconverted are sick unto death; those who come to know Christ and have been born again continue sick but they are gradually getting better as the work of grace goes on in their lives. All Christians need Scripture truth as medicine at every stage, and the making of and accepting of new applications of it is the administering and swallowing of it. The ability to apply God's truth therapeutically implies the prior ability to diagnose spiritual ill – health, and the diagnostic abilities learned as much by discovering and keeping track of one's own sins and weaknesses as by any other means.

The Puritans so taught Scripture as they and their hearers might rightly understand themselves and appraise their actions and see their responsibilities. These responses would range over the whole area of faith, hope, and love; repentance, humility, and self distrust; self denial, self devotion, and obedience; praise, thanksgiving, adoration and petition: plus the various dispositional "affections" (these being not just waves of passing emotion, but set inclinations of the heart) that contributed to one's keeping close to God and being in communion with Him.

When the Puritans spoke of Christian experience they were not usually describing heightened emotional experiences – they were describing the experiences of everyday living the Christian life, the life of faith and obedience to God's Word.

They took the Bible as a book of normative experiences as they took the Bible as a book of normative doctrines.

William Tyndale sometimes called the first Puritan said *Seek therefore in Scripture as thou readest it, first God's Law, what God commandeth us to do: and secondly the promises, that is the Gospel in our Lord Jesus Christ. And thirdly seek examples, first examples for our comfort, and then examples of how God purges all them that submit themselves to walk in his ways. And finally note the examples which are written to warn the flesh that we sin not; that is, how God suffereth the ungodly to continue in their sin and how ultimately God destroyeth them.*

Peter Lewis in his *The Genius of Puritanism* described Puritan counsellors as follows:

The Puritans were physicians of the soul, skilled enough to avoid that vagueness and subjectiveness which leaves the anguished soul clutching at uncertain straws of uncertain hope. They believed the Word of God in Scripture to be, comprehensive enough to cover every basic human condition and, knew their Scriptures well enough to apply with responsible authority the available salve to the exposed sore. They were also clear, logical and fearless enough to apply these Scriptures. This is not to imply shallow application of proof texts to particular situations, this deduction could not be more astray. These men had such a grasp of Scripture as a whole that even though they may begin to treat a problem by opening up a particular verse of Scripture, before long the full scope of Scriptural truth – with all its balancing nuances – would be brought bear upon the condition.

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They had absolute confidence in the fact that Scripture deals with real people passing through the deep and difficult experiences of life and that it provided a well of inexhaustible usefulness in addressing the real-life everyday difficulties of people.

This aspect seems to have been lost sight of and become neglected in many quarters today and it is into this vacuum that the psycho-therapy movement has moved.

One has said, "*psychotherapy rings bells in the realm of peoples experience of life.*" It has something to say to people in serious trouble. It has answers, *they may not be the right answers, they may be misleading answers and remedies, but it has answers to the difficulties people face every day. They do have something to say to people facing terrible and destructive addictions, to people overcome with anxieties and fears, to people facing marriage or family breakdown, to the young couple who ask how do I bring up my children in a day like this, or to some sinking soul struggling in a slough of despond or depression.*

Again I stress not the right answers the fact remains that psychotherapy has laid claim to the vital areas, the things that are deep and significant, such as the intricacies of human motivation, defensiveness, interpersonal conflict, communication between individuals, anger, anxiety, sin, depression, guilt, shame, grief etc.

What we need to emphasis is that these very areas are dealt with in Scripture. Scripture may not use all these terms but they are the very areas that the Holy Spirit has chosen to address – the very issues which the Bible has so much to say.

St. Paul reminds us that the Scriptures are profitable for:

doctrine (teaching) reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness (ie.nurturing and training in the life of righteousness).

II Timothy 3:16

Scripture teaches us how to live, what we should do, how we ought to behave. It is to be constantly applied to the conscience, it brings before us our duty, how we should judge ourselves, how we should order our lives, how we should treat other people, how we should conduct all our business and carry out our responsibilities.

It includes of course repentance, faith in Christ, humility, hope, love, devotion to God, obedience, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, prayer. It speaks to counsel us regarding all the various emotional aspects and feelings of life, joy, sorrow, desire, fear etc.

As an example of way the Puritans applied Scripture in detail to the living of everyday life, and the problems of everyday life, no better example than that of Richard Baxter in his famous *Christians Directory*.

Take for an example his *Twenty Directions, How to Grow in Grace*.

1. *Make sure your faith is real and not merely nominal.*
2. *Make sure you not only believe but practice the truth.*
3. *Seek to increasingly grow in the understanding of the faith you profess.*
4. *Do not first meddle (get involved) with controversies of religion, seek love and humility, charity, holiness and heavenly mindedness.*
5. *Be very thankful for the great mercy of God in your conversion but do not stop at conversion, seek to advance knowledge and holiness.*
6. *Do not be discouraged at the difficulties that will rise up before you when you seek to walk with God.*
7. *If it be in your power, live under a judicious, faithful, serious, searching ministry, and diligently attend.*
8. *Keep right appreciations of the excellency of charity and unity amongst believers, and received nothing hastily that is against them.*
9. *Take heed lest any persecution or wrong from others, provoke you to any unwarrantable actions and practices and deprive you the charity, meekness, and innocency of a Christian.*
10. *When you are repenting of or avoiding any extreme, do it not without sufficient the caution of the contrary extreme.*
- 11 and 12 are about controversies and how to act when they arise.
13. *Know that true godliness is the best life on earth and the only way to perfect happiness.*

14. *Be very diligent in mortifying the desires and pleasures of the flesh: and keep a constant watch upon your senses, appetites and lusts.*

15. *Be exceedingly wary, not only of what teachers you commit the guidance of your souls unto but also with what company you familiarly, converse.*

16. *Make careful choice of the books you read. Let Holy Scripture have the pre-eminence. Be careful of the influences you allow your- self to come under. Beware of the dangers of worldly thinking and godless philosophies.*

17. *Beware of antinomianism, or libertineism as Baxter calls it. ie neglect of God's Law.*

18. *Watch diligently both against the more discernible decay of grace also of religious duties.*

19. *Promise not yourself long life, nor prosperity and great matters in the world, lest it enlarge your hearts with transitory things, and encourage ambition or covetous desires that steal away your hearts from God.*

20. *See that your religion be purely divine and animated all by God as the beginning, the way, and the end; and that first upon thy soul, and then upon all that thou hast or dost, there be written "HOLINESS TO THE LORD;" and that thou corrupt not all with an inordinate hypocritical respect to man.*

To be holy is to be divine, devoted to God and appropriated to him, and his will, and use; that our hearts and lives be not common and unclean. To be godly, is to live to God, as those from their hearts believe that he is God indeed, and that "he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him," that he is "our God all – sufficient, our shield and exceeding great reward," and that "of him and through him and to him are all things," that all may give glory to him for ever and for ever. God should be First, and Last, and All, in the mind, and mouth and life of a believer. God must be the principal matter your religion. The understanding and will must be exercised upon him....

Baxter also gives 40 very practical and helpful descriptions of the nature of sin and what sin does to us.

This minute of detail is not tedious but gives us a pattern and a method for identifying problems and difficulties and their source, and of how to deal with them. pp 86-88.

Another example would be that of Richard Rogers (1550-1618) in his Seven Treatise.

The full title of the book is a lesson in itself:

Seven treaties, containing such direction as is gathered out of the Holy Scriptures, leading and guiding to true happiness, both in this life, and in the life to come: and may be called the practice of Christianity. Profitable for all such as heartily desire the same: in the which, more particularly true Christians may learn how to lead a godly and comfortable life every day.

Rogers came to be aware as a pastor that many people had serious questions about how to live the Christian life. They asked very detailed and specific questions, but none of the devotional books available at that time gave correspondingly detailed answers. There seemed to be few books from a Protestant standpoint that were available to answer the questions people were asking. In this work

Rogers seeks to give very precise answers. One critic accused him of being too precise to which he replied, "*I serve a precise God.*"

The following is an example of the type of advice he gave. Here is some of his advice on how every day should be ordered toward God.

1. First that every day we should be humble for our sins, as through due examination of our lives by the Lord God we shall see them.
2. That every day we be raised up in assured hope of the forgiveness of them, by the promises of God in Christ.
3. That every day we prepare our hearts to seek the Lord's will, and keep them fit and willing thereto.
4. That every day we strongly, and resolutely arm ourselves against all evil and sin, fearing most of all to offend God.
5. That's every day we nourish our fear and love of him, and joy in him more than in anything, and endeavour to please him in all duties, as occasion shall be offered, looking for his coming. (2 Thess. 3:5)
6. That every day thanks be continued for benefits received, and still certainly hoped for.
7. That every day we watch and pray for steadfastness and constancy in all things.
8. That every day we hold and keep our peace with God, and so lie down with it.

This book of Rogers really inaugurated a whole genre of Puritan writing which influenced all departments of life for many generations. It is a literature of great value, and great worth for us to study and apply today.

William Haller's comments in *The Rise of Puritanism* a well worth pondering on.

To the modern mind, judging hastily and often with a prejudiced hostility towards the facts, the 16th century Puritan may seem a morbid, introspective, inhibited moral bigot and religious zealot. To the common man of the time this was not so. The Puritan preacher proffered to a multitude in his own age (what seemed) enlightenment and a new freedom. He proffered the means to a more active and significant life, a means of overcoming fears, a counsel of courage, a vision of adventure for courage to undertake, a program of self-discipline for making adventure a success, a prospect of success certain to be attained sooner or later. Rogers in the language of his day states this clearly in the "entrance into the book, or preface to the reader." He wrote the book, he says, because he knew of no writer who had set before men's eyes "as in a glass" the infinite, secrets and deceitful corruptions of their own hearts whence arise the evils of this life. Neither did he know any writer who had drawn up directions for daily use which would enable men to govern their own hearts and so overcome the wants and, infirmities, rebellions, inferences and other discouragements by which they are afflicted. "And therefore, not to be as men that have no such privileges," not to be men "either cast down with needless fear, or possessed with an earthly or vain rejoicing, or destitute of encouragements to walk forward in a heavenly course: but that they may be merry in the Lord, and yet without lightness; sad and heavy in heart for their own sins, and the abominations of the land,

and yet without discouragement or dumpishness... And that the ungodly may see how such are blessed in comparison with others, and what they themselves go without of which they might enjoy, and therefore may seek how to become not almost but altogether Christians with them."

What Rogers is saying is that the road to true happiness both in this life and in the life to come is as we seek to live a holy and godly life conformed to God's Holy Word.

The Rise of Puritanism p.36-37

The Puritans had a highly developed system of problem diagnoses based on Scripture and observation of their own hearts.

The Puritans came to develop sophisticated diagnostic experience and where were aware of literally hundreds of different personal problems, spiritual conditions, and their remedies. John Owen was representative when he taught that every pastor must understand all the various cases of depression, fear, discouragement, and conflicts that are found in the souls of men. Not only were they to know and be aware of and be able to recognize these conditions but also they must be able to prescribe fit spiritual medicines and remedies to every case. Puritans were indeed physicians of the soul. Their study of the Scripture and the heart led them to make fine distinctions between conditions and to classify many types and subtypes of problems that required different treatments. Thomas Brooks' *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* is a superb example of this. His approach has been summed up as follows.

Brooks writes that some temptations have straightforward doctrinal roots. He sees the roots of temptation in false views of repentance, and inadequate understanding of God's holiness, and the shallow understanding of indwelling sin. Many other temptations have social roots, namely bad company, or man pleasing idolatry, or the disillusionment caused by inconsistent Christian leaders. And many temptations come from distorted thinking about what will really satisfy us.

For each case Brooks attaches five or six remedies or counselling approaches.

Some of very simple such as shunning wicked company.

Others are full of comfort, as for example the person who is repeatedly relapsing into the same sin. Instead of simply demanding that the person repent, Brooks tenderly encourages. He points out *"that even the most renowned and now crowned saints have, in the days of their being on the earth, relapsed into one and the same sin. A sheep by weakness may slip into a slough, as well as a swine. But there is a difference a swine delights to wallow in it. A sheep wants to be out as soon as possible. "*

He also gently reminds the discouraged believer that no experience of the conviction of sin or even the love of God can "forever fence and secure the soul from relapsing into the same sin." Even people like Peter, who saw our Lord in his glory on the mount, later denied him. Such counselling is indeed aimed at comforting, and bringing peace to a person in emotional pain and distress. Brooks gives six remedies in all for this particular device of Satan. (See page 110.. Works vol. I)

Brooks sees other problems as being largely due to doctrinal distortions, largely due to unbelief, and lies that we believe about God and ourselves. Therefore, many of Brooks's remedies are passionate Scriptural arguments to be thrust forcibly and constantly into the consciousness against the lies

which are dominating the heart. He constantly urges the reader to "dwell more upon" particular truths. For example, Brooks recognizes that many people are tempted to presume on grace. For example the person who has come to believe that "the work of repentance is an easy one, and that therefore the soul need not make much such a fuss over sin." "Why! Suppose you do sin," says Satan, "It is no such difficult thing to return, and confess, and be sorrowful, and beg pardon." Brooks tells the tempted person, under the power of this distortion, to remember continually that Satan is a liar. Before you sin, he will tell you repentance is easy, but after you sin, he will tell you repentance is too hard! Both are lies. Ah, souls! He that now tempts you to sin, by suggesting to you the easiness of repentance, will at last bring you to despair, and present repentance is the hardest work of all in the world, and a work far above man as heaven is above hell, as light is above darkness. Oh that you were wise to break off your sins by timely repentance! Repentance is a work that must be timely done, or utterly undone forever.

Summarised from Tim Keller, Internet Article p.7

Another wonderful example is Baxter's sermon, preached at Dr. Annesley's Church, St. Giles, Cripplegate, London. John Wesley's maternal grandfather.

What are the best preservatives against melancholia and overmuch sorrow?

Dr. Masters is going to speak on this and therefore there is no need for me to say anything about it, except to say that Baxter notes a number of sins which feed depression. Impatience, discontent, too much love for the material world, selfishness, the distrust of God, and the lack of real submission to the sovereign will of God. At the same time Baxter carefully distinguishes between physical and spiritual causes of depression showing that many times the greater part of depression comes from weakness or disease in the body. Or of course great sadness or as he calls it "overmuch sorrow" can make us depressed.

The point is these men illustrate to us just how full Scripture is of teaching and help in the counselling and encouraging of the flock of Jesus Christ.

A typical example of the way these writers deal with common problems amongst Christians is the dealing of a troubled conscience over past sins.

Joseph Caryl (pronounced Caril) in his Exposition of Job, addresses himself to this problem. He says that they who have truly repented of the sins of youth may yet feel the grief of them in old age: although such, shall not be punished for the sins of youth, yet they are often chastened for them; and though God will not remember their sins against him, yet he may give them such mindings of them as to make their hearts to ache and themselves to cry out.

Caryl says that sometimes a godly man may remember his own sins with new fears owing to the work of Satan, this is one of his devices, *to fill them with assurance of pardon who are guilty, and conversely to fill those with doubtings that are not pardoned who are in fact acquitted from guilt.*

The same theme is taken up by Robert Bolton, in his *Instructions for the Right Comforting of Afflicted Consciences*. He says that sometimes God has a good and wise purpose in making us feel sorrow for past sins which have been pardoned.

Sometimes, the Lord may for a time retire the light of his countenance... From his child, that he may be driven thereby to take a new and more exact revision, a more serious, thorough survey of his youthful sins, of that dark and damned time which he wholly spent upon the devil; and so be put back again, as it were, into the pangs of his new birth, that Christ may be more perfectly formed in him: that he may... renewing his sorrow, and repairing repentance, grow into a further detestation of them, a more absolute divorce from his insinuating minion – delight, and be happily frightened afresh and fired forever from the very garments spotted by the flesh and all appearance of evil.

The Genius of Puritanism p.81.

Moreover the Puritans sought to answer the question and give reasons why God decrees that his people should sometimes experience depression and desertions of various kinds.

William Bridge says in answer to the question, **but why does God suffer his children to undergo such experiences?: "In general, it is for their good. For their good they have peace and comfort, and for their good they lack peace and comfort.**

p.71 ibid

All true pastors down through the years have sought to have this knowledge of the human heart and store of Scripture remedies, to challenge sin, or restore the penitent, or lead the seeking soul to Christ etc.

we could list here some of the other Puritan titles which are available which also give us detailed biblical application and remedies in the method of sanctification and dealing with the warfare of the Christian life.

A Bruised Reed. Richard Sibbes

A Lifting up for the Downcast. William Bridge

A Godly Man's Picture. Thomas Watson

Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices. Thomas Brooks

The Cure of Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow by Faith and Physic.

Richard Baxter (sermon)

Instructions for a Right Comforting of Afflicted Consciences. Robert Bolton

The Dejected Souls Cure. Christopher Love

This heart searching ministry was well illustrated by Gregory the Great in one of the first books on the subject of pastoral counselling to be widely known in this country *Liber regulae pastoralis*.(Book of Pastoral Guidance) Alfred the Great had this work translated into Anglo-Saxon and read by all the clergy in his kingdom. In the book he applies Ezekiel 8:7 – 13 as a powerful metaphor of the pastoral method for dealing with the human heart.

.....Ezekiel first spoke of digging through a wall until there appeared a door through which he then went in, where he beheld the abominations, the beasts, the evil appetites, the abominations, the creeping things and the fantasies of deceit within the human heart. This, says Gregory is what pastoral counsellors do. They first chip away by delicate probing, putting a wedge into the situation so that the hardness of the heart can be revealed and in some sense be softened and dented before there then can be applied the Scriptural cure.

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III

Our forefathers held to a clear Biblical view of the nature of man. Sanctification has a great deal to do with knowing God and knowing ourselves

We might here recall the famous opening sentence of Calvin's famous Institutes. *Nearly all wisdom (doctrine) consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.*

The Bible teaches that man is essentially a noble being made in the image and likeness of God and called by God to rule God's world, but now however because of the Fall, *brutified and brutalized by sin.* (as J. I. Packer put it).

Augustine's view of man was summed up by Harnack as follows:

Mankind is, as experience shows, a "mass of sin", waited on by death, and incapable of raising itself to the good; for having revolted from God, he could no more return to him than an empty vessel could refill itself....

Quoted in Faith Alone R.C. Sproul p. 136

The Biblical view of man is perfectly expressed by Pascal in his famous Penses.

Pascal here is emphasizing the greatness of man as well as his Fallenness.

But there is another aspect of man to be considered, his greatness. The greatness of man is so evident that it can be inferred even from his wretchedness. For that which is nature and animals we call wretchedness in man. And by this we recognize that his nature being now like that of the animals, he is fallen from a better nature which formerly was his. For who is unhappy at not being a king, except a deposed king? Even man's excesses revealed his craving for the infinite. And his power of recognizing his wretchedness is itself a sign his greatness. Man knows that he is wretched. He is wretched then, because he is wretched; but he is great, because he knows it. Further, thought constitutes the greatness of man. Man is only a reed, the frailest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. It is not required that the whole universe should arm itself to crush him; a breath of wind, a drop of water is sufficient to destroy him. But what of the universe to crush him, man would still be nobler than that which slays him. For he knows that he dies and that the universe has the better of him. But the universe knows nothing of this..... Man is filled with an insatiable desire for happiness. But the infinite gulf can only be filled by an infinite and changeless object, that is by God himself. So here again man's wretchedness reveals his greatness, his capacity for God.

History of Philosophy Copplestone p.168

(See also Baxter's The Knowledge of Ourselves)

However the advocates of modern psychotherapy are not clear on the nature of man. Modern psychotherapy advocates both secular and "Christian" varieties of it seemed very much to be influenced by the evolutionary and secular humanistic theories of man.

Mark Cosgrove in his book, *Psychology gone Awry*, observes:

Unlike the physical and natural sciences, in which a fair agreement is been found for the interpretation of data, psychology is in a state of flux – not to say confusion.

Lawrence Crabb who has been a very strong advocate of the Psychotherapy Movement in the USA, nevertheless in his earlier career rightly commented on this confusion and radical departure of leading psychotherapists from the Biblical view of man.

Freud said that man is selfish and one ought first to know it, and then accepted as okay. Ego psychology claims that man can be strengthened to successfully re-channel selfishness into personally and socially acceptable outlets.

Rogers denies any inner badness and teaches that man is filled with goodness and should therefore let it all hang out.

Skinner contends that man is neither good nor bad, and that he is a complicated mass of responses which in terms of intrinsic value amounts to a large zero. Since man can be controlled by experts (Skinnerian Psychologists) who can control them towards ends desired ultimately by the controller who is himself totally controlled.(At random vicious circle with no breaking point).

Existentialists don't know if man is bad (Freud), good (Rogers), both (ego psychologists), or neither (Skinner). Man is logically absurd but needs something besides rational meaninglessness; therefore leave rationality behind and blindly hope that something in life's experience will fill the void.

See B.B. Warfield Miserable Sinner Christianity, Perfectionism part I p.179

Here we might note that some have argued for a partial use of psychotherapeutic techniques alongside the Biblical method.

Those who do so and you from the perspective of common grace. They take the approach that all truth is God's truth. We can agree that it can be rightly argued that there are three sources of truth and knowledge available to mankind, that is:

Biblical revelation.

Scientific experiment.

And the knowledge gained by human experience.

A Christian would rightly argue that these three should be considered in terms of a hierarchy of knowledge placing at all time Scripture first.

This can be allowed but the serious question in our case remains that being whether or not psychotherapy is a proven and sound and reliable source of knowledge?

Many authorities both secular and Christian would say that it is not. For example I quote again here the secular writer Leslie Stephenson I referred to in the introduction who observes:

The position of psycho- analysis on the intellectual map is still a matter of dispute. Psycho – analysts continue to practice, with a variety of Freudian and post – Freudian doctrine. But many academic psychologists and some practicing psychiatrist condemn psycho – analysis as almost totally un- scientific, as more akin to witchcraft than to a respectable scientific medicine.

Seven Theories of Human Nature p. 72

For further details on this from a Christian perspective read *Christ or Therapy* by Dr. E.S. Williams, or the writings of doctors Martin and Deirdre Bobgan.

It goes without saying that a Christian should be more than suspicious of seeking to learn from the advocates of views whose general opinions are so plainly divergent from those of Holy Scripture on these very issues.

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IV

An Emphases on spiritual warfare

G. I. Packer has noted that Christians may have laid too much emphasis on assuring men and women that in coming to Christ all will be peace and rest and all life's problems will be over.

Obviously there is a large truth in this, we will receive rest from guilt and the fear of God's condemnation, rest from the fear of death, rest and meaninglessness and lostness.

But Scripture also speaks of the fact that when we become Christians we enter into a warfare, against the world, the flesh and the devil.

The two great metaphors of the Christian life are those of pilgrimage and warfare. Bunyan brilliantly portrayed these in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Holy War*.

We might also mention here William Gurnal's massive 800 page work on, *The Christian in Complete Armour*.

John Owen has a great deal to say on this subject. His large work on the Holy Spirit, arguably the classic work on the subject. In its he speaks much of the battle to live the life of Christian holiness reminding us that the Holy Spirit is our great enabler in the work of sanctification.

In the very helpful abridged version of this work we have the titles:

Affliction and holiness pp. 130-131.

Exhortation to watch against laziness and procrastination. p.147.

Identifying the internal and external duties to be performed pp. 155 – 156.

Methods of dealing with sin, mortification. p.163-

Owen also deals with this subject in his work, *Indwelling Sin, and Temptation*. Volume 6 of his works.

In these works Owen says a great deal about how the world, the flesh and the devil try to divert the Christian from his course.

There is much exhortation to watch, to resist, to fight. The children's chorus reminds us:

*There is a fight to be fought, there's a race to be won,
There are dangers to meet, on the way,*

Packer says that knowledge of this conflict is therapeutic it puts into our hands a key to diagnose and deal with all kinds of trouble. There are many perplexities in life that we will find difficult to deal with unless we are aware of the fact that we are involved in a conflict.

The cause of this conflict is indwelling sin. Rom 7:21 *I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

Indwelling sin throughout the course of the Christian life abides in our soul. *Sin dwelleth in us*. And this sin is always ready to take advantage of us.

Those sins which do so easily beset us are sometimes called inbred sin. There is an inner contradiction within us and through sloth, laziness, antinomianism, self-indulgence, the persuasive nature of sin, the wiles of the devil, the lust of the flesh, those sins can gain an advantage over us.

We should see that in all things we are obedient to Scripture and its standards, Satan is always trying to set up false standards *hath God said?* Prompting us to ask, is this really wrong, surely this is only natural behaviour? everybody else does it etc. etc.

How to overcome temptation:

As in any warfare we should be fully aware of our situation. We should keep in mind that we have been redeemed from the dominion of sin, that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that we are in the covenant of God's care and love. That Satan is ultimately defeated foe. That Christ breaks the power of cancelled sin.

We should know our weaknesses and not expose ourselves to our besetting sins. There are situations in which we should seek not to spend a lot of time on our own. We should see the Fellowship of God's people. If we are being depressed sometimes other believers in the best sense of the word can cheer us up, Baxter said, "*There is no mirth like the mirth of believers.*"

We should guard against attacks of Satan. To do so we should seek to be universally obedient to God. Owen says he who has a running sore is weakened in his whole condition. We should watch against the running sore of unrepented sin. If we are seeking to live to the glory of God we will be in a very strong position.

We should resist the enemy's attacks. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

We should take upon ourselves the armour of God and all prayer.

We should reduce the enemies opportunities of attacking us by mortifying our members (sinful desires) while we are on the earth. Watch the company we keep, the influences we put ourselves under.

These are some of the ways in which our Puritan forebears source to open up to us those Scripture teachings which would enable us to fight the good fight of faith.

Add from preface of the Authorized Version

The Bible is not only an armour, but also a whole armoury of weapons, both offensive and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and for the enemy to flight. It is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicine. It is not a pot of manna, or cruse of oil, which were for memory only, or for a meals meat or two, but as it were a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it never so great; and as it were a whole celler full of oil vessels; whereby all our necessities may be provided for, and our debts discharged. In a word, it is a panary (a bread basket) of wholesome food, against fenowed traditions; a physician shop (St. Basil called it) of preservatives against poisoned heresies; a pandect (A collection of texts) of profitable laws against rebellious spirits; a treasury of most costly jewels, against beggarly rudiments; finally fountain of most pure water springing up unto everlasting life.

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We are beginning to see a pattern or model emerging of a Biblical or traditional pattern sanctification and pastoral counselling that is in clear contrast to those principles and methods advocated by the psychotherapy movement.

I came across this summary of a method drawn up from the writings of the Puritans. (Internet)

- 1. Man must worship something (Charnock). See the First Commandment. God first.**
- 2. Sin causes every person to worship himself, to be as God, self existent and independent. Christians have remaining sin which is dethroned but still seeking to capture the heart for self worship. They also have a new man created by the Spirit (Charnock).**
- 3. While each seek self existence, we choose different routes to it. We believe we can reach self-sufficiency through an idol. Every man devises an idolatrous religion of his own which is essentially self worship and some form of works – righteousness (Charnock).**
- 4. Three examples of idolatrous forms of worship are:**
 - a. Power idolatry: life only has meaning if I have power and influence over others.**
 - b. Approval idolatry: life only has meaning if I am loved and popular.**
 - c. Comfort idolatry: life only has meaning if I have this kind of pleasure, this quality of life etc.**
- 5. Idols seek to control the person by capturing the imagination (Owen) . Our characteristic sin comes to consciousness in the form of positive mental pictures of certain conditions that we believe will make us happy and fulfilled. Our desires or drives towards these goals are powerful because the goals are being worshiped.**
- 6. The sin controlled imagination produces distortions and lies about oneself, the world, human relationships, God, and the nature of things. (Brooks).**

7. These lies and distortions lead directly to gross sin, depression, hardness of heart, bitterness, and all kinds of sinful behaviour which leads to greater misery. (Brooks).

8. At the deepest level idols must be rooted out through the process of mortification. (Owen)

9. At the thought level lies must be replaced by meditation on the truth. This is a procedure that both comforts and confronts. (Owen and Brooks).

10. At the behavioural level disobedience must not be tolerated. Holy living is practiced through discipline and accountability.

As we can see the Puritans would differ quite extensively from counsellors of today. Most modern evangelical counsellors simply lack the firmness, directness and urgency of the Puritans. Today much less is talked about sin than in former times. But we may also note that the Puritans were very tender, encouraging, and always called those counselled to accept the grace of God, and were extremely careful not to call the problem "sin" unless it was analyzed carefully. One of their favourite texts was, as we have seen "A bruised reed he will not break a smoking flax he will not quench." Matthew 12:20.

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V

Additional note on the Character of the Minister

Gregory the Great has an interesting application of the passage in Leviticus 21

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Speak unto Aaron, saying, whosoever he be of thy seed in their generation that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God.

For whatsoever a man he be that hath a blemish he shall not approach:

He shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or anything superfluous,

Or a man that is broken footed, or broken handed etc.

Leviticus 21:16-24

Gregory doesn't take this passage literally but is fascinated by its symbolic and typical meaning for those who provide pastoral council. Gregory interprets the physical blemishes described here in spiritual and moral terms.

I will not go through all of these but make the following summary.

Gregory says of the nose, if it is too small, the counsellor may not discern the stench of human existence, but if too large, as he says as the "*Tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus* (Song of Solomon 7:4), such a nose will confuse itself by the variety of its own intake!

Then the eyes are metaphorically treated: the bleary eyed are not ready for offering counsel because their eyes are so swollen by the flow, so that they are not capable of fine, careful balanced discrimination.

Then the skin: one whose internal or un-dissipated anger is such that it continually breaks out in scabs and eruptions should not be charged with the cure of souls nor should one who has a chronic skin itch, metaphorically a symbol of avarice be allowed to conduct the Lords work in this area of pastoral counselling, the cure of souls.

Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition Thomas C. Oden p.65

Pastoring from the Pulpit.

It may or may not be part of the influence of the psychotherapy movement that there seems to have come about a demise in expectation of receiving any meaningful practical counsel from the weekly pulpit ministry in church. It has often been said before, but it is no less true, that the church today more and more resembles a place of entertainment than a place where God meets with his people and speaks to them through his Word.

The Puritans certainly did visit from house to house and Richard Baxter is a characteristic and well-known example of the sort of counselling ministry that was conducted in the homes. John Dod (1549-1645) Dod opened his home after each of his two Sunday sermons, as well as once during the week, in order to counsel those burdened about the state of their souls. He also made it easy for individuals to talk privately with him and his church, which he used the pastoral study. However the Puritans regarded preaching as paramount believing that here the main work was done.

In regard to the level into which we as ministers must probe into the personal lives of our flock, on a one to one basis this is debatable. The following remarks I think are very pertinent.

In some ministers today there seems to be an unhealthy involvement in other people's lives. Their role has become more reminiscent of the psychoanalyst than the pastor, as they probe into every intimate detail of a persons life. One wonders how much of this intimate probing is really necessary. One certainly doubts whether the Puritans felt the necessity to do so. In fact, Richard Sibbes advice to believers in general in this respect is especially suited to pastors. He says "men must not be too curious in prying into the weaknesses of others." And there is good reason for heeding his advice.

Daniel Webber Westminster Conference Papers 1986. p.92

The question of mental illness

Is there such a thing as Mental illness? The answer here must be certainly yes.

One of the arguments which is used against the minister functioning as a pastoral counsellor for those who are disturbed is the issue of mental illness. The question is sometimes posed what if the counselee is mentally ill? The implication behind the question is often that the pastors efforts might make the situation worse.

It is sometimes said mental illness is a term widely used and rarely defined accurately.

Jay Adams defined mental illness in terms of organically generated difficulties.

Some have distinguish between conditions that affect the mind and conditions that affect organic functioning of the brain. The latter being a medical condition, the form being a spiritual. The Puritan's often described the latter condition as Melancholia. Thomas Brooks said that *Melancholia belongs more to the physician than to the divine*. Some former ministers often served as, amateur doctors to their congregations, Baxter and Wesley could be mentioned. See Wesley's Primitive Physic. There are times when those who are depressed may need antidepressant medication.

We do come across people who have literally gone out of their mind and are no longer acting rationally, in such cases medical or other help is clearly needed.

J. Adams on the 23rd Psalm

Jay Adams certainly needs to be given credit for being one of the first to identify the so-called Christian psychotherapy movement as a threat to the authentic Gospel.

Others said that in spite of this in his latter counselling methods he perhaps inadvertently imbibed some influence from the Christian psychotherapy camp.

This said there is a very useful exposition of the 23rd Psalm on page 65 of his, *Competent to Counsel* which anyone could profit from reading.

The Psalm begins the Lord is my shepherd, this could be interpreted the Lord is my pastor for the word pastor means shepherd. In caring for their sheep see that they lack nothing.

Notice the description of the shepherds work in the second and third verses. The sheep are made to lie down in pastures of tender green grass and the sheep are led beside restful waters. The shepherd revives them. He leads them in the paths of righteousness for the sake of God's name, and though they walk through the valley of the shadow of death they have no fear for the shepherd is with them.

This picture embraces the idea of the shepherds taking care of the tired, weary, worn sheep. They also may be discouraged. A large part of pastoral work consists of reviving the sheep. Pastors must know how to take tired, discouraged sheep to restful waters and green pastures. They also must protect their sheep from dangers.

Christ the good Shepherd demonstrated what a good shepherd should be in the fullest sense of the word, He lays down his life for the sheep.

And finally of course we need to stress as our forefathers did the fact that Christ and the Gospel is the true medicine for the Soul. The picture of Christ the great physician.

Luke 4:18 describes the scene in the synagogue at Nazareth where he was brought up. He opened the Scriptures and read:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind to set at liberty them that are bruised.

Calvin brings this out beautifully in the Institutes II 16:1 quoting Bernard of Clairvaux, *Christ is the soul's salvation the true medicine for the soul*. The name of Jesus is not only light, but also food; it is also oil, without which all food of the soul is dry; it is salt, without whose seasoning whatever is set before us is insipid; finally it is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, rejoicing in the heart, and at the same time medicine. Every discourse in which his name is not spoken is without savour. (II xvi.1)

In a sermon on Isaiah 53:4 – 6 Calvin speaks of Christ is the only ground for the soul's healing.

Speaks of Christ who was willing to be disfigured from the top of his head even to the sole of his feet and a mass of wounds, flogged with many stripes and crowned with thorns, nails and fastened to the cross and pierced through the side. This is how we are healed, here is our true medicine, with which we must be content and which we must embrace whole-heartedly, knowing that otherwise we can never have inward peace, but must always be tormented and tortured to the extreme, unless Jesus Christ comforts us and appeases God's wrath against us.

A hymn by Paul Gerhardt.

Hither come, ye heavy-hearted,

Who for sin, deep within,

Long and sore have smarted:

For the poisoned wounds you're feeling

Help is near, One is here

Mighty for their healing.

A verse from William Williams.

He came to heal the wounded,

Being wounded in their stead;

The heir of heaven was pierced

For those through sin made dead:

He sucked the awful poison

The serpent gave to me,

And from that deadly venom

He died on Calvary.

A hymn by Charles Wesley.

Plenteous grace with the is found,

*Grace to cover all my sin,
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within;
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me taste of Thee,
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.*