

Rethinking Psychology

Psychology Has Its Limits

Psyche means soul. Logos refers to what we say about things. The word “psychology” combines these two ideas to tell us its focus: psychology speaks about the matters of the soul – about soulish things. The thoughts we think, the choices we make, the emotions we feel, these are the issues of the soul.

Physical issues sometimes accompany soulish issues. Depression, for example, may relate to a variety of conditions, from low thyroid to lack of sleep. Unless we deal with any underlying physical problems, psychological counseling will be an unnecessarily uphill climb.

Less commonly considered are the ever-present spiritual issues that either nourish or starve the soul. These are the deeper issues that, when addressed, permit deep healing to occur, not only in the soul but also in the spirit (and sometimes even in the body – a joyful heart *is* good medicine, Proverbs 17:22). Spiritual issues always accompany (and often sustain) the issues of the soul.

Our Culture Worships Experts

We live in an age of specialization and expertise. It follows that Christians and the secular world alike believe that psychological problems must be dealt with by psychological experts. I’d encourage you to start rethinking psychology’s ownership of expertise.

Psychology can offer great insight about behavior patterns. It can be very useful in identifying issues. Remember, though, that psychology deals primarily with disorders – it observes the flesh. Psychology does not remark on the person made in God’s image. I’m not implying that psychological counsel isn’t helpful, just that it’s limited to soulish change. The experts don’t deal with spiritual issues like repentance or the implications of the New Covenant – two primary and powerful forces for change. We need to start rethinking psychology’s scope.

What if we considered the Lord to be a psychological expert? That does make sense. Who better to understand our minds than the One who made them? Psychology has only been around since Freud came to prominence in the mid 1800’s; God has been around much longer. We need to respect His expertise and start rethinking psychology’s domain.

We Needn’t Back Off

Christians generally don’t appropriate the immense practical perspective that Scripture offers. We may think the Bible deals primarily with abstract ideas but has little to do with getting through the day. Perhaps we haven’t learned to scour its pages for practical

applications. Either way, many feel ill-equipped to come alongside others facing difficult issues. We need to correct that misperception.

The Bible is not some upper-story religious book that focuses on other-worldly concerns and ignores our here-and-now problems. It weaves together issues of the soul and spirit and carefully shows how each affects the other. We err when we ignore their mutual influence and emphasize one at the expense of the other. We must never ignore the spiritual issues; we must also take great care never to recite a religious truth while ignoring another's personal pain.

Too many Christians back-off because they don't think the Bible addresses psychological issues. But it does. It deals with the beliefs and motivations behind our behaviors and addresses the spiritual issues so intricately intertwined with psychological problems. Unless those deeper spiritual issues are addressed the heart won't change and the problems will continue. Things might look better, but the motives haven't improved. Someone using food to get rid of their sense of deprivation may stop overeating, but they'll fill their void with one substitute satisfaction after another (sports, projects, volunteer work, you name it) until they come to believe that God fills all our needs.

God deals with both soul and spirit. So should we, and so can we. He equips us to follow His example and help others with the deep issues of the heart. That's our privilege, our calling, and our responsibility. Please accept the challenge.

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