COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

EXALTING CHRIST PUBLISHING
710 Broadway Street · Vallejo, CA 94590
707-553-8780 · www.cbcvallejo.org
publications@cbcvallejo.org

THE ALL-SUFFICIENT SAVIOR

Exalting Christ in His Soul-Healing Power

Steve Fernandez

© January 2009 Steve Fernandez · Printed by Permission
Previously published March 2003 as *The All-Sufficient Savior*
Previously published January 2006 as *More Than Enough*

Contents

The All-Sufficient Savior 3

Christ’s Infinite Fulness 7

Jesus Heals the Emotions 16

Jesus Binds Up the Brokenhearted 24

Jesus Searches the Heart 39

Jesus and the Depressed 46

CHAPTER ONE

The All-Sufficient Savior

In 1851, a young man went into a small English village and began to preach the gospel and the glories of an all-sufficient Savior. Here is his personal account of what took place:

> Did you ever walk through a village notorious for its drunkenness and profanity? Did you ever see poor wretched beings, that once were men standing, or rather leaning against the posts of the ale-house, or staggering along the street? Have you ever looked into the houses of the people, and beheld them as dens of iniquity, at which your soul stood aghast? Have you ever seen the poverty, degradation, and misery of the inhabitants, and sighed over it? "Yes," you say, "we have." But was it ever your privilege to walk through that village again, in after years, when the Gospel has been preached there? It has been mine. I once knew just such a village as I have pictured — perhaps in some respects one of the worst in England — where many an illicit still was yielding its noxious liquor … and where in connection with that evil, all manner of riot and iniquity was rife. There went into that village a lad, who had no great scholarship, but who was earnest in seeking the souls of men. He began to preach there and it pleased God to turn the whole place upside down. In a short time the little thatched chapel was crammed, the biggest vagabonds in the village weeping floods of tears, and those who had been the curse of the parish became its blessing. Where there had been robberies and villainies of every kind, all round the neighborhood, there were none because the men who used to do the mischief were themselves in the house of God, rejoicing to hear of Jesus crucified … I do testify, to the praise of God's grace, that it pleased the Lord to work wonders in our midst. He showed the power of Jesus' name, and made me a witness of that Gospel which can win souls, draw reluctant hearts, and mould afresh the life and conduct of sinful men and women.1

The preacher was Charles Spurgeon and the place was Waterbeach, England, where he ministered for three years before going to London, where he ministered with great effect for another 38 years.

The underlying conviction of Spurgeon's ministry was clear. He believed that the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of His name could, in his words, "win souls, draw reluctant hearts, and mould afresh the life and conduct of sinful men and women." Notice the description of the townspeople transformed by Christ. They were "notorious for drunkenness and profanity." They were known for "evil and all manner of iniquity." They were also known for "robberies and villainies of every kind." Today we would call these people alcoholics, rageaholics, substance abusers and co-dependents. To Spurgeon, Christ's power through the Gospel and the Holy Spirit was more than adequate to transform or "mould afresh the life" of anyone, even those devastated by the emotional and spiritual effects of sin.

Of course, Spurgeon's testimony is nothing new. The church for centuries has proclaimed a Christ who transforms and changes. It has proclaimed a glorious, all-sufficient Savior whose power, through the Word and through the Spirit, is more than adequate to deliver anyone from any bondage.

In Scripture, God's people are continually encouraged to rest in Christ's all-sufficiency. Christ Himself encourages His people to do so. Perhaps the best example is when He applied Isaiah's prophecy of Messianic ministry to Himself. Christ, reading from Isaiah, says He was sent "to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden" (Luke 4:18). Christ announces that He releases captives and sets free the downtrodden. Clearly, Christ encourages His people to look to Him alone for their restoration and deliverance.

Many today in the Evangelical church, it appears, do not hold to this conviction. Christ, we are told, is not sufficient. People with serious problems need something more. One leading proponent of this new something more theology states:

> Dealing with our insides can be frustrating. Disciplined Christian living fails to resolve all the problems of the soul. Inviting the Holy Spirit to take over our life leaves part of our being untouched.2

Think for a moment of what is being said. The Holy Spirit, the other Comforter sent by Christ to work in His people on His behalf (John 14:16), falls short! He "leaves part of our being untouched." Furthermore, He "fails to resolve all the problems of the soul"! The Holy Spirit, we are told, is not enough! Now of course, if the Spirit fails, Christ fails. Clearly, if the Spirit cannot transform us deeply, then Christ cannot, for it is the Spirit who conveys Christ's power and presence. This same author makes this position clear elsewhere when he denounces teachings that emphasize Christ alone. Critical of what he calls a "nothing but Christ" theology, he rejects the fact that "its basic tenet is nothing but grace, nothing but Christ, nothing but faith, nothing but the word."3 Apparently, to teach Christians to look to "nothing but Christ" is bad counsel. In other words, to be to the point, the Lord Jesus Christ is not enough! Many in fact do conclude that something more than Christ is needed, and this something, added alongside Christ, is the teaching of men gleaned from secular psychotherapies. Another leading proponent of the something more teaching says that:

> Psychology might be an academic and practical discipline enabling us more adequately to help people who live in a society permeated with change and complexity unknown in the days of Jesus and Paul.4

Here we have the same thing stated a little differently. In this case, we need something "more adequate." This something is found in psychology which, it is claimed, "enables us more adequately to help people." Once again, it is inferred that Christ alone is not sufficient. Now we must ask ourselves some basic questions: Is this really the case? Do God's people need more than Christ to be helped with their most severe problems? Does Christ need to be supplemented by the "insights" of modern psychotherapy?

As a pastor for over 20 years, I have dealt with many people beset with various problems; for example, people (to speak in current terms) who were substance abusers, who had eating disorders or who were controlled by sexual addiction. I have also seen these very same people transformed by Christ apart from any supplementation from psychotherapy. I have seen people helped and delivered; people who, by their lives, demonstrate the power and glory of Christ. Here is one young woman's testimony of Christ's all-sufficiency in her life:

> Before I became a Christian, I had been seeing a counselor for six years. Having been sexually abused as a child, I was diagnosed as having a low self-esteem and on occasions suffered from depression. During my high school and most of my college years, I dated several men and found myself to be very dependent upon them. I would often times blame these "co-dependent" tendencies on the fact that I had been sexually abused. However, when I became a Christian my life changed. I realized that I had received into my life a God who was concerned about me, who loved me. The truth behind the work of Jesus Christ's death on the cross became a reality to me, and God filled the voids in my life that I had so desperately tried to fill in my relationships with men. But there was something that continued to trouble me. I felt as if somehow I was still bound to my past. I realized that I had not forgiven the person that had sexually abused me as a child. I was still holding on to bitter feelings towards this person, and that began to affect my walk with the Lord. At that time, I had also started reading books by Christian psychologists, but the problem with these books was that they did not direct me first and foremost to Christ and the Word of God for the answer to my problems. I did not improve, but became worse as I was focused on self. At that point, through friends, I was once again directed to Christ and His Word. I have learned several things about myself, about God, and how to look at every situation in my life from a Christ-centered and Biblical perspective. First of all, I learned that God's Word, the Bible, has a solution to every problem in my life. I did not have to pursue psychology-based counseling or self-help books because I have a permanent counselor in the Holy Spirit and in the very Word of God. Secondly, I learned that I don't have a self-esteem problem. Instead, I have a self-focus problem called "sin." I am not to rely on my feelings which are generally the first things a depressed person will look at. The only thing I am to look at is Christ and His Word and the promises and power that He gives to me. The most important thing I learned is that Christ has given me everything I need to forgive those who have offended me. As a new creation in Christ, God has made every provision for me not to be dominated by sin. I was able to successfully plan strategies to overcome the sin of an embittered and unforgiving spirit in my life.

Testimonies like this abound from people who are directed once again to Christ. More than the testimony of people, however, is the fact that the Scriptures teach us to expect this very thing. They teach us to look to Christ alone for deliverance, since He has made abundant provision for all emotional and spiritual problems. Therefore, for both biblical and practical reasons, I am convinced that Christ's all-sufficiency is more than adequate to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of people. Furthermore, I am convinced that God's people are in great need of being directed to Christ and not to the supposed insights or teachings of men which have been brought into the church under the umbrella of Christian Psychology. The mixture of psychology and Christ, in the final analysis, weakens the church. It turns professing Christians into self-absorbed people, who, in the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, are "preoccupied with the mumps and measles of the soul."5

This is not really claiming anything new. The church has always confidently pointed people to Christ as the one who sets people free. Spurgeon's belief concerning Christ's power to deliver (mentioned earlier) was typical until recent years. In a wholesale shift in the Evangelical church, the person who claims that Christ is enough to deliver someone in bondage to drunkenness, or drugs, or sexual sin, is often viewed as simplistic and backwards. In response, I would ask: isn't this nothing more than a belief in the biblical testimony of the power of the risen Christ? Is it not simply the historic testimony of the Evangelical church that the Lord Jesus Christ delivers from the bondage of sin? What I am saying, then, is really nothing new. It is the something more theology that is new. In fact, "Christ alone" is the essence of biblical theology recovered by the Reformation. It is the biblical teaching that Christ alone is sufficient, not only for the justification of His people, but for their sanctification as well. John Calvin for example said, "We proclaim that a complete fountain of blessings is opened up to us in Christ, and that out of it we may draw for every need."6 Calvin was responding to the Roman Catholic Church's practice of adding the teachings of men alongside Christ. Speaking of this he said,

> For where is it that they seek for salvation and every other good? Is it in God alone? The whole tenor of their lives openly proclaims the contrary. They say, indeed, that they seek salvation and every other good in Him; but it is mere pretense, seeing they seek them elsewhere … In a word they concede to God the glory of all that is good. But in reality they rob him of the half or more than half, by partitioning His perfections among the saints. Divine offices are distributed among the saints …and in a multitude of instances, they are made to do His work, while He is kept out of view.7

Notice that the issue is Christ's sufficiency—not only for salvation, but for "every other good" as well. Therefore, Calvin and the reformers, in response to a church that insisted on supplementing Christ with the teachings of men, proclaimed the biblical doctrine of Christ's sufficiency for every aspect of the believer's need. Whether it is the forgiveness of sins, or the overcoming of emotional problems, Christ is a "complete fountain"—a complete provision for the child of God. To teach otherwise, is to "rob Him of … half" His glory.

History is repeating itself in the church today. Christian psychology, while it maintains that in Christ believers have all they need, denies it in reality. Christ Himself is not directly denied; He is simply diminished, and in being diminished, He is kept out of view. His work as deliverer is now partitioned amongst the Christian psychologists, who are made to do His work! Evangelicals since the Reformation have maintained that in Christ alone the believer has "a complete fountain of blessing" for any personal problem or need. Today, this is all changing. Confidence in Christ's absolute sufficiency and reliance upon 'Christ alone' for sanctification and spiritual growth is departing from the Evangelical church.

My approach in this study will be to present the biblical case for the all-sufficiency of Christ. I

will attempt to show from Scripture that Christ claims to be, and is set forth in the New Testament as the All-Sufficient Savior and Deliverer. Christian psychotherapies and theories of the genetic source of disorders will only be touched upon in passing to show how they depart from, and contradict, clear biblical teaching. My desire is to restore people's confidence in Christ's ability to deliver and to make whole, regardless of the degree and extent that sin has affected a life. This is an issue central to the gospel. It concerns the matter of how people are helped and delivered. Moreover, and this is primary, it concerns Christ's glory. Here are the issues: Does the Lord Jesus Christ need the insights of fallen men to help His people? Does the Scripture anywhere indicate that the church must look to natural revelation or any other source to supplement Christ? In other words, does Christ need more than His Word, His Spirit, His Body, and His all-sufficient Person to help emotionally devastated people? We contend that He does not! We also contend that any other position diminishes His glory. It makes Him less than He is. It diminishes His glorious, all-sufficiency as Savior and Deliverer. With the Psalmist we maintain,

> My soul waits in silence for God only. For my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation. My stronghold: I shall not be shaken. In God my salvation and my glory rest. The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people. Pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us. (Psalm 62:5-7)

Lastly, it is a central issue because it concerns the well-being of the church. A church not focused on Christ, however well-intended, will be powerless and infirm. Is the Evangelical church any stronger, or has it had more impact on the world after a generation of being enamored with psychology? The answer is self-evident. The church, if it is to see a reformation and revival, if it is to see a movement of the Spirit, must be marked by a Christ-centered, Christ-dependent ministry. This Christ-centeredness extends not only to how a person is saved, but to how a person grows and is sanctified as well. It must be marked by a complete confidence that in Christ we can point people to the One who can meet any need and restore any sin-ruined, sin-ravaged life. My task will be to prove from Scripture that Christ alone is all God's people need. My desire is the glory of Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

Christ's Infinite Fulness

Each summer for the past eighteen years our family has traveled from our home by car to the central Sierra Mountains to vacation at a Sierra lake. And nearly every year we also make a separate one and one-half hour day trip to visit the Yosemite Valley. Coming from the south, we wind our way for more than an hour when (as we begin to tire with the endless turns) we come upon a three-quarters of a mile long tunnel burrowed through a mountain. This tunnel signals that Yosemite is near. As we come out of the darkness of the tunnel on the other side, we are suddenly ushered into the scenic beauty of the Yosemite Valley and are confronted with the glory of its natural splendor. Sheer faced granite cliffs that seem to be a mile high and luminous water falls are suddenly before our eyes. A large viewing area just off the highway accommodates the constant flow of people who stop and behold the beauty of Yosemite. It is one of those rare places where words and pictures will not do. It cannot be described. You must see it and take it in. It has to be experienced for yourself.

I believe that what I have just described, in some ways, parallels the believer's conversion experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul describes conversion in similar terms. He says that when a person is saved, they see Christ and behold His glory. Prior to our conversion, our minds were blinded. We saw no beauty nor glory in Christ. Paul says that "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the

glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). When we are made alive in Christ we are, as it were, brought into another world. Paul describes it this way, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Here we see that conversion in its experiential aspect involves "see[ing] the light … of the glory of Christ" (v.4) as well as a divine shining in which God shows us "the Light of … the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

True Christians are those who have been stunned and captivated by what they have seen. With God-given spiritual sight they have seen the majestic glory of Christ. The aim of this chapter is to show that a central feature of the glory of Christ blazoned before the Christian is the glory of His all

-sufficiency. Christ is infinite in His perfections and being. He possesses a fulness, and an all-sufficiency that makes Him unspeakably glorious. The Christian sees this glory in conversion. They see that He, and no other, is their all-sufficient Savior-God. Therefore, with an instinctive spiritual response that is a result of the new birth, believers recognize in Christ a limitless source and supply for all their soul's needs. They see in Him a fulness which is, as it were, a vast reservoir or an ocean of supply for what ails those in great emotional and spiritual need. I acknowledge that I am out of my element. Who can adequately describe glory and beauty that is infinite and is therefore beyond description? There is no one like Christ in this regard. Spurgeon said it well:

> Hope not, my brethren, that the preacher can grapple with such a subject. I am overcome by it. In my meditations I have felt lost in its lengths and breadths. My joy is great in my theme, and yet I am conscious of a pressure upon my brain and heart, for I am as a little child wandering … among the stars. I stumble among sublimities, I sink amid glories. I can only point with my finger to that which I see, but cannot describe. May the Holy Spirit himself take of the things of Christ and show them unto you.1

As I said, a new Christian instinctively sees in Christ a limitless supply for all their spiritual and emotional needs. In fact, the essence of saving faith is the spiritual sight of the infinite glories and excellencies of Christ. John Owen states it well:

> Herein, then, is the Lord Christ exceedingly glorious. Those who cannot behold this glory of his … know him not …. He that discerns not the representation of the glory of God in the person of Christ unto the souls of men, is an unbeliever …. The essence of faith consists in a due ascription of glory to God, Rom iv.

> 20. This we cannot attain unto without the manifestation of those divine excellencies unto us wherein he is glorious. This is done in Christ alone …. He who discerns not the glory of divine wisdom, power, goodness, love, and grace, in the person and office of Christ … is an unbeliever.2

So the Christian sees Christ's glory. However, this sight of Christ can be lost. The Christian can be directed away from Christ. His glory can be obscured and, as it were, hidden. This becomes evident when we lose a sense of the awe and wonder of Christ. It is apparent when we are no longer captivated and spellbound by the beauty of Christ's person. Paul says this occurs unknowingly. That is, even when occupied with spiritual things such as Christian teaching and service, it is possible that someone "takes you captive through philosophy … according to the …principles of the world" (Colossians 2:8). In other words, while busy with Christian ministry, we can "not hold fast to the head" (Colossians 2:19).

This is, in fact, a central strategy of the devil as he opposes the church and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in the world. Satan detests Christ, so he is relentless in his attempts to demean and diminish Christ's person. More than this, he knows that in the proportion that a Christian sees Christ's greatness and glory will be the degree they trust in Him. And the degree that they trust in Him will be the degree that the devil's opposition is defeated. Therefore, it has always been his primary focus to deface and diminish Christ. It has always been his objective to lessen people's conception of the greatness of Christ. Church history in many ways is a chronicling of Satan's efforts to diminish or to deny the person and work of Christ. Think of the great battles of the fourth and fifth centuries over the deity of Christ, or the battle over the gospel and the work of Christ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And it is no different today!

Therefore, it is vital that Christians understand the all-sufficiency of Christ. When Christ is seen in His fulness and beheld in His glory (in the revelation of Christ in the Word of God as it is illuminated by the Spirit of God) it produces an unshakeable confidence. It produces a confidence that Christ is a measureless resource for every need. This confidence in Christ is sadly lacking in the church. The church has unwittingly diminished the glory of Christ. There is an obscuring of Christ. He is lost amidst the man-centeredness that characterizes much of the modern evangelical church. Christ is seen, as it were, dimly. He is not denied, of course; He is simply pushed to the side. Therefore, I will set forth in this chapter the glory of Christ's all-sufficiency. Christ is infinite in His nature and being. According to the Apostles John and Paul, He possesses an infinite fulness (John 1:16; Colossians 1:19). He possesses the full scope of divine perfections and attributes, and He possesses each one to an infinite degree. Therefore, there is no limit to His power, to His wisdom, to His love, or to any of His other attributes. And there is no limit to His willingness to exercise them on behalf of those who humbly come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30). How can He not be all that one could need for the healing and restoring of the pains and miseries of their soul? Once again Owen's words are to the point:

> That which is principally suited to give him [the Christian] rest, peace and satisfaction—and without which nothing else can so do—is the due consideration of, and the acting of faith upon, this infinite … wisdom and goodness, in the … person of Christ. This at first view will reduce the mind unto that conclusion, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible.' For what end cannot be effected hereby? What end cannot be accomplished that was designed in it? Is any thing too hard for God? … Against this no objection can arise. On this consideration of him, faith apprehends Christ to be—as he is indeed—the power of God, and the wisdom of God … and therein doth it find rest with peace.3

Owen is right! What divine goal or purpose cannot be accomplished by Christ? If God has designed the healing and transformation of His people, how can it not be accomplished by such an infinite person as Christ? We will now show from Scripture that the believer has in Christ a glorious, all-sufficient Savior-Deliverer for his every need.

The Supremacy of the Glory of the Person of Christ

We will begin by looking at Christ's glory in two broad aspects. First, we will consider the supremacy of His glory in general. Then we will look at the sufficiency and infinite fulness of His glory in particular. The central passage of Scripture is 2 Corinthians 2:14—4:6. In this passage, Paul asserts the glory of Christ's delivering and transforming power. Paul's focus is upon the new covenant, for the new covenant manifests both the supremacy and all-sufficiency of the glory of the person of Christ. The new covenant was a theme of Old Testament prophecy (Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:20-26). Its core element is the heart-renewing soul-transforming work of God by which a person is delivered from the bondage and miseries of sin and the fall. Speaking of the new covenant, Ezekiel says, "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). Here we see that through the new covenant, a person receives a great heart-renewing soul-healing change.

Paul's emphasis is that this great work is accomplished by the grace and power of Christ. In other words, although the Spirit is the agent, Christ is the author. Speaking of the Spirit's agency in the new covenant, Gordon Fee says, "… specifically mentioned only six times (vs. 3, 6, 8, 17 [2x], 18) the Spirit dominates Paul's thinking and argumentation."4

Granted this is true. But it must also be stated that, in Paul's thinking, Christ is even more dominant. Why? It is He who works and accomplishes His purpose in the believer through the Spirit. Notice Paul's references to Christ. He speaks of "the sweet aroma of the knowledge of

Him" (2 Corinthians 2:14), and of a "fragrance of Christ" (2:15). He refers to the new covenant change of heart as "a letter of Christ," a work of Christ "written … on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3). I believe Matthew Henry is right when he says concerning this text "that Christ was the author of all that was good in them."5 So then the new covenant is the vehicle by which Christ, through the Spirit, undertakes His great delivering work.

It cannot help but be noticed that Paul repeatedly makes mention of the glory associated with the new covenant. In fact, the term "glory" occurs twelve times in verses 7-18. Paul speaks of the exceeding glory of the new covenant compared with the old. He describes it as "more glory" (v. 8), it "much more … abounds in glory" (v. 9), and it is "the glory that surpasses" (v. 10). The heart-changing soul-transforming work of Christ in the new covenant manifests glory, one that far exceeds the glory of the old covenant.

For Paul, the vital fact is that new covenant glory is in essence a manifestation of the supreme glory of the person of Christ. Notice how Paul indicates this in 2 Corinthians 3:18. In contrast to beholding Moses' face, which reflected the fading glory of the old covenant, we behold in the new covenant the glory of Christ. Paul says, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (v. 18). Notice, we are "beholding … the glory of the Lord." In chapter 4, verse 4, he directly asserts that new covenant glory manifests Christ's glory. He says that the gospel involves "seeing the light … of the glory of Christ." Therefore, the supremacy of the glory of Christ, the "glory that surpasses" (3:10), is manifested in the heart-renewing, soul-transforming work of the new covenant. In other words, Christ's glory is exhibited in His mercy and power as He changes and renews the human heart, and delivers it from that which enslaves it and holds it in bondage. In keeping with this Christ-centered emphasis, Paul earlier said that Christ, through the new covenant, gives forth "an aroma from life to life"(2:16). That is, Christ ushers in new life, a life now characterized by liberty (3:17). Herein lies Christ's supremacy. Christ alone accomplishes such a mighty work. Who is adequate for these things? Paul says, "Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (3:4-5). Notice it is a confidence through Christ toward God. So we see that Christ possesses a supreme glory, a glory that is exhibited in the accomplishing of a mighty, renewing, liberating work in the heart. He can change any heart. He can deliver from any bondage. His power and grace are exceedingly glorious.

The Sufficiency of the Glory of the Person of Christ

But Paul does not stop there. He speaks not only of the supremacy of Christ's glory, but of the sufficiency of it as well. The sufficiency of Christ's glory is manifested in that He continues His initial renewing work with an ongoing transformation of the soul. The renewal and deliverance described in verses 1-5 and 17, therefore, is only the beginning. In verse 18, Paul describes Christ's great mercy and power in carrying out a further work. He says, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed" (v. 18). Notice that all believers are beholding, and all are being transformed. There are no exceptions. Clearly Christ possesses in Himself limitless grace and power to heal and transform any life. The term "transformed"6 speaks of a deep change, a change that reaches deep into the inner core of a person. This transformation is accomplished by the Spirit through the Word of God. The Spirit deeply transforms believers as they "all … [are] beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." Therefore, Christ's glory consists in this: He is the all-sufficient Savior. He is more than able to accomplish in us all that is needed for the healing of the pain and misery of the soul.

So here is our initial conclusion: Growth, wholeness, maturity and soul-healing come from Christ alone, through Scripture alone, by the Spirit alone. The focal point—the central issue as it has been

throughout church history—concerns the glory of Christ's person. No diminishing, no detracting can be allowed. Spurgeon stated the matter this way,

> What of God it is needful and beneficial for us to know he has revealed in Christ, and whatsoever is not there, we may rest assured it is unfit and unnecessary for us to know. Truly the revelation is by no means scant, for there is vastly more revealed in the person of Christ than we shall be likely to learn in this mortal life, and even eternity will not be too long for the discovery of all the glory of God which shines forth in the person of the word made flesh. Those who would supplement Christianity had better first add to the brilliance of the sun or the fulness of the sea. As for us, we are more than satisfied with the revelation of God in the person of our Lord Jesus.7

Spurgeon brings forward the real issue! Are we more than satisfied with the glorious Savior? Do we see in Him an infinite fulness? Are we convinced that all that is necessary for us to know is revealed in Christ in His word? Do we preach and teach such a Savior? Do we point our most needy, wounded, scarred, and broken people to Him? Are we confident that He is willing and more than able to restore their broken sin-ravaged lives?

The "Sight" of Christ's Glory

> **is the Unique Experience of All True Christians**

We have seen that the spiritual sight of Christ's glory is the central element of a genuine conversion experience. We will now look in more detail at what it means to see and behold the glory of Christ. In particular, the glory of His sufficiency. The key passage is 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. We quote it in its entirety:

> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

We "See" The Light of the Gospel of the Glory

of Christ

The first thing to notice is how Paul describes this 'spiritual sight' of Christ. The Greek term for "see" in verse 4 is vivid and striking. It refers to a 'radiant light,' a 'brightness.' The KJV translates it "shine upon them," which gives a very good sense of the term. The word is translated "daybreak" in Acts 20:11. One authority gives the meaning of the noun as "a bright light especially of the sun; so it is used of the rays and beams of the sun; or any gleam on the surface of a bright object."8 This describes the experience of Christians in their first "sight" of Christ. They see a radiance, a brightness as it were. They have a spiritual sight of glory. It is a glory comparable to the first sight of the sun by a person who is born blind. Jonathan Edwards, who perhaps in a way like no other, wrote on the saving view of Christ says:

> The change made by this spiritual opening of the eyes in conversion, would be much greater, and more remarkable every way, than if a man born blind should have the sense of seeing imparted to him at once, in the midst of the clear light of the sun, discovering a world of visible objects. For though sight be more noble than any of the other external senses, yet this spiritual sense is infinitely more noble, and the object infinitely more important.9

Such is the nature of the first sight of Christ in a genuine conversion. All true Christians have seen Christ's glory. And all to some degree have been captivated and taken up by what they see of His beauty and loveliness. It is important to realize that it is the glory of Christ's person which is the focal point of Satan's attacks. Paul says, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light … of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Prior to conversion Satan works to blind people to it. He works to demean and deny the glory of Christ's person. After conversion, he works to diminish Christ's glory, to detract and deface it. He will do all in his power to lessen people's conception of the greatness and infinite fulness of Christ. His aim is to direct God's people away from Christ as the all-sufficient source for the needs and troubles of their soul, and thereby rob Christ of the praise and adoration He rightly deserves.

God Has Shone in Our Hearts the Glory of God in the Face of Christ

Paul uses another vivid term in this passage to describe the sight of Christ in conversion. In verse 6 he says, "God … has shone in our hearts to give the Light … of the glory of God in the face of Christ." The term "shone" in its noun form refers to something that is "shining brilliant, clear or transparent, something splendid and magnificent."10 The word is used in Matthew 17:2 where it says of Christ, "And His face shone like the sun." The noun is used of Christ when He says of Himself that He is "the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16). So we see that Christians have seen in Christ a majestic glory. They have beheld glory that is superlative—a glory that is life-changing and soul-transforming. It is this sight of Christ that characterizes and distinguishes true Christians from all those who merely profess Christ, and from outright unbelievers as well. Speaking of 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, Edwards says,

> We are there abundantly taught, that the saints differ from the ungodly in this, that they have the knowledge of God, and a sight of God, and of Jesus Christ … This plainly shows, that there is a discovery of the divine superlative glory and excellency of … Christ, peculiar to the saints; and also, that it is as immediately from God, as light from the sun … For it is compared to God's creating the light by his powerful word in the beginning of the creation.11

The Sight of Christ's Glory Captivates

Paul is not alone in describing the conversion experience as involving the sight of Christ. Christ Himself uses this descriptive language, as does the Apostle John. Christ says, "Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, will have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day"(John 6:40; also note John 12:45). Notice that Christ says that to believe in Him is to behold Him! The Greek word for "behold" comes from the word *theoros.* In its noun form, it refers to "men who attended the games or the sacrifices as public deputies; it was used primarily not of an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at a thing with interest and for a purpose; as of a general, officially reviewing an army, inspecting it with careful attention to details."12 It is connected to a related word which means "to gaze at," or "to watch with wonder." Therefore, a Christian is not someone who has had a passing glimpse or made a casual disinterested observation of Christ. A genuine Christian does not simply have a theoretical knowledge of Christ. That is not what Scripture means by believing in Christ. A Christian is someone caught up and captivated by what has been seen. A good illustration in some ways would be a person's first view of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center Towers in New York City. It was impossible to merely take a casual, disinterested look. The sheer magnitude of it commanded full attention. We beheld it, fixated on it, we were stunned nearly into disbelief by what our eyes were beholding. In a similar way, saving faith beholds Christ. The

term emphasizes seeing something which captures one's undivided attention. It stresses that the spiritual sight of Christ's glory and majesty captivates and holds spellbound. A person's gaze is paralyzed, as it were, by the greatness of what is seen.

John speaks in the same way although he uses a different word. He says, "no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him" (1 John 3:6). This is the same descriptive language used by Christ. To know Christ John says; is to see Christ, to gaze upon Him, to have a spiritual sight of His glory. Paul, John and Christ Himself all speak of conversion in this manner. Their point is to emphasize the captivating nature of a saving sight of the glory and beauty of the all-sufficient Savior.

The Sight of Christ's Glory Is

A Sight of His Infinite Fulness

We are now at the vortex—the very heart and center, if you will—of the glory of Christ beheld by the Christian. It is what John and Paul call Christ's fulness. The central passage is John 1:14-17. It is here that the glory of Christ's all-sufficient fulness is set forth in explicit terms. John says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

John emphasizes his point by using a middle voice. The middle voice, which emphasizes the subject, in this case places the emphasis on the great privilege of beholding Christ. It is as if he says, "We, yes even we ourselves, beheld His glory, majestic glory." Then John adds a specific feature of the glory which he beheld — its fulness. He says, "We beheld … glory … full of grace and truth." His point is that a true spiritual sight of Christ beholds in Christ the divine perfections in an infinite and limitless degree. All the divine perfections are in Christ: power, wisdom, holiness, righteousness, goodness, love, truth, immutability, and so forth. And for John, the wonder is that He possesses each one to an infinite degree!

John, like Paul, began by declaring the supremacy of the glory of the person of Christ in general. Christ possesses the supreme glory of the preexistent, eternal God. Speaking of Christ he says, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). The term 'dwelt' is significant. It is a direct allusion to the Old Testament references of Jehovah God dwelling among His people.13 God's "cloud of presence" (1 Kings 8:10-11) dwelt in the tabernacle and then in the temple. God said regarding the tabernacle, "I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). John is declaring that Christ is the eternal God—the God of the Old Testament whose presence was in the tabernacle—who became flesh and dwelt among men. Therefore, the supremacy of the glory of the person of Christ is none other than the supremacy of the self-existent, all-glorious eternal God. This is John's emphatic point.

John then declares the glorious, all-sufficient fulness of Christ. He says, "We beheld His glory … full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The term "beheld" is the word from which we get our English word "theatre." It is used of a "spectator looking

at a parade, or of august things and persons that are looked on with admiration."14 It is related to a word which means "to wonder at" or "to marvel." Clearly, John was stunned by what he had observed and seen. He and the other disciples had marveled, as it were, at a wondrous spectacle. They marveled at the spectacle of an eternal person who possessed a glorious, infinite fulness.

The word "fulness" refers to a "plentiful abundance." It is used of the twelve baskets "full" of loaves of bread and of a "full reward." It is used of Jesus who was "full" of the Holy Spirit, a fulness that was without measure (John 3:34; Luke 4:1).

Most significant is John's specific mention of two aspects of Christ's fulness: grace and truth. These are the two perfections of the divine nature most prominently displayed by Christ as He ministered in a fallen, sinful world. First, grace is prominent. Grace is God's disposition to be kind and favorable to people. It is His disposition to help people in need though they are greatly undeserving. It is God's provision for man's moral and spiritual pollution. It is His provision that delivers people out of the misery, bondage and destruction that they justly deserve. Second, truth is

also prominent. This is God's provision for man's moral and spiritual blindness. It is God's provision for man's self-inflicted, spiritual ignorance that causes misery and pain apart from God. These perfections are found in Christ to an infinite degree. John, in effect, is announcing that in Christ there is a boundless supply for those in great personal, spiritual and emotional need. Whatever the misery, whatever the bondage, He is a supply for that need. Edwards says it this way,

> But Christ Jesus has true excellence and so great excellency, that when they come to see it they look no further, but the mind rests there. It sees a transcendent glory and an ineffable sweetness in him; it sees that till now it has been pursuing shadows, but that now it has found the substance; that before it had been seeking happiness in the stream, but that now it has found the ocean. The excellency of Christ is an object adequate to the natural cravings of the soul, and is sufficient to fill the capacity. It is infinite excellency, such a one as the mind desires, in which it can find no bounds: and the more the mind is used to it, the more excellent it appears. Every new discovery makes this beauty appear more ravishing, and the mind sees no end; here is room enough for the mind to go deeper and deeper, and never come to the bottom. The soul is exceedingly ravished when it first looks on this beauty, and it is never weary of it. The mind never has any satiety, but Christ's excellency is always fresh and new, and tends as much to delight, after it has been seen a thousand or ten thousand years, as when it was seen the first moment … The soul that comes to Christ, feeds upon this, and lives upon it; it is that bread which came down from heaven, of which he that eats shall not die: it is angels' food, it is that wine and milk that is given without money, and without price. This is that fatness in which the believing soul delights itself; here the longing soul may be satisfied, and the hungry soul may be filled with goodness. The delight and con-tentment that is to be found here, passeth understanding, and is unspeakable and full of glory. It is impossible for those who have tasted of this fountain, and know the sweetness of it, ever to forsake it. The soul has found the river of water of life, and it desires no other drink; it has found the tree of life, and it desires no other fruit.15

How foreign do Edwards' words sound in our day! He says, "The soul is exceedingly ravished when it first looks on this beauty!" He speaks of Christ as "adequate to the cravings of the soul and is sufficient to fill the capacity." He also declares that in Christ "the longing soul may be satisfied and the hungry soul may be filled with goodness." Should not such a Christ be heralded to the broken, empty and miserable of our day?

Moreover (and this is wonderful), John says this plentiful abundance is received and experienced by all true believers without exception. John says, "For of His fulness we have all received." All believers have at their disposal Christ's infinite fulness for the needs of their soul. J. C. Ryle says, "There is laid up in Him as in a treasury a boundless supply for all that any sinner can need in time or eternity."16

Tragically, as we said earlier, we can forget and lose sight of Christ's fulness. God's people "hew … cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). They are "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). They do "not hold fast to the head" (Colossians 2:19). They forget the exhortation: "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him" (Colossians

2:6-7). The Scriptures are full of such reminders and admonitions about our need to remain unwavering in our faith toward Christ as the limitless provision for our spiritual and emotional needs.

Moreover, just as Scripture is full of exhortations to rest in Christ, so also it often warns of the tendency to forget God and to seek deliverance and healing elsewhere. For example it says, “They went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty” (Jeremiah 2:5). Like Israel, the church wanders into strange pastures. Shepherds feed sheep strange food—food from the world; they provide hollow, empty food—food that does not nourish. Such is the case today, as the church has turned from Christ’s fulness and has paid a great price. It has “walked after emptiness and became empty.” As a whole, it does not believe Christ can restore and heal its most needy people, and therefore its needy many times are not healed. Spurgeon, aware of this danger, exhorts,

> I have only … one object, namely, to address myself vehemently to the servants of God, that they may be exhorted to lay hold of the fulness of the power, and holiness, which dwell in their covenant Head … There is a glorious fulness in Jesus. Brethren, if it be so, why are we so weak, unfurnished, and unhappy? There is

> an infinite fulness in Jesus, a fulness of all that any saint can ever want to enable him to rise to the highest degree of grace. If there be anything lacking for the attainment of the divine image in us, it is not a deficiency Christward, it is occasioned by shortcomings in ourselves. If sin is to be over-come, the conquering power dwells in him in its fulness; if virtue is to be attained, sanctifying energy resides in Christ to perfection … In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead … and they who dwell in him shall find things impossible with man become simple every-day facts with themselves if they will but have faith in the mediatorial fullness … for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell for all his saints. If you have not these riches the fault lies with yourself. It is there, you might have it if you had but faith to take it. Too often we sit down like beggars on the dunghill, and groan and cry because of the poverty of our nature when we ought to be rejoicing in the Lord. I thank God that we can groan, for that is something; but there is a more excellent way, a better gift to be earnestly coveted. In Christ, ye are rich to the fulness of riches; get ye up, I pray you, to the high places, and realize for yourselves the fulness of God in Christ Jesus.17

How often do we hear this today? How often is it preached that if we are in bondage or under the dominion of some habitual problem, “if there be anything lacking … in us, it is not a deficiency Christward, it is occasioned by shortcomings in ourselves … the fault lies with yourself”? Preaching of this sort is not politically correct in the church. Serious problems, we are told, are rooted in disorders—disorders defined and catalogued by the world by those who know nothing of Christ! And from such we take our cue! So, we qualify and limit the infinite fulness of Christ and unwittingly diminish His glory! May God deliver us!

But John goes even further. Christ’s fulness is not only available to all; it is available to all continually. He says, “We have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16b). The phrase “grace upon grace” is John’s vivid way of describing the experience of Christ’s ongoing provision for the inevitable pains, brokenness and neediness of life. John is confident that, as believers experience emptiness, deficiency, and powerlessness, they will also experience Christ’s fulness. As believers cast themselves wholly on Christ, as they trust His character and rely upon His Word, they will find Him to be an abundant supply for any soul-misery and any soul-need. Spurgeon’s words, once more, are to the point:

> Sinner, saint, to you both alike these words, “all fulness,” sound like a holy hymn … “All fulness!” You, sinner are all emptiness and death and you saint, would be so if it were not for the “all fulness” of Christ of which you have received; therefore both to saint and sinner the words are full of hope. There is joy in these words to every soul conscious of its sad estate, and humbled before God … “All fulness” is a wide, far-reaching, all-comprehending term, and in its abundant store it offers another source of delight. What joy these words give to us when we remember that our vast necessities demand a fulness, yea, “all fulness” before they can be supplied! A little help will be of no use to us for we are altogether without strength. A limited measure of mercy will only mock our misery … But “all fulness,” ay, that will suit us. Here is exactly what our desperate estate demands, for its recovery … Thou wantest—but indeed, the catalogue were much too long for us to read it through at this present, yet be assured though thou pile up thy necessities till they rise like Alps before thee, yet the all-sufficient Saviour can remove all thy needs … The words are both exclusive and inclusive. They deny that there is any fulness elsewhere, for they claim all for Christ. They shut out all others, “It pleased the Father that ‘in him’ should ‘all’ fulness dwell.”18

With such an unbounded confidence in Christ’s glorious all-sufficiency, is it any wonder that God’s blessing was so abundant in Spurgeon’s ministry? May God give us such a faith to herald such a Savior in today’s needy world!

Conclusion

What I have attempted to set forth in this chapter underlies all that follows. I have tried to set forth that the Lord Jesus possesses infinite fulness. This fulness is available to all His people for all their needs. It is not a great storehouse or treasury to which only a select few have access. It is available to all His people. The gospels are pictorials, cataloguings if you will, of the types of people He restores and heals, not only in body but in soul. The degree of brokenness, pain and misery is not

an issue to Him. I believe such a Savior, in great measure, is no longer preached in today’s church. Therefore, my desire is to move us to consider afresh what Scripture says about the all-sufficiency of Christ for the healing of those in great emotional and spiritual need. The church must not take its cue from the world’s assessment of people’s problems—assessments that are made by men who have no conception of the greatness and glory of our Great Physician, and Soul-Healing Savior.

In the pages ahead, I will attempt to present the biblical case for the all-sufficiency of Christ for the delivering and restoring of even the most needy people. I am not advocating a formalistic, mechanical approach. Restoring and healing is often messy. Twenty-five years in pastoral ministry never lets me forget this. However, the Scriptures clearly teach that when Christ is working true soul-healing and true restoration occur. It is a restoration and deliverance that is decisive, though in many cases, it involves an ongoing process. Nonetheless, in the end it is a complete soul-restoring deliverance. This is the Christ we must preach! This is the Savior we must point our needy people to! I believe when the Savior is preached in His all-sufficient glory, many of our most needy people will, with Augustine, say,

> Oh, my God, let me, with thanksgiving, remember and confess to You Your mercies toward me. Let my bones be renewed with Your love, and let them say to You, “who is like unto thee?” (Psalm 35:10). You have broken “my bonds,” and “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalm 116:16-17). I will declare how You have broken them, and when they hear this, all who worship You will say, “Blessed be the Lord in heaven and in earth, great and wonderful is His name.”19

CHAPTER THREE

Jesus Heals the Emotions

A popular Christian book a few years back opened with the following words:

> Early in my pastoral experience, I discovered that I was failing to help two groups of people. … Their problems were not being solved by the preaching of the Word, commitment to Christ, the filling of the Spirit, prayer, or the sacraments … they have scars of ancient painful hurts … as when a little boy rushed downstairs one Christmas dawn and discovered in his Christmas stocking a dirty old rock, put there to punish him for some trivial boyhood naughtiness … such scars have been buried in pain for so long that they are causing hurt and rage that are inexplicable. And these scars are not touched by conversion and sanctifying grace.1

These comments and the thinking behind them bring before us a burning question. Does Christ's sufficiency extend to the healing of people with deep emotional pains and problems? Or do people with acute emotional problems need to be directed to those trained in the theories and techniques of psychology? The focus of this chapter is to look at this vital issue.

My primary aim is to demonstrate that Christ's sufficiency does, in fact, extend to man's emotional needs. We will see that the Scriptures clearly present Christ as the healer of ruined and damaged emotions. Furthermore, we will see that the division between the spiritual and the emotional, so commonly accepted today, cannot be supported from Scripture. It is a concept imposed on Scripture, brought over from secular psychology through the Christian psychology movement. It is not biblically based, and it greatly diminishes people's confidence in Christ's restoring, healing power. The Scriptures clearly teach that the psychological/emotional aspect of man and the spiritual aspect are two inseparable parts of the same inner person, ruined by the fall. Therefore, Christ's renewing and sanctifying grace, by which He delivers from the effects of the fall, reaches to every part of the inner man. This, of course, has been taught by the church for centuries.

Sinclair Ferguson, echoing the church's long accepted teaching that Christ's renewing and restoring work extends to every part of the inner person, says,

> But just as total depravity means sin has influenced every area of our lives so grace reaches into every aspect of our experience where the ravages of sin first ventured. It is through the new birth that the image of God like an embryo in the womb is restored. It then begins to grow to that full maturity of the later stages of Christian experience.2

It is only relatively recently that people's emotional needs have been taken from Christ and partitioned off to those who claim special insight and knowledge. It has, however, gained widespread acceptance in the church. It has taken the church by storm. This is an issue of great significance. It has to do with the glory of Christ. The Scripture presents the glory of Christ as consisting, in large part, in the fact that He is able to restore the whole person—the mind, the will, and the emotions—from the devastating spiritual and emotional effects of sin. The Scriptures teach that He is the soul-healing Physician-Savior. It teaches that there is no limitation to His soul-healing power. In other words, there is a wonderful comprehensiveness to Christ's delivering and renewing work. A comprehensiveness and sufficiency to which God calls His people to put their absolute trust. Therefore, nothing should be allowed to diminish or detract from the Savior's glory in this regard.

The comments quoted at the beginning of this chapter, however, give a different understanding of Christ's power and ability. They are based upon two lines of thinking now commonly accepted in the evangelical church. First, there is the thinking that serious problems—problems that affect the deep inner person—are beyond the scope of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The author says, "Their problems were not being solved by … a commitment to Christ." He

indicates that Christ's soul-healing power is evidently not sufficient to help these people, for he also says, "These scars are not touched" by Christ in "conversion and sanctifying grace." Whatever Christ, His Spirit, His Word and His people are able to do, they are not able to heal the deep scars of the soul.

The second line of thinking that underlies these statements is another commonly accepted idea. This is the idea that a distinction must be made between emotional and spiritual problems, and as distinct problems, they must necessarily be dealt with differently. People with spiritual problems are to be directed to pastors and spiritual counselors who direct people to Christ and His Word. However, people with deeper emotional problems are to be directed to specialists or counselors who are trained in the latest theories and techniques gleaned from secular psychology. This thinking long ago made its way into mainstream evangelical thinking. A leading pioneer of Christian psychology said,

> Man is more than a spiritual being. He is an …emotional being as well. Although a person's spiritual condition affects all other aspects of his life, he may need diagnosis and help in these other areas. Therefore, a counselor may need to refer his counselee to the person who can help him most.3

A more recent writer also makes this distinction between emotional and spiritual problems and the need for something more than Christ. Speaking of those who use secular techniques in Christian counseling, he says,

> These specialists integrate Christian theology and psychological techniques and help their clients with both spiritual and emotional growth…they respect and honor people's Christian values while helping them understand and change their emotional pain.4

Clearly, it is believed that emotional problems are different from spiritual problems. Emotional problems are psychological in nature and require a different approach. Therefore, in the minds of many Christians, things such as anger and rage, anxiety (including neurosis and panic attacks), depression and the like are no longer considered spiritual issues. They are psychological and

emotional. This is their thinking—it must be said in passing—in spite of the fact that Christ often speaks of the emotions and His ability to restore them. He asserts that He is able to restore peace, rest and joy irrespective of the pain and suffering that a person is experiencing (John 14:27; 15:11; 16:33). The aim of this chapter is to show that such thinking has no basis in Scripture. More specifically, its aim is to show the sufficiency of Christ for the healing of severe emotional problems. My desire is that people in great need and those who help them will rest with complete confidence in Christ's all-sufficient, soul-healing power. Its objective is to exalt the glory of Christ in His healing and delivering work.

I must make two clarifications before we go on. First, I am not saying that Christ's sufficiency means that a person should not consult a physician when there is an obvious physical problem. That is self-evident. Secondly, I am not discounting or ignoring the relationship that physical problems may have on a person's spiritual and emotional well-being. It is well known that physical ailments may cause and compound emotional problems. It must be emphatically stated that there are physical problems that cause depression and other emotional ills. For example, hormonal imbalances, hypothyroidism, fatigue, chronic viral infections, liver disease, and even brain tumors, and the like have been shown to cause depression. This must be recognized, and steps must be taken by a physician to search this out. Of course, the fact that depression and other things may be caused or compounded by physical problems does not mean people are not responsible to live godly lives as they seek to discover the source of their problem. Having made this clarification, we will now turn our attention to the sufficiency of Christ for the healing of emotional problems.

Christ Heals and Restores the Whole Inner Person

We will start by showing that the emotional and the spiritual are two inseparable aspects of the same inner person. This is evident, first of all, by the fact that the Scriptures teach that the sinfulness of fallen human nature consists in large part in ruined and corrupted emotions. This is stating nothing new. It has been an essential component of Christian theology for centuries that man's sinful depravity extends to the emotions as well as the mind and the will. It is a long-accepted Christian teaching that man's fallen spiritual condition includes his fallen emotional state. Speaking in contemporary terms, the fall damaged man's emotional capacity. Therefore, the spiritual and emotional are inseparably linked, and both are the object of Christ's healing grace.

A number of Scriptures prove this. To begin with, the fallen heart is described as a hard, stony heart. That is, man, because of sin, is described as unaffected and unmoved in his emotions as he ought to be. This is manifested primarily towards God and secondarily, towards his fellow man. God, speaking through Ezekiel, says,

> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statues, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Notice man's heart is stone-like. That is, it is defective in its emotional capacity. Jonathan Edwards states it clearly:5

> Now, by a hard heart is plainly meant an unaffected heart, or a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affection [emotion] like a stone, insensible, stupid, unmoved and hard to be impressed. Hence, the hard heart is called a stoney heart and is opposed to a heart of flesh, that has feeling and is sensibly touched and moved.6

The inseparable connection between the spiritual and emotional is clear. Man's sinfulness—his

spiritual hardness of heart—consists, in large part, in his ruined and damaged emotions. This, then,

becomes the object of Christ's renewing work both in salvation and sanctification. In salvation, Christ gives a new heart — a heart of flesh, a tender heart, a heart with new receptive emotions. This heart then undergoes a further lifelong transformation. Both are the work of Christ as He renews and restores His people. As Edwards says,

> Since also the Scriptures, do so frequently, place the sin and corruption of the heart in hardness of heart: it is evident that the grace and holiness of the heart, on the contrary, must in great measure, consist in its having pious affections [emotions] and being easily susceptible of such affection [emotion]. 7

There will be more on this later. For now, we can see that there is no biblical basis for treating emotional problems in a distinct way from spiritual problems. The ruin of the one involves the ruin of the other. Likewise, the restoration of the one involves the restoration of the other. Both come under the soul-healing reach of Christ. To make such a distinction is, in effect, to remove from Christ the task which He came to do. It is to replace Him in His calling as the Great Physician of the diseased soul. In the final analysis, it is to diminish and detract from His saving glory.

There are many other passages of Scripture that demonstrate man's emotions are part of his fallen spiritual state. The Lord Jesus, for example, was moved to anger and displeasure by the hardened unresponsive emotional condition of the heart, not simply intellectual and spiritual ignorance. Mark reporting Jesus' response to uncaring religious leaders says that He was, "after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:6). In this same vein Paul, concerning a chief reason for God's anger towards man, says, "Because of your stubbornness [hardness] and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5).

In addition, the Scriptures teach that man's corrupted emotional condition manifests itself in a spiritual manner in two primary ways. First, men do not fear God; it is not simply that men lack a mere intellectual reverence for God, but a heart gripped in its emotions as well. Indeed, fear is one of the strongest emotions, yet with regards to God, men have none. Isaiah says, "Why, O Lord, do You cause us to stray from Your ways and harden our heart from fearing you?" (Isaiah 63:17). According to Isaiah, the absence of the emotion of fear manifests a hard heart, a heart fallen in sin. Paul, in fact, states it as his climactic indictment against man, that proves that man is under sin. He says, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18).

The other primary way man's fallen, emotional condition manifests itself spiritually is in the absence of love. Men have no love towards God or towards their fellow man. Jesus says, "But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves" (John 5:42). Paul says that men are "hateful to God" (Romans 1:30). Paul also says that the unsaved, unregenerate life is characterized by hate. He says, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). Clearly, malice, envy and hatred are emotions; and just as clearly, these emotions reflect the spiritual corruption of the fallen heart. At this point then, we can conclude that Scripture makes it abundantly clear that man's emotions are corrupted, and this emotional corruption is spiritual in nature. They are intertwined, being two interconnected aspects of the same thing.

Therefore, just as the spiritual condition of fallen man consists in corrupted emotions, so also the object of Christ's renewing and sanctifying grace is to restore and heal these emotions. We will look at this in depth in a moment. For now it can be pointed out that both Paul and John teach that the healing of the emotions is a focal point of Christ's saving work. John says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love" (1 John 3:14). Paul says, "We also once were … hateful and hating" (Titus 3:3). Clearly Scripture teaches that Christ changes His people to the deep inner core of their being; He heals and restores their emotions. They are people who are no longer dominated by hate. They are people who love. In light of such Scripture, there is no warrant to speak of deep emotional problems as psychological and not spiritual. If Christ, in His delivering

work, does not restore and heal the emotions, then what does He do? Does Christ merely change the mind and leave the heart and its emotions untouched? Is His work purely a cerebral, intellectual thing? Does He merely change thinking so that people are able to speculate and theorize about God in an unfeeling manner? Does not Scripture teach that God detests such a theoretical, knowledge-only religion? Did not this emphasis upon knowledge and intellect, to the exclusion of the heart and its emotions, bring Christ's scathing rebuke of the Pharisees? (Matthew 15:7-9).

Edwards, once again, is to the point about the central place of emotions and the danger of a mere intellectual view of Christ's renewing grace:

> For although to true religion there must indeed be something else besides affection; yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection … where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light; that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things.8

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the emotions are a component of man's spiritual makeup. To separate them is to intellectualize Christ's saving work and, therefore, to endanger the Gospel!

Christ Heals the Emotions by His Renewing and Sanctifying Grace

We will now consider in more detail the main proof which demonstrates that Christ heals the emotions. It consists in the fact that a central element of the work of Christ, both in the new birth and in sanctification, is to effect a great change in ruined and damaged emotions. The Bible states this change in different ways. The new birth (regeneration), for example, is called a circumcision of the heart. Moses says, “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul in order that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6). Whatever else the imagery of circumcision conveys, it conveys that Christ’s work cuts deep into the inner person. It reaches man’s emotional state. It reaches the heart. Those affected by it are marked by love. “God will circumcise your heart … to love.” The new birth is also described as the receiving of a heart of flesh. God says through Ezekiel, “I will give you a new heart … a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). As we’ve seen a heart of flesh is a tender heart; a heart with restored and healed emotions, a heart that, in Edwards’ words, “Has feeling, and is sensibly touched and moved.”9 It can be seen that the whole inner person comes under the domain of Christ’s all-sufficient, soul-healing work. He makes a heart tender. He changes it in such a way that it now is moved and affected. He enables it to love!

It is the Apostle Paul who speaks most directly concerning Christ’s power to restore damaged

emotions. A key text briefly mentioned above is worth repeating here. He says, “We also once were

… enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). Notice he describes the unregenerate, unsaved state as characterized by hatefulness and hating, envy and malice. Moreover, He says that believers have experienced a great healing of the soul. In Paul’s words, “we also once were” all those things. Christians are no longer hateful, and hating; their emotions have been renewed and restored. How? Paul tells us, “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:4-5).

By means of the renewing of the Holy Spirit, Christ penetrates the deep inner person and restores the emotions. He effects a great emotional transformation. Spurgeon, whose confidence in Christ’s soul-healing power marked his unparalleled ministry, says,

> He speaks of “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another”.… Revenge is the delight of the wicked, but to do kindness in return for injury is the luxury of a Christian. One main distinction between the heirs of God and the heirs of wrath is this: the unregenerate are in the power of self, and so of hate, but the regenerate are under the dominion of Christ, and so of love. … God help us to stamp out the last spark of personal animosity! … Hearken to this. There are men in the world who are saved …saved even now—saved from the dominion of the evils which we described under our first head. … Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus … is saved from the … power of sin. He shall no longer be the slave of his lusts and pleasures; he is saved from that dread bondage. He is saved from hate, for he has tasted love, and learned to love.10

Clearly, emotional transformation is a central facet of Christ’s renewing work, and as we shall see, it is a central facet of sanctification as well. Those who claim that serious emotional problems are not healed by spiritual renewal and transformation are sorely mistaken. It is, in many regards, fundamentally an issue of unbelief. In the words of Christ, they “are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Sadly, many are saying such things in the church. For example, one author speaking of a person who has, in his words, “a continuous feeling of anxiety, inadequacy, and inferiority,” says that these problems are not helped by Christ through the Gospel. He says, “The good news of the Gospel has not penetrated down into his damaged inner self.”11 Is this not a denigrating and diminishing of Christ? Does this not lessen Him in the minds of people? Christ, through the gospel, does not reach the deep inner person,

we are told! Is it any wonder that the church is infirm and powerless when such a weak, powerless Savior is preached in many pulpits?

Contrary to such statements is Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians 3. In this classic text, Paul speaks in detail on the depth and breadth of Christ's great heart-work. He says, "You are our letter…being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God" (2 Corinthians 3:2-4).

First of all, note Paul's confidence. It is a confidence that Christ is able to effect a deep and pervasive change. It is a change "written … on tablets of human hearts." Paul is referring to a penetrating change, a central feature of which, as we have seen, is a change in the emotions. Notice also that he attributes this change to Christ, though it is through the agency of the Holy Spirit. He says believers are "a letter of Christ" a letter as it were, written by Christ Himself. Calvin says it this way, "Pursuing the metaphor he says that the Epistle of which he speaks [the great work on the heart] was written by Christ…he makes Christ the author and Himself the instrument."12 Or as Matthew Henry says, "They were the epistle of Christ … Christ was the author of all that was good in them."13 In other words, Paul is emphasizing that it is Christ who comes through the Gospel. It is Christ whose power operates both in conversion and sanctification. Spurgeon once again is clear in this regard:

> We do not receive any blessing apart from our Lord Jesus. In all works of the Spirit, whether regeneration or renewal, it is the Lord Jesus who is putting forth his power, for He saith, "Behold, I make all things new." The Mediator is the conduit-pipe through which grace supplies us day by day with the water of life. Everything is by Jesus Christ.14

It is Christ who works this great soul-healing change by the putting forth of His power. And since it is Christ who works in such an all-sufficient manner, our most needy and our most emotionally bankrupt people must be pointed to Him who, as the Great Physician, is able to heal their souls.

Paul says more about the work of Christ in verse 18. He says that Christ not only initially renews, but that He continues His work in an ongoing transformation of the soul. Paul says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." Both the breadth and the depth of Christ's transforming work are indicated here. First, Paul speaks of its depth. This is

indicated by the term "transformed." This word is a translation of a Greek word that comes into English in the word "metamorphosis." It speaks of a penetrating transformation. One source defines the Greek word as "to change the inward reality of something."15 In the New Testament, it is the word used to describe an essential change that penetrates the whole person. It is contrasted in Romans 12:2 with another Greek term that refers to a surface, outward change. Believers are not to be, in Paul's words, "conformed to this world, [an outward superficial change] but to be transformed [a deep, penetrating change] by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The root word *morphe* is used of Christ when it says of Him, "although He existed in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). Christ was in the form of God. That is, in the core of His nature, in His essence and inner being, He was God. Therefore, the term "transformed" emphasizes a core, internal change. A change that is intrinsic and essential as opposed to outward and incidental. It is just such a change that Christ works in His people. It is a change that penetrates to the deepest part of the inner person. In other words, there is no aspect of a person—no scar, no pain, no wound of the soul or damaged emotion—that cannot be directly touched by His renewing and sanctifying grace. To teach otherwise, even unwittingly, is to detract from the Savior; it is to diminish His great soul-healing glory.

Paul also speaks of the breadth of Christ's soul-transforming work. He is careful to emphasize the fact that all true believers are the objects of it. He says, "But we all, with unveiled face, … are being transformed … from glory to glory." Notice that Christ is the soul-healer of all His people. None are excluded or are beyond His ability to change them deeply.

Christ Heals the Emotions In Order That His People May Offer Acceptable Worship and Service

There is one last matter that we must consider that proves that Christ is the healer of emotions. It is the fact that God requires godly emotions as a prerequisite for acceptable worship and service. Scripture constantly emphasizes that God rejects cold, lifeless worship. It is in fact no worship at all. It is what Jesus calls vain worship! Christ sternly rebukes cold-hearted worship. He says, “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me, but in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men’” (Matthew 15:7-9). Therefore, since Christ places such a premium on the heart, we should expect that His renewing work would in fact exhibit itself in godly emotions. And, as we have seen, this is indeed what the Scripture teaches. Edwards‘ comments on the vital role of restored emotions in worship, He says,

> That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in His word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, “fervent in spirit,” and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion. … If we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts … unless they be lively and powerful! In nothing is vigour in the actings of our inclination so requisite as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.16

We see, then, that it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who declares the priority of godly emotions in worship. And it is the Lord Jesus who provides these emotions through His renewing work. It must be said in passing that I am not diminishing the vital role of truth and doctrine in worship. Christ Himself said that “those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). To neglect truth and doctrine is to corrupt worship in another direction. It is to degrade it into a sanctified superstition. Nonetheless, it is clear that Christ requires the involvement of godly emotion in worship.

Not only that, but without godly emotion there is no acceptable service to God either. The

Scripture condemns a dispassionate, cold-hearted service — a service that is mechanical — something done out of a sense of duty. Christ commends a church that stands for the truth and opposes evil. He said to the Church at Ephesus,

> I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you can not tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. (Revelation 2:2-3)

However, this is not enough. He also demands an earnest heart, a heart moved in its affection for Him. He says,

> But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent (Revelation 2:4-5).

Christ warns that unless this church rekindles its love for Him, He will remove its lampstand! It is evident, then, that service is unacceptable apart from the healing and restoration of godly emotions. Therefore, it is just as evident that saving and sanctifying grace must necessarily center upon the healing and renewing of the emotions. This is how Christ, in large measure, fits His people to offer Him acceptable worship and service. Once again, Edwards is to the point:

> I am bold to assert, that there never was any considerable change wrought in the mind or conversation of any person, by anything of a religious nature that ever he read, heard, or saw, that had not his affections [emotions] moved. Never was a natural man engaged earnestly to seek his salvation … nor was ever one induced to fly for refuge unto Christ, while his heart remained unaffected. Nor was there ever a saint awakened out of a cold, lifeless frame, or recovered from a declining state in religion, and brought back from a lamentable departure from God, without having his heart affected. And, in a word, there never was anything considerable brought to pass in the heart or life of any man living, by the things of religion, that had not his heart deeply affected by those things.17

In conclusion, we can say that a primary focus of Christ's saving and sanctifying grace is to work a deep change in the emotions of man. We also conclude that the idea that emotional problems are different from spiritual problems indicates an ignorance of what the Scripture teaches concerning Christ's delivering power. Practically speaking, it has a harmful effect on the church. It directs people away from Christ, the all-sufficient river of life, to the broken cisterns of this world. Jeremiah warns, "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). Christ Himself therefore pleads, "Now in the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "from his innermost being will flow rivers of living waters"'(John 7:37-38). These Scriptures point out the great need to see Christ in His all-sufficient fulness. A fulness more than enough for the most needy of soul-famished people.

May the Lord rise up and defend Himself and His glorious all-sufficiency. For then will His people find their all in Him, and the church will experience the blessing of His inexhaustible fulness. And more importantly, Christ's glory will be seen in its fulness before the watching world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jesus Binds Up the Brokenhearted

The following is a young woman's account of her struggle with anorexia and her deliverance from it by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a stirring testimony that gives hope to others held captive by similar problems. These are her words:

> All through my teenage years I was growing bitter and hardening my heart, and didn't even realize it. God began to lay His hand heavy upon me during my senior year in high school. For years I had struggled with my weight. I could never reach a weight I was satisfied with. I would always go up and down and never maintain a desired weight. So I decided to go on a diet.

> At first, everything seemed okay. By the end of my senior year, it had grown into more than a diet. It had grown into what people would call an eating disorder. I had become anorexic. To me, I didn't have a problem. I was finally at a desired weight I had always wanted to be at. Within six months, I weighed 80 lbs. For a year and a half I lived this way without ever thinking there was a problem. Controlling my eating gave me a sense of power and identity. I felt important and in control of my life.

> After a while, I started to sink into depression. I started to feel out of control and it scared me. I went to a nutritionist, but that didn't help. I wasn't dealing with the real problem. I had stuffed anger and bitterness for years, and it started to surface in my life. I didn't recognize my emotions as bitterness at first. I would tell myself I wasn't angry, but just feeling hurt by others. I wanted control over my life, and yet it seemed the more weight I lost, the more out of control I felt. I felt I could always control my eating, but it had come to control me. I was on a path of self-destruction. I would call out to God, but it seemed as if He wasn't there. I began to doubt my salvation. There was so much guilt I was carrying and I literally could find no rest in my soul or my body. I had always tried to be the "perfect" or right kind of Christian. I tried to obey all of God's law, but that only put me in bondage more. I got to the point of wanting to commit suicide. I had no hope and no reason for living.

> I never really came out of the depression, but it did ease up. Slowly, my anorexia turned into bulimia. The anger and bitterness inside kept growing and growing. Over a period of a few months, God started to really convict me of my anger. The pastor was preaching on the cross and what God did for us, and it didn't move me at all. It actually made me angry. I would think, "What has God done for me?" I wasn't happy, so it must be God's fault. The hardness of my heart began to disturb me. I would drive home from church crying and wondering if I was going to hell. After a while, I admitted I was bitter, but refused to forgive. I was fighting God. I wanted my own way and not God's way. No matter how miserable I was, I wouldn't go to God. I knew I'd have to humble myself.

> Slowly, God began to soften my heart and break me. I was starting to see how selfish I was. I began to realize my anger was ultimately towards God and my eating disorders were an outlet for my anger. The anorexia and bulimia were an outward extension of my heart and how I idolized myself and what I wanted. Instead of alcohol or drugs as a way to bury things, I would starve myself or purge. I thought I deserved better than what God had given me. I was pointing the finger at God and at others, and blaming them for my unhappiness. I was so ungrateful and unthankful in my heart. I had never bowed the knee to Christ, and never truly saw myself as vile and wicked before God. Where was the love, joy, peace, forgiveness and thankfulness that should characterize a Christian?

> In my bedroom, in February 1995, down on my knees, I truly repented of my sins and bowed the knee to Christ. I was genuine and thankful for the first time in my life. I saw what a wicked person I was. I was a hypocrite, full of pride and self-righteousness. I knew I needed His mercy and forgiveness. I knew the only way out of my eating disorders was through the grace and power of Christ. The power of the sin was so overwhelming and too strong for me. I had read every book and analyzed myself to every extent. All that did was make me feel more trapped and in bondage. What I needed to do was look to the cross and get my focus on Christ.

> God has healed me like no therapist ever could! His Word cut right to the heart of my problem. I am free in Christ alone! The cross is more than enough. I didn't need therapy groups or to analyze myself. I needed Christ!

The Distinguishing Mark

> **of Christ's Presence**

This story is an example of what countless people have testified about the compassion and power of the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the long history of the church. They testify that the Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of His name, delivers people from the dominating power and devastating effects of the most severe emotional and personal problems. This, of course, has always been the hope and confidence of God's people. In fact, the good news is, in essence, that there is a compassionate and delivering Savior! The purpose of this study is to show from Christ's own words in the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel (Luke 4:18) that the prominent feature of His presence and work in the world is the healing, restoring, and delivering of broken and downtrodden people. My desire in writing is that people will be encouraged to place their confidence in Christ. It is my conviction that a psychologized gospel has caused many people in the church to look to something other than Christ for their serious problems and thereby remain mired, year after year, in emotional and personal difficulties without any true experience of deliverance and freedom.

While there are modern complexities that may compound some problems, in the final analysis there are no truly new problems. Modern problems (like anorexia and others) are underlain by age-old problems that manifest themselves in new symptoms. Therefore, those who turn to Christ for the healing of their soul and rely on Him through the power of the Holy Spirit still find Him to be the All-Sufficient Savior. This confidence in Christ's delivering and restoring power is greatly needed in the church today. Like the woman in Mark's Gospel, many are spending their resources only to find themselves worse off. Mark says of this woman, "A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse" (Mark 5:25-26). This woman, after spending all she had, was, in Mark's words, "not helped at all, but rather had grown worse." This is the sad plight of many today who are not directed to find their healing and restoration in the limitless power and compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. The following words aptly express the confidence we must have in Christ. They are from Charles Spurgeon, who was intimately acquainted with great emotional pain and brokenness:

> Surely we may expect the divine help of the Holy Spirit … for the special office of the Holy Spirit under the present dispensation is to be "the Comforter" who is to abide with us forever. While we bring forth this oil and wine from His own stores, we may hope that He will pour them into the wounds of the afflicted, for this is His office and it would be blasphemy to imagine that He will neglect it. He comforts effectually in an all-sufficient and omnipotent manner.1

With Spurgeon, we would say that there is no deficiency in Christ. There is no problem beyond His delivering power. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He still frees the captives.

We will now look at Christ's own words as recorded in Luke's Gospel. They were spoken by Christ upon His visit to the synagogue at Nazareth, where He had been brought up. When asked to read, Christ selected a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 that vividly describes the purpose of His ministry as Messiah and Savior. Speaking of Himself, He read,

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

The Lord Jesus Christ, announces that the distinguishing feature of His presence in this fallen world is the restoration and healing of "the poor," "the captives," "the blind," and "the downtrodden." Christ makes it abundantly clear that this is how He is to be regarded by His people and how He is to be preached in the world. J.C. Ryle states it well:

> Let us know for ourselves in what light we ought chiefly to regard Christ … We must know Jesus as the friend of the poor in spirit, the physician of the diseased heart, the deliverer of the soul in bondage. These are the primary offices He came to fulfill on earth. 2

This passage is written in a way that emphasizes the fact that Christ alone does this delivering work. Emphatic personal pronouns are used to stress that we must look to Him alone for the healing of our souls. Christ says "He anointed Me" and "He sent Me," emphasizing by the personal pronouns that He means *Me and no other.* That needy people are to look to Christ alone is stated well by John Calvin:

> He uses the singular number, and speaks in the name of Christ that He may more powerfully awaken the minds of the godly to strong confidence. It is certain that what is here related belongs to Christ alone … because He alone by the power of the Spirit performs and grants all the benefits that are here promised.3

Christ's intent, then, is clear. He is directing people to put their confidence and hope in Him. Look to Him, He says. He is sufficient! He is able! In other words, irrespective of the degree of brokenness and pain experienced, Christ can restore and heal. This is the good news preached to the poor. There are no modern problems, there are no unique problems of the soul and mind, that He cannot deliver from.4 Until recent years, this was the confidence of the church. This comment by Spurgeon is typical:

> There is no possible state into which a believer could fall even if it were the most desperate that could be conceived but that Christ can restore him perfectly … all our healing lies in Christ. Christ is the physician and Christ is the medicine too. Go straight away to Christ and lay hold of Him just as you are. Whatever your condition may be.5

The Lord's purpose, then, is to draw people away from man and his wisdom and to point them to Himself. Spurgeon, again, puts it well:

> Scripture never urges men to despair. It is full of promises to the most sinful, it reaches to the greatest extremity of our need, and cries in generous love: "He is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by Him." "Oh but I still know there is no hope for me." My dear friend, you know nothing of the kind; it is a dream, a horrible nightmare, and there is no truth in it. This blessed Scripture sounds from the cross to you: "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." 6

Christ says "Come to Me…and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). To those whose souls are storm-tossed and weary, as it were, from the turbulence of a raging sea, Christ says He will give them rest. What a marvelous hope; what a blessed confidence. My desire is to show from Scripture that this is true, regardless of the ruin and bondage a person may

experience in his soul. This confidence in Christ's delivering power is waning in the Evangelical church as psychological theory comes in like a flood. David Wells, recognizing the importance of confidence in Christ's power, says,

> As we sink ever deeper into a therapeutic universe, the biblical language…gives way to the psychological language of healing. The widespread assumption in our culture is that as the body contains its own healing mechanisms, so too, does the self … we therefore simply have to tap into the springs of our own internal healing. … And what I have been describing in the culture is now all too evident in the Evangelical Church with its endless chatter about the self, its psychobabble … the more seriously we take the God who has revealed himself, the more firmly we grasp the redemption Christ has wrought, the more fervently we seek

> the Spirit's transformation, the less confidence we will have in ourselves. It is this loss of confidence in ourselves that is the bedrock condition for a growing confidence in God. This confidence in Him will enable us to understand the fact that, despite the undoubted challenges of the postmodern world, the Word of God in the hand of God is quite sufficient to do the work of God and to think otherwise is simply old fashioned unbelief. 7

Simply stated, we must renounce our confidence in ourselves and in the wisdom of man, and once again put our confidence in Christ, His Spirit, and His Word. We must have, in Wells' words, "an overwhelming sense of the centrality and supremacy of God and a great confidence in His power and presence."8 In terms of ministry, this means our most needy people must be pointed to Christ, not with a simplistic, magical view of restoration, but nonetheless, with a confidence that He is the true physician of the soul, and He can and will heal those who cast themselves on Him. Isaiah says this is God's response to any who turn to and rest in Him:

> For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57:15)

Christ was Anointed by the Spirit to Fulfill His Mission as Deliverer

So central is Christ's work of deliverance that His anointing by the Spirit was chiefly designed for this purpose. Christ said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel [good news] to the poor." Anointing is "a metaphor for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, a special power, or a divine commission."9 It is "for the accomplishment of His great office."10 It is the "consecrating of Jesus to the Messianic office and furnishing Him with the powers necessary for its administration."11 In other words, the anointing of the Holy Spirit fitted Him in His humanity for His unique delivering ministry. It fitted Him to heal and restore devastated people.

This is Christ's office. This is His work. This being the case, people should cast themselves on Christ, and preachers should direct them to do so. However, with the church, awash in psychological theory, this very often is not the case. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says it this way,

> Christian people have come to me and said, “I need to see a psychologist, can you recommend one who is a Christian?” I say, “What is the trouble?” “Temper,” they say, “I cannot control my temper.” What has happened is that the devil has said to them, “The trouble with you is that you are a psychological case; you must go and have psychological treatment,” whereas their problem is a purely spiritual one. (I am dealing, remember, with Christians) When I am asked such a question I say, “No, I recommend no Christian psychologist to you.” “Well,” they ask, “what do you tell me to do?” I say, “Control your temper!” “It is very difficult,” they say. “Of course it is difficult,” I reply, “have we not all got our difficulties? You are simply trying to get out of it by saying “I am a psychological case. I am not just an ordinary person with a bad temper. I must get some psychological help.” In the meantime the devil is rejoicing because you have regarded what is a purely spiritual problem as if it were psychological.

> People come to me about other sins in exactly the same way. They say, “I must be a psychological case, I am always falling to my particular sin. The temptation to it makes me tremble. Do you think I need some psychological help?” I reply, “The Bible tells you that what you need is to ‘fight the good fight of faith’ in a spiritual manner.” The whole tendency to evade the spiritual in terms of the psychological is rampant at the present time.

> Everything is being explained away in terms of diseased conditions or psychological states. … It is a terrible and a horrible danger.12

The horrible danger of which Jones speaks, I believe, is that people in the church will no longer

recognize that their problems are fundamentally spiritual and, therefore, they will not cast

themselves on Christ. The supernatural will be gone. The Spirit’s power in deliverance will be gone. The church’s testimony in the world will suffer and with it the glory of Christ’s name. Christ will effectively be removed from His office as Deliverer and Restorer. The fact is that such things as anger, drunkenness, sexual sin, fear and anxiety, among other things, are ultimately spiritual issues of the heart. They are the very things from which Christ came to deliver. For anger, He provides self-control and patience. For drunkenness, He provides joy and self-discipline. For sexual sin, He provides self-control and contentment. For fear and anxiety, He provides a peace that passes understanding. Confidence and faith in the delivering, restoring power of Christ must be heralded in the church. People must be shown that Christ not only cares for, but also restores and helps, such needy, weak people.

Jesus Delivers Broken People

There is, perhaps, no passage of Scripture that more clearly declares Christ’s all-sufficiency to deliver and restore than Luke 4:16-19. In it, Christ uses terms that vividly describe those who are experiencing acute suffering. They are “poor,” “broken,” “oppressed,” and “downtrodden” people. It is a cataloging, as it were, of the worst kinds of problems, problems that today are called dysfunctions and disorders. It is to these people—the worst of the worst—that Christ gives hope. In this marvelous passage, Christ offers the great blessing of the healing of the soul to all who cast themselves on Him. The following words accurately summarize the blessing that Christ offers:

> We were altogether overwhelmed by every kind of evils: but God cheers us by his life-giving light, to rescue us from the deep abyss of death, and to restore us to complete happiness. It tends, in no ordinary degree, to recommend the Gospel, that we obtain from it inestimable advantage.13

Christ has come, and the good news is that He delivers people from the miseries of their soul. It is as if He says, “Come to me, you who are the most ruined and the most devastated of Satan’s and sin’s captives. Come to me, you who are hopeless, helpless, and despairing. I can and I will heal and restore you.”

The Scripture that Christ quotes in Luke 4:18-19 is from Isaiah 61:1-2a. It will be helpful to compare these two passages.

> **Isaiah 61:1-2a Luke 4:18-19**

The Spirit of the Lord 1. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me is upon me

Because the Lord has 2. Because He anointed anointed Me to bring Me to preach the

> good news to the gospel to the poor afflicted

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted

To proclaim liberty to 4. He has sent Me to the captives proclaim release to

> the captives

And freedom to the 5. And recovery of prisoners [lit. opening to sight to the blind those who are bound]

To set free those who are oppressed

To proclaim the favorable 7. To proclaim the year of the Lord favorable year of the

> Lord

Immediately it is noticed that the passages are not identical. The Luke passage leaves out “He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted,” and the Isaiah passage does not have “to set free those who are downtrodden.” We will look at each one of these phrases, and hopefully the differences will be explained. It is enough to say here that the substance and teaching of these missing phrases is included in the meaning of the other phrases.

Jesus Preaches the Gospel to the Poor

Christ says, first of all, that He was sent to preach the Gospel to the poor. The Gospel is a joyous message of good news. The people to whom this good news comes are described by Christ as “poor.” The term is used by Christ to describe an attitude of heart, a poverty of spirit, not a poverty in material possessions. Christ came primarily concerned for the soul of man, not his social status—although the true Gospel works itself out in social relationships or it is not the true gospel.

The term “poor” is a picturesque word. It comes from a root word that means to “cower down or hide oneself for fear.”14 It often conveyed the idea of “moving about in wretchedness.”15 Its basic idea meant to be “brought to the point of begging with no means to repay.”16 Jesus used the term this way when He said, “But when you give a reception invite the poor…and you will be blessed since they have no means to repay you” (Luke 14:13). In other words, the poor are lowly afflicted people destitute of wealth, influence, position and honor and they know it. Jesus, as we said, is referring to spiritual poverty. It is parallel to Matthew 5:3 where He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.” As William Hendricksen says, “The speaker was thinking of the destitute, those who knew themselves to be such.”17 Therefore, the poor in spirit are people who recognize their destitute state and realize that in Christ alone they have hope of deliverance.

Therefore, when Christ says He came to preach good news to the poor, He is in fact laying down His terms for restoration and healing. Christ is making it clear, that apart from a poverty in spirit, He restores and heals no one. What this means in terms of ministry is this: until a person sees himself in this way and casts himself on Christ, he cannot be helped. As one has said,

> We cannot enjoy these benefits which Christ bestows in any other manner than being humbled under a deep conviction of our distresses, and by coming as hungry souls to seek Him as our deliverer: for all who swell with pride and do not groan under their captivity lend a deaf ear to this prediction and treat it with contempt.18

This may explain the frustration of much pastoral counseling. What counselor has not bemoaned the fact that they often see no significant change in people even after multiplied hours of counseling. The reason for this is simple: it is Christ alone who delivers. It is Christ who restores and heals, and He restores no one who does not with humility cast himself on Him. My own experience through the years has proven this true. Isaiah says it this way,

> Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him. O People in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry, when He hears it, He will answer you. (Isaiah 30:18-19)

Notice that the Lord longs to be gracious! He waits on high to be compassionate. He waits for the cry of a humble brokenness, the cry of a person poor in spirit that casts himself on Him alone. This, in fact, is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. This pattern is the same everywhere. First there is a poverty in spirit that cries out to the Lord. Then the Lord in compassion responds by healing and restoring. Two other references will show how central this is. The Lord said to Israel when they were in captivity:

> From there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your

> heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things come upon you … you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God. He will not fail you. (Deuteronomy 4:29-31)

Jeremiah elsewhere says, "'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will restore your fortunes'" (Jeremiah 29:12-14). Notice it is the same order. First there is a poverty of spirit, and then the Lord restores and heals. That is, first there is a sense of need—a desperateness which causes a person to turn to the Lord, to cast themselves on Him alone. Then the Lord, who is compassionate, promises that He will not fail them! He will restore their fortunes! The lesson for us today is clear. If people will abandon themselves to Christ, they will find Him to be an all-sufficient deliverer and restorer. They will find no problem or need so great that He cannot meet it. He will heal their soul! He will restore their fortunes! This is the good news to the "poor."

Jesus Proclaims Release to the Captives

The needy people Christ delivers and restores are, in Christ's words, "captives." A captive is a person **"**held in bondage under someone or something." The word "captive" comes from a root word which means "a spear."19 Therefore, literally it refers to "a person taken or led away captive at the point of a spear."20 Jesus uses the word when speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem when He says, "And they will fall by the edge of the sword and will be led captive into all nations" (Luke 21:24). Once again, it is picturesque language to describe the misery and hopelessness of people who suffer from the devastation of severe emotional and spiritual problems. It is just such desperate, hopeless people that Christ came to deliver and restore. Speaking of the all-sufficiency of Christ's power to restore and release from bondage, Spurgeon said,

> Surely he who regenerated can restore; he who created can renew. Restoration is not a more difficult work–nay, it is but a secondary work compared with the new creating of the soul. The Lord, even Jesus Christ, who did at the first give thee to live, can revive thee again; and he can do it by himself, being to thy soul her medicine as well as her physician. … The hunger, famine, and disease of war need but one cure, and that is peace; the woes of the believer's soul need but one remedy. … The presence of Christ has everything in it that the soul can possibly need.21

Spurgeon had a complete confidence in Christ's all-sufficiency. Therefore, he directed his people to find their healing in Christ alone. Notice his words: "[therefore] He can do it by Himself," and "the believer's soul need[s] but one remedy." How greatly we need this confidence restored in the church. How great is the need for the church to renounce its dependence on psychology and the wisdom of men. More than this, how great is the church's unbelief when it insists on referring its most needy people to specialists trained in the wisdom of men; when it accepts without question the world's redefining of people's problems as disorders and dysfunctions; when it effectively removes Christ from His office of Restorer and Deliverer. Until the church directs its needy to Christ alone, can it reasonably expect that Christ would send revival? Would Christ bless the church while there is a widespread lack of confidence in His delivering power? The following is a moving account of people who had such a confidence in Christ. It is an account of someone healed by the power of Christ from unspeakable emotional and personal pain. It occurred during the terrible persecutions of Christians under the reign of Idi Amin in the late 1970s in Uganda. It is in the words of a pastor who ministered to greatly needy people during this time:

> I went with an elder from the church to visit with the Martin Okelo family. Martin Okelo was a distinguished Ugandan from the Langi tribe and a former member of the national parliament. On the previous Sunday he and his family had attended our worship service for the first time. After the service Okelo came with his wife and two sons to make introductions. He spoke of his deep interest in the message of Jesus Christ and asked me

> to his home for long discussion with other members of the family. The Okelos lived in a large white stucco mansion on Nakasero Hill and we arrived at their home in the late afternoon as the sun was just setting over the valley … As we walked to the front door I began to wonder if I were dressed properly and I tried to think how I would begin my message. The door was half open. We knocked and stepped inside. Beneath our feet was a beautiful light green carpet. A zebra skin hung in the hallway and through the door of the sitting room I could see colorful batiks and expensive European frniture. We waited for our host for several minutes. No one came to welcome us. When we called out a greeting, there was only silence. I began to think we had come to the wrong house and I turned to my friend to suggest that we leave. Just at that moment a small boy appeared in the doorway of the sitting room. He stood completely still and his arms were raised straight in the air. Even in the half-light of the hallway I recognized the child as Okelo's youngest son. I moved towards him, strangely moved by a haunting appearance and deeply puzzled. He began to cry and tried to speak but his words were lost in sobs. Before I could reach him he fell completely stiff to the floor. I bent down to pick up the child. As I did, I looked beyond him into the sitting room. A deep shock passed through my body. The curtains were open and the sun was shining through onto a carpet with blood and excrement. Broken teeth and eyes pulled from their sockets were scattered throughout the room. On a table in the center of the floor three human tongues were laid out in a row, as if on public display. Without thinking I grabbed young Okelo from the floor and with the elder I ran shaking and trembling from the house. The short distance to our parking space seemed to be many miles and with every sound I thought myself a dead man. Finally we reached the car, and I laid the boy on the back seat. The elder and I took our own seats in deep fear and I drove quickly towards my home. Thoughout the trip the boy remained motionless, his arms raised rigidly above his head. When we arrived at the house I put Okelo on the couch and stared helplessly at his paralyzed body. His hands were cold and his eyes stared straight ahead, seeing nothing. Later I learned that he was the sole survivor from a nightmare of death. Soldiers from the army of Idi Amin had come to his home late in the evening. They had raped his mother and tortured to death each member of his family. Twelve-year-old Okelo was somehow overlooked. When the killing was over and the soldiers had left, he crawled under his bed. He stayed there for more than a day, his mind empty and his body paralyzed. It wasn't until he heard voices in the hallway that he had been able to move. Now, once again, the boy's body was stiff, his mind completely closed to human contact. I tried to comfort him but no words or gestures could reach him. There was no sign of life in his eyes. In utter frustration I picked up my Bible and began to read out loud. I read chapter after chapter. I read of the Christ who promised to see His children beyond the grave. I read of the Redeemer who claimed that the words of His mouth were life and spirit. My own words failed me. I could make no interpretations. I had nothing to say to the small shattered life lying before me. I did not think that the truths I mediated on every morning could reach his deaf ears. When I looked up from my reading, Okelo was lowering his arms. His neck was no longer stiff and he turned his head to look at my face. There were tears in his eyes but beyond his tears there was life and hope. He looked away again, breathed deeply and closed his eyes again. I took Okelo's hand in mine and prayed to God, thanking Him for His providential care. I confessed my own astonish-ment. I knew it was in spite of my unbelief that the child responded; it was in spite of my skepticism that God's Spirit had come among us. Now I wanted to cry out, like Peter, "depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The healing of Okelo was complete. Later that night I drove him to the Kijomanyi Children's Home and he was admitted to the home as a ward of the foundation. When I saw him again the following day he was playing soccer in the yard, running and shouting with the other children. He made many friends and before long he adjusted to the poorer, communal circumstances of his new life.22

Can words adequately respond to such an account? Could there be a more vivid image of hopelessness and misery? On the other hand, could there be a more vivid example of the soul-healing power of Christ? Christ releases from the most acute soul-suffering. In fact, it is His deliverance of the most needy that brings Him the most glory. Matthew Henry says it like this,

> By the merit of Christ sinners may be loosed [released] from the bonds of guilt, and by His Spirit and grace from the bondage of corruption. It is a deliverance from the worst of thraldoms, which all those shall have the benefit of that are …willing to be ruled by Him.23

The idea that the church's most needy people must be sent to specialists simply is not true. Christ says that He releases the captives—the most devastated and needy people. Do we say that He does not? Or cannot? The term "release," in fact, often means to "release, as from bondage."24 It was used

by Christ when He said of Lazarus—whom He had raised from the dead, and who was standing before Him still bound head and foot with wrappings—"unbind [release] him, and let him go" (John 11:44). Therefore, just as Lazarus was released from the wrappings that bound him, so Christ still releases captives bound in emotional and spiritual misery, who turn to Him as their all-sufficient deliverer. The word "release" is the common term for forgiveness. It refers to God's act when He ''sends away" our sins. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus says that He came "to proclaim release to the captives," He is announcing His ability "to send away" the emotional and spiritual miseries that hold people in bondage. He is calling the most needy to cast themselves on Him. Therefore, the church's fundamental duty is to direct people—as Spurgeon, and others have done—to Christ, as their all-sufficient Deliverer. To not do so is dereliction of duty. It is ministerial neglect of the gravest sort.

Jesus Binds Up the Brokenhearted

Next is the fact that Christ "binds up the brokenhearted." Luke does not quote this phrase from Isaiah 61:1-2, but it is in both the Hebrew and the Greek Septuagint versions. The question is, why? Perhaps, Luke left it out for it was understood to be included in the meaning of "poor." They are poor in the sense of destitute and brokenhearted. It may be explained, as Hendricksen says, by the fact that "the reference to 'the poor' to whom the good news must be proclaimed made a further statement about the 'brokenhearted' not absolutely necessary."25 Therefore, binding up the brokenhearted is at the center of Christ's work.

The term for "binds up" is literally "heals." Jesus, therefore, "heals" brokenhearted people. It is the normal term used for healing the physically sick, yet it is used here of the healing of brokenheartedness. The author of Hebrews uses the term with this heart-healing emphasis. Addressing his readers who are "growing weary and losing heart" (Hebrews 12:3), he says,

> Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:12-13)

The Psalmist says of God, "He heals up the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). Christ therefore proclaims His heart-healing power. Our responsibility is to announce it to the world and to pray that Christ will demonstrate it in the church. It is the prominent way that He makes Himself known. Therefore, it is essential to the church's testimony in the world.

The term brokenhearted is another vivid term. It depicts very clearly the end result of the misery and pain that people experience in a fallen world. The word "broken" means "to break in pieces, to shatter, crush, or oppress."26 It is used of the perfume vial broken by Mary to anoint Jesus where it says, "And she broke the vial and poured it over His head" (Mark 14:3). In addition, the tense of the word (a perfect) emphasizes that the condition is such that there is no real hope for the future. It is a permanent irreparable state. Once again, despair of ever being helped is emphasized. Edward Young vividly describes this condition: "Their sins have weighed them down so that their heart is broken and there is no heart left in them."27 Spurgeon vividly describes the soul-agony of a broken heart:

> A heart broken—conceive of that. If you could look within and see everything going on in this real mystery called man, you would marvel at the wonders thereof, but how much more astonished would you be to see its heart, not merely divided in twain, but split into atoms. You would exclaim, "What misery must have done this! What a heavy blow must have fallen here!"28

Clearly, by means of such language, God is emphasizing that He realizes that the misery and pain that some people experience is overwhelming, beyond human recovery. Therefore, Christ was sent into the world to give hope to the hopeless. He was sent to assure the most ruined and needy people that He is able to restore and deliver even such ones as they.

One other matter is important in this regard; the soul-healing work of Christ is a major theme of Messianic prophecy. It is given continual emphasis throughout the Old Testament. Therefore, it was

expected and anticipated that His ministry was to be marked by this very thing. Isaiah says of God that it is His prominent work amongst the needy "to loosen bonds of wickedness to undo bonds of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke" (Isaiah 58:6). Elsewhere in Isaiah, God says of the Messiah,

> I will also make you a light of the nations so that My salvation shall reach the end of the earth…and I will keep you and give you for a covenant of the people, to restore the land … saying to those who are bound, "go forth" and to those who are in darkness, "show yourself"… for He who has compassion on them will lead them and will guide them to springs of water. (Isaiah 49:6, 8-10)

Furthermore, Isaiah is careful to emphasize that this restoring, soul-healing work is the Messiah's alone. In fact, it is His glory. No one else is able to do what He can do. He alone can, and He alone will, heal the broken heart. Once again, Spurgeon's comments are appropriate:

> He only can do it. I defy any of my brethren to bind up a broken heart. I have often labored to do it, but could never effect it. I have said a word to console the mourner, but I have felt that I have done but little, or have perhaps put the wrong mixture in the cup. He only can do it…. You can have no peace and comfort unless you have immediate dealings with God, who alone, as the great Physician, healeth the broken in heart…. That is a sweet thought. "He healeth the broken in heart;" he WILL do it. Nobody else can, nobody else may, but he will. Is thy heart broken? He WILL heal it, he is sure to heal it; for it is written—and it can never be altered … "he healeth the broken in heart."29

Therefore, healing the broken heart is Christ's glory—a glory which He will not give to another.

Again, in Isaiah, God says of Christ,

> "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness…to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 42:6-8).

The Messiah's unique glory is centered in His delivering, soul-healing work. Therefore to deny or diminish Christ's power to deliver is no small matter. It robs Him of His glory. A Christ who cannot deliver the most broken, distraught, emotionally devastated people, is no Christ at all. Therefore, for the exalting and glorifying of Christ, we are under divine mandate to proclaim Christ's soul-healing power in the church.

Jesus Proclaims Recovery of Sight to the Blind

Jesus also gives sight to the blind. This refers to the "opening of eyes" of those who cannot see. Christ of course healed the physically blind, yet His even greater work is that He opens the eyes of those who are in spiritual darkness. Christ, in fact, said of Himself, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind" (John 9:39). He opens the eyes of the spiritually blind, for their spiritual darkness is the cause of their captive, downtrodden state. Paul himself said that the good news was for those "in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds…that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is in the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Paul further said that "we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord…. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

Clearly, the primary significance of Christ's announcement is that He delivers from the spiritual darkness which causes the misery and bondage that oppresses people in this world. Men, as it were, live in a dungeon, a place where there is no light. They live in darkness. The Apostle John says that a man without Christ's help is "in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going" (1 John 2:11). The result is destruction and misery. Paul says of people without Christ

that "destruction and misery are in their paths and the path of peace have they not known" (Romans 3:16-17). Spiritual darkness is a central reason for people's problems and troubles. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says it this way,

> The final thing about such a person is that he is a stumbling block. Let me put it like this: The man who is in darkness and who is walking in darkness and whose mind is dark is an occasion of stumbling both to himself and to everybody else. These people are always finding problems and troubles. But John says, they cause other people to stumble also because they are in this state and condition and no one knows what to do with them … they constantly run other people into trouble.30

So, darkness and spiritual blindness is the cause of people's misery and troubles. Jesus says He delivers from this. He brings "recovery of sight." They now know where they are going and what to do because Christ Himself is helping them.

Jesus Sets Free the Downtrodden

Lastly, Christ says He sets free the downtrodden. This phrase is not in the original passage in Isaiah 61:1-2. Some think it was included here as a comment by Christ or perhaps, by Luke himself, as an explanation of the immediately preceding phrases. As Hendricksen says, "It can perhaps be viewed as a comment on the immediately preceding passage."31 What Christ is emphasizing, then, is that He not only announces that He delivers, but that He actually does deliver! One writer says, "He not only proclaims liberty to the captives, but He sets at liberty … the prophets could but proclaim liberty but Christ … came to set at liberty: and therefore this clause is added here." 32 It is, as it were, a final climactic statement of Christ's all-sufficiency. It is a final word to encourage people in great need to abandon themselves on Him alone. The term "downtrodden" is once again a vivid word. It means "to break or shatter, or to be crushed by cruel oppression."33 It means "to be shattered in fortune and broken in spirit."34 The tense (a perfect) once again emphasizes the completeness and finality of a crushing blow. It is, as it were, a deadly blow from which there is no healing apart from Christ.

The following is a moving story of a woman who was completely "shattered in fortune and broken in spirit." It is her account of how the Lord Jesus set her free. May it move many to no longer trust in the wisdom of men, but in Christ alone:

For 48 long years I battled against a rare and incurable muscle disease. The Doctors and modern medicine spent years of tests and tried many drugs to alleviate the agonizing pain and weakness I suffered. Many times, I would be taken by ambulance to the hospital, to be given morphine and morphine-like drugs. They would wrap me in hot towels to bring my body temperature up, and administer oxygen and stabilize me and then send me home. After years of working with me, Kaiser paid to fly me to the National Institute for Health in Bethesda, Maryland, for experimental therapies and muscle biopsies and numerous tests, in hopes of finding help or a cure. After several years of grueling tests and drugs, I was diagnosed with a rare, incurable muscle disease and put on a drug maintenance program. I developed tolerance to the drugs and the doses continued to go up until the doctors told me I was addicted and would have to get off them. So I would steal prescription blanks and write my own and drive to other cities to get them filled. I would steal drugs from my parents, my family, my friends and began using street drugs. By this time I had developed numerous mental problems and was hospitalized for several suicide attempts and given more drugs. I was on drugs for my heart, drugs for pain, drugs for muscle spasms, drugs for mental illness. Although vocational rehab had trained me at several vocations, I was unable to hold any job down long enough to sustain myself and 4 children. Both the doctors and the state declared me permanently disabled. In desperation, I turned to prostitution for a living. My weight dropped to 90 pounds and I was hospitalized for yet another malady, and the doctor told me I was dying and he couldn't help me. I returned home that time, feeling helpless, hopeless, futile and at the end of myself, with no one to turn to. During this time I had also been pursuing my remedy through religion. I sought solace in one religion after another, from Hindu to Buddhist. But at the end of each quest, I found there had been no power or peace to save me and was left with a worsening sense of empty futility, with peace nowhere to be found.

One day, I met an old friend who I had shared a rental house with 10 years prior. I had kicked her and her children out and made them homeless. That she would even speak to me was amazing. But, not only that, she began to pursue me. She made daily phone calls to see how I was doing, to bring me food, give me clothes and take me to places when I couldn't drive. I was greatly suspicious of her motives, thinking she was plotting to get revenge on me somehow. But, as time went on, and she continued to befriend me, I realized that she had forgiven me. When I would ask her how she could do this, she would tell me wonderful things about Jesus. Most of our conversation she would tell me how Jesus loved me and she would give me Scripture to read. When I would have questions she would refer me to a scripture. Because of the way she poured the love and forgiveness of Jesus out on me, I was more determined to know who this Jesus was. So, I consumed myself with reading the Word and praying the best I knew how. Since I was confined to bed most of the time, it was easy for me to spend many hours a day in pursuit of Him. God began to reveal His love for me through the Word and His faithful servant. He opened the doorway of my soul when He revealed the Majesty of His Goodness, and for the first time I saw the gravity of my sins and the awesomeness of His love and forgivenss given to me through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus. I saw that Jesus is a real person, that He is God, that He is the same today, yesterday and will continue to be the same through all eternity. I saw that if I would confess my sins, He would and could "because He had the power" forgive my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I got on my knees in my bedroom and asked Jesus to forgive me. I gave Him complete rule over every kingdom of my heart and for Him to do with me as He pleased. Now mind you, nothing earth shattering, like thunder and lightning, happened, but in the deepest part of my being for the first time in my life, sprang joy and peace. Over the next 30 days, the awesomeness of that forgiveness for me, a low life prostitute, thief and drug addict, began to sink deep into my heart. There grew an immense degree of gratitude, an inexpressible joy, that to this day brings tears of thankfulness. That I could spend eternity with this Jesus, was all I wanted. Why He did this for me I do not know. I only know I did not earn it or deserve it, but He gave it to me in His grace and merciful love.

> At the end of the month of August 1993, I was completely healed, set free, and delivered from all bondage to all the disease and afflictions I had suffered from. I can not comprehend this kind of love, nor do I understand why He favors me so, I do not deserve it.

What a marvelous testimony of the compassion and power of Christ. In many churches today, she would be told she had a disorder or a dysfunction and needed to see a Christian psychiatrist and then be put on medication. In some cases, she would be told she had a chemical imbalance and given treatment. However, a common, simple Christian believed otherwise. She did what few in our evangelical churches are taught to do. She pointed this broken, enslaved woman to Christ. She told her she would have to look at herself and her own sin and not at what others may have done to her. She told her that if she would in a repentant humility cast herself on Christ, He would forgive her of her sins and deliver her from her bondage—and He did! Oh what a glorious and kind Savior! Oh, may the church once again point people to Christ! And may preachers and teachers in full confidence, call their congregations to do so. Perhaps, the Lord seeing our faith and confidence in Him alone may send a movement of the Spirit to glorify Himself, as He did for Spurgeon and others with similar faith in the history of the church.

Unbelief

Earlier, I quoted David Wells regarding the need in our churches to once again put our confidence in Christ. Wells basically said that the church's acceptance of psychology and psychiatry—so called Christian psychology, but simply secular psychology dressed up in Christian terms—is in fact a reflection of a deeper problem. It is old-fashioned unbelief! Once you accept Christ's claims in Scripture and see Christ deliver people, people as described in this chapter, you begin to realize that the problem is indeed one of unbelief. Wells writes,

> Confidence in Him will enable us to understand the fact that, despite the undoubted challenges of the post

> modern world, the Word of God in the hand of God is quite sufficient to do the work of God and to think

> otherwise is simply old fashioned unbelief. 35

In other words, the inundation of psychology reflects a church in unbelief. Christ simply is not able to deliver our neediest people. And as always unbelief causes God to withhold His blessing! The writer of Hebrews says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Christ Himself teaches that the whole matter is an issue of faith. The Lord Jesus Christ after proclaiming His work of delivering captive, downtrodden people, goes on to warn of unbelief. The people of His hometown did not receive His message. They were in fact angered. In their unbelief they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22). Notice they disbelieved His divine commission. He was merely "Joseph's son." Here is Christ's response to their unbelief as reported by Luke, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" (Luke 4:23) In effect they said, "We do not believe that you can heal and deliver people! Heal yourself and show us first!" Christ, then, responds to their unbelief with His warning:

> Truly, I say to you, no prophet is welcomed in his hometown. But, I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet, Elijah was sent to none, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. (Luke 4:24-27)

Christ issues a warning. In effect, He says in response to their unbelief—and to the church today as well—"I will restore and I will deliver needy, downtrodden people. However, it will not be where there is unbelief. Therefore, I will withhold My blessing when My professing people doubt My power to deliver and heal." How great, in light of Christ's warning, is the church's sin of unbelief. Therefore, how great is the need for the church to once again place its full confidence in Christ's power to deliver and restore its most needy people. Without this confidence, there will be no blessing. The church will find itself without Christ's healing and restoring presence. The inundation of secular psychological theory has robbed Christ of His glory, and removed His blessing. How many churches today can point to delivered and restored people? Not people endlessly in recovery, but people restored, healed, and delivered by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ! May God grant us the ability to see what is happening to Christ's glory at our hands in His own church. More importantly, may He then grant us the courage to do what is necessary to see Christ recognized in His rightful place as His people's All-Sufficient Deliverer and Restorer. May He, then, be given the glory and honor due His name, and His Kingdom be greatly advanced in the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jesus Searches the Heart

In the aftermath of the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal, the following headline grabbed the attention of the American people: “First Lady blames husband’s affairs on abuse as a child.” Hillary Clinton evidently in response to a question regarding President Clinton’s ongoing pattern of lying and infidelity, was quoted as saying that she:

> … had been told by an expert that trying to please two women who are fighting over him is the worst possible scenario for a small boy … he was so young, probably 4 when he was scarred by abuse, there was terrible conflict with his mother and grandmother…there was always a desire to please each one. … I thought he had conquered it. I thought he understood it. But he didn’t go deep enough or work hard
>
> enough.1

Apparently, according to Mrs. Clinton’s thinking, lying and marital infidelity are the results of abuse suffered as a child. Mrs. Clinton’s understanding of the cause of the President’s sinful behavior is, of course, standard fare in the world. We would expect such an answer from the First Lady. The startling thing is that this is the type of answer that is being given by many Christian psychologists and Christian leaders in the church to explain the sinful behavior of Christians. It is the thinking that now pervades many evangelical churches.

There is, in fact, a growing consensus in the Evangelical church that the root cause of personal problems is either some form of abuse, a dysfunctional home, or (according to a recent theory) neurological problems in the brain. For example, one leading Christian psychologist explaining the source of such things as rage and sexual addiction, states,

> The cause most commonly fingered as the culprit is some form of abuse. … But there is a deeper foundation still … the very bottom is that hunger for love that is as much a part of us as breathing. … This is the root of many tragic problems.2

The author does not simply state that abuse and being unloved has a negative effect on people to which we would all agree. He goes further and states that these things are the “very bottom,” the fundamental causes of people’s problems. The purpose of this study is to show from Scripture what the Lord Jesus Christ teaches is the root problem, the bottom-line cause of man’s aberrant behavior and emotional problems, and how His teaching is central to the healing and restoration of people in need. The teaching of Christ will also be contrasted with what is being taught in the Evangelical church today. Christ himself directly spoke on this very thing in the gospels. He says,

> Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart and those defile the man. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man. (Matthew 15:16-20)

The parallel passage in Mark 7:20-23 is even more explicit, adding more attitudes and behaviors to the list. It says,

> And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting, and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these things proceed from within and defile the man.”

The Lord Jesus Christ was aware of the terrible reality of abuse and the emotional pain experienced by people who are unloved. The Roman world was notorious for its heartless disregard of women and children, as well as people in general. Child abuse, for example, was rampant. Philip Schaff, commenting on the mistreatment of children in the Roman world, says:

> Another radical evil of heathen family life which the church had to encounter throughout the whole extent of the Roman Empire was the absolute tyrannical authority of the parent over the children, extending even to the power of life and death … whom the capricious master [the father] might alienate or destroy without being responsible to any earthly tribunal.3

Seneca, the Roman Stoic philosopher, said of unwanted children, “Monstrous offspring we destroy: children too, if born feeble and ill formed, we drown. It is not wrath but reason, thus to separate the useless from the healthy.”4 It was a common practice to abandon and expose unwanted children to the outside elements to die. Gibbons says that it:

> … was the prevailing and stubborn vice of antiquity: it was sometimes prescribed, often permitted, almost

> always practiced with impunity … till such murders were included … in the letter and spirit of the … law.5

These references concern children only. However, documentation of the abuse of women and people in general could be cataloged as well. Obviously, Jesus was aware of what today would be called dysfunction and co-dependency, as well as emotional and physical abuse. In fact, on a scale not yet seen in our western culture, people, particularly women and children, were terribly abused and treated on a “level with moveable things and slaves.”6 Christ, aware of these things, nonetheless, did not hesitate to attribute the root cause of emotional problems to the evil of the human heart.

Christ’s language, in fact, is emphatic. The ultimate, the “very bottom,” cause of such things as sexual addiction, rage and murder, even greed is the human heart. They, in Christ’s words, “proceed out of the man … from within out of the heart.” Christ’s diagnosis, then, is that the source of man’s evil behaviors and emotional problems is the heart. It is unambiguous teaching, which I will show, and is in direct contrast to what is taught by many in the church today.

It must be said that experiencing such things as abuse and lack of love can devastate people and often contribute to emotional problems; this is not to be denied. Abuse and being unloved are terrible things that do affect people. The Bible, in fact, teaches this (which we will examine later). However, they are not the root cause of sinful behavior and emotional problems. To teach so is to contradict the clear teaching of Christ. We must not ignore these secondary causes, and the people who have experienced such things must be handled compassionately. But neither must we make such secondary causes the source of people’s problems when Scripture clearly teaches otherwise. With these things in mind, we will look at Christ’s teaching about the heart in Matthew 15.

The Heart is the Culprit

The incident that occasioned His teaching was the confrontation with the Pharisees over their hypocritical concern for religious externals and man-made ceremonies. The Pharisees were offended that Christ and His disciples disregarded the Pharisees’ tradition of ceremonially washing their hands before eating. They said to Christ, “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread” (Matthew 15:2). The Pharisees’ concern, of course, was not hygiene. It was solely their conception of spiritual and ceremonial defilement. Christ used this incident as an opportunity to teach on the source of personal defilement and the emotional problems that come from it. Obviously, the Lord Jesus Christ considered it absolutely critical that we understand the fundamental role that the heart plays in man’s problems.

The heart, Christ says, is the culprit. It is the place to look. The Pharisees, “teaching as doctrine the precepts of men” (Matthew 15:9), had obscured this fundamental truth. Christ, therefore, asserted two things. First, it is the condition of the heart that determines whether we acceptably serve and worship God. In response to the Pharisees He said, “You hypocrites … ‘this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men’” (Matthew 15:7-9). Clearly we are to measure acceptable service and worship fundamentally (though not entirely) by the condition of the heart.

But Christ goes further. Not only is acceptable worship and service measured by the heart, but true defilement originates in the heart as well, not in the violation of external ceremonies. In verses 18 and 19, He says, “The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries. … These are the things which defile the man.” The strongest Greek preposition for ultimate source (*Ek:* out of) is used twice to stress the point that the heart is the source of the evil things mentioned. The preposition means “origin, cause…or the source from which something flows. …”7 It refers to “the source of conduct, as to be found in the state of the soul, its feelings, virtues, vices, etc.”8 The result of these things coming out of the heart is that man is defiled; that is, his life, as it were, becomes polluted, beset with all

kinds of emotional and personal problems.

In Mark’s account, Christ is even more emphatic. He states, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders. … All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:21, 23). Mark adds the words “from within” to the already emphatic “out of.” It is perhaps the strongest language possible to emphasize ultimate source. The heart, then, is the place to trace the source of man’s problems and defilement.

Underestimating the Heart

This was radical teaching that cut across the grain from what people had been taught. Therefore, as was to be expected, the Pharisees reacted indignantly to Christ’s teaching. In their case, it was a personal offense. They had concocted a whole system of man-made teachings that disregarded clear teaching on the heart found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 17:9). As someone has pointed out, “No Jew should have been shocked at what Jesus was saying. He was not teaching new truths, but was simply reinforcing truths that God’s Word has always taught”9 (see Deuteronomy 10:12-13, 16). Rejecting the clear teaching of Scripture, they authoritatively taught their own precepts as if they were the teachings of God. Christ, aware of this, confronted and exposed their error. The disciples, surprised at Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees, said to Him, “Do you not know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” (Matthew 15:12). Man-made teachings were so generally accepted that the truth about the heart was completely obscured. Even the disciples had been taken in by the Pharisees’ error!

Man recoils at Christ’s teaching about the heart. We see it in the church today. In rejecting Christ’s clear teaching, man-made teachings about the source of emotional and behavioral problems are now accepted on a wide scale in the church, often without question. They are taught as doctrine, when in fact they are teachings of men. For example, a leading Christian psychologist says, concerning the cause of repeated sexual sin in a counselee,

> The relationships in her family of origin always had been rocky; she and her siblings did not get the loving attention they needed. During the actual period of abuse, when her love tank should have been receiving nurturing from her father’s, the valve was tightly closed. Pain, humiliation, guilt, betrayal—all that and more had blocked off the flow and poisoned her own tank. … Can a person like Beryl be helped?… Yes. It can be done, but the process is immensely painful. … Only when the foundation layers (her pain and her fundamental need for love) are uncovered and repaired… The same basic addiction cycle can describe just about any obsessive compulsion. Any number of factors can label the entry point. In … one of our recent patients, the entry point was a sense of uselessness, of being of little value. The basic problem, as usual, was that her love tank was near empty, neglected by a Valium-addicted mother and a preoccupied father.10

Here we see that the author traces the very root cause of ongoing adulteries and sexual sin to abuse and an unmet need for love. Notice where he places the final root cause of adultery; he says, “Pain, humiliation, guilt and betrayal…poisoned her tank. … The basic problem was her love tank was near empty.” As we have seen, this differs from the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ says adultery, greed, rage and other evils come out of the heart. These evils are not rooted in abuse or in an unmet need for love, though these things may often be a contributing factor. There can only be one root source for personal problems, and Christ emphatically says it is the heart. Do we know more than He? Do we dare differ with Him? Another leading Christian psychologist approaches it a little differently. In this case, the author believes that emptiness and a futile search for meaning in relationships is the source of our problems. He says,

> Each of us has what I like to call a hollow core in our personality, a central part that is empty, but yearns to be filled … internal emptiness becomes an absolutely compelling force that drives people to sacrifice anything, even their own identities, in an effort to find themselves. … Symptoms may be relieved, feelings may become more pleasant, a counterfeit sense of well-being may be enjoyed, but the horrible reality of a

> hollow core remains unchanged, the counselee remains a slave to the god of his own longings for satisfaction.11

Here we are told that the real culprit for personal problems is an “internal emptiness” or “longings for satisfaction.” It is a “compelling force” to which we are “a slave.” The author further states,

> The emotional problems we human beings experience have a moral root … their basis can be found in a lifelong (and often unconscious) commitment to depend on our own maneuvering to protect ourselves from feeling the pain of a hollow core. Until we pull away the wrappings that hide the moral core of our difficulties, we will not be dealing with the real issues responsible for human suffering.12

The author makes his position clear: the moral root, the basis of emotional problems, and the moral core of our difficulties are our attempts to protect ourselves from feeling the pain of our hollow core, or our unmet longings for satisfaction. This is in direct conflict with the clear teaching of Christ, and the historic teaching of the Christian church. Whatever effect emptiness and longing for satisfaction may have on man, it is at best a secondary cause—a by-product, as it were, of the root problem of an evil, rebellious heart. There is only one root foundational cause to our emotional problems, and the Lord Jesus Christ says it is the heart.

The Heart and Revival in the Church

History is repeating itself in the Evangelical church. The teachings of men are being readily accepted and, as a result, the Word of God is being obscured and we are losing sight of the all-sufficiency of Christ. Christ’s teaching, however, is final! Therefore, it must once again be asserted that the source of man’s evil behavior and defilement is the heart. Spurgeon’s comments on this text are to the point. He says,

> All the mischiefs mentioned in our text come out of man’s essential self—that is what I understand the Saviour to mean by the heart. The heart is the true man; it is the very citadel of the City of Mansoul; it is the foundation and reservoir of manhood, and all the rest of man may be compared to the many pipes which run from the fountain through the streets of a city. The Saviour puts his finger on the mainspring of the machine of manhood, and cries, “Here is the evil.” Like a great physician, he lays his hand upon the very core of human nature, and exclaims, “Here is the disease.” The leprosy … is … in the very heart; the poison is in the centre, and consequently all the outlying members share in the poison.13

Note the emphatic language. The heart is “the foundation and reservoir”; it is “the fountain,” “the mainspring,” “the very core,” and his conclusion is that “the poison is in the centre, and … all the outlying members share in the poison.” Now Spurgeon was simply echoing the historical Evangelical position—the long-time consensus—that the root of man’s evil attitudes and behaviors and the emotional problems that come from them is to be traced to the heart. The real culprit, is not a dysfunctional home or abuse, or even neurological and genetic disorders. The real culprit is a poisoned, diseased heart. This thinking has all but left the Evangelical church.

The tragedy of all this is that people are not being helped. At best, there is superficial and often a temporary behavior modification, but no deep spiritual change. In spite of millions of dollars spent, and countless hours of effort, there is no proportionate fruit seen where lives demonstrate the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. People are moralized and behavior is modified, but as a whole, people do not become Christ-centered, Christ-loving people who, with Paul, say, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” If they did, we would see it in a revival of holiness that long ago would have impacted the Evangelical church. On the contrary, the church has become much like Israel when she turned to Egypt for help against her enemies, and after all her efforts in diplomacy and money, found herself in a far worse state (Isaiah 30:1-3).

Regarding revival, we must ask a pointed question. Can there be a revival when Christ’s work as sanctifier is diminished, when He is hidden and veiled by the teachings of men? Can Christ be recognized as all-sufficient in His work of conversion, but not in sanctification? Scripture and history tell us no! Christ cannot be divided. His all-sufficiency extends to His people’s sanctification as well as their salvation. The prophet says of Him, “He shall deliver His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In fact, in every revival in church history, Christ was recognized as all-sufficient in sanctification, as well as salvation. In every revival, the teachings of men were rejected and the church rested once again in Christ alone! Martyn Lloyd-Jones, recognizing this, comments:

> Every reformation has always expressed a distrust of reason and philosophy. One of the earliest examples of this is to be found in Tertullian, one of the first great theologians of the Western church. He put it in a very striking form: “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens? What has the temple to do with the porch and the academy?”… I suggest to you that nothing is more important in our present situation than just this one particular point. Philosophy has always been the cause of the church going astray, for philosophy means, ultimately, a trusting to human reason and human understanding … that is why there are no more important passages in the Scripture for us at the present time than the first epistle of the Corinthians, starting in chapter 1, at verse 17, and going right the way through to the end of chapter 4, with especial reference to chapter 2. The Apostle’s whole contention in those chapters is that things were going wrong in Corinth because they were beginning to bring back faith in human wisdom, philosophy; and his point is to show that this is diametrically opposed to the preaching of the gospel.14

If Scripture and history teach us anything, they teach that Christ will not send revival as long as psychology thrives in the church. In other words, there will be no true reformation and revival until Christ is exalted as the All-Sufficient Savior in every area of His delivering work. The Great Reformation itself testifies to this. The gospel was recovered in its fulness as Christ’s all-sufficiency was freely proclaimed for any and all personal needs.

The Heart’s Self-Deceit

Now the question arises, why do people have such an aversion to acknowledging that the ultimate source of their problems is the heart? The answer lies in the deceitfulness of the heart itself. Jeremiah tells us, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Notice, men are not able, on their own, to make an accurate assessment of the heart! Its evil nature is not fully understood. This being the case, a primary manifestation of the heart’s deceit is its misdiagnosis of itself. The heart will not, as it were, allow itself to be found out. As Calvin says,

> Men will allow themselves to be restricted by numerous, severe laws; to be obligated to numerous laborious observances, to wear a severe and heavy yoke; in short, there is no annoyance to which they will not submit, provided there is no mention of the heart. Our only remaining course is to seek out indirect substitutes that we may not be obliged to come directly into His presence; or rather, like specious masks, we hide the inward malice of the heart, and in order that we may not be forced to give it to him, interpose bodily observances like a wall of partition. It is with the greatest reluctance that the world allows itself to be driven from subterfuges as these.15

I believe Calvin is right. Man's tendency is to find indirect substitutes in order to avoid dealing with his heart. Today it is the indirect substitutes of psychological and, more recently, biological interpretations of the source of our emotional problems. By ignoring the heart, it becomes someone else's fault. We deflect responsibility to someone besides ourselves. This is recognized even by some secular writers. The following comments from *Time* Magazine express this clearly:

> Hence, the rise of cult therapies teaching that we are all the victims … that whatever our folly, venality or

> outright thuggishness, we are not to be blamed for it, since we come from "dysfunctional families." The

> ether is jammed with confessional shows in which a parade of citizens and their role models … rise to denounce the sins of their parents … it tells you that nothing is your fault. … The all-pervasive claim to victim-hood tops off America's long-cherished culture of therapeutics. Thus we create a juvenile culture of complaint in which Big Daddy is always to blame and the expansion of rights goes on without the other half of citizenship: attachment to duties and obligations.16

The "culture of therapeutics" has invaded the Evangelical church. This, of course, reflects nothing more than the age-old bent toward blame-shifting that has characterized man from the beginning. Did not Adam say, "the woman whom you gave me"? We see, then, that Jeremiah teaches that the inward malice of the heart is veiled from man by his heart's own deceitfulness. Therefore, man's tendency is to either underestimate or disregard the heart completely. J.C. Ryle said,

> Our original sinfulness and natural inclination to evil are seldom sufficiently considered. The wickedness of men is often attributed to bad examples, bad company, peculiar temptations or the snares of the devil. It seems forgotten that every man carries within him a fountain of wickedness. We need no bad company to teach us and no devil to tempt us in order to run into sin. We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.17

Jeremiah, recognizing man's inability to see himself rightly, says of the Lord, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind" (Jeremiah 17:10). In other words, it is God alone who grasps and understands the evil capacities latent in the heart. This is reaffirmed in the New Testament where Christ says of Himself, "All the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (Revelation 2:23). Therefore, Christ's estimate and infallible diagnosis of the heart must not be minimized or ignored without great risk. Ignoring the heart neither glorifies Christ, nor is it in the best interest of the people we seek to help. Dealing with symptoms and surface issues brings only temporary relief. This, I believe, accounts for many of the frustrations and failings of pastoral and church-based counseling. The real problem—an unchanged corrupted heart—has not been dealt with. More importantly, Christ's great primary work of cleansing and transforming the heart does not come into play. Therefore, lovingly dealing with the heart is the most compassionate thing we can do. It brings the healing, restoring power of Christ to bear in a person's life.

Summarizing Christ's teaching, we can say two things. First, the heart is the original source of man's twisted, evil behavior and emotional problems. While man is affected by secondary matters, (such as environment, upbringing, evil mistreatment, etc), they are not the fount, the original source. Secondly, the Lord Jesus says that all these evil things that

come out of the heart defile the man. The term “defile” means to “make common or unclean,” with an accompanying idea “to pollute.” Simply stated, the heart leads to behaviors and attitudes that pollute and defile a person’s life and his relationships. It is the source where we find “seeds of evil…lying deep down within everyone of us and ready at any time to start into active life.”18 The heart, as it were, becomes active in life, polluting and defiling all it touches, or as one commentator says, it is from the heart that “spring all the forces that defile…his heart is a veritable sink of iniquity a flowing stream and a river, not polluting himself only, but also the life of family, friends of the city and the nation.”19

This being the case, it is no wonder that Christ leaves us no doubt where we are to trace the ultimate source of those things which cause man his emotional problems and all the interpersonal conflict and misery that result from it. Spurgeon’s words concerning Christ’s teaching in Matthew crystallize the issue:

> My text is a looking-glass in which every man may see himself; may see, not his face which he can see everywhere, but his heart, his moral nature, his innermost self. Here, sin in man’s heart is laid bare, turned inside out, anatomised and depicted by one who cannot lie and cannot be deceived.20

The One who cannot be deceived, the One who cannot lie, says the heart is the fount of man’s emotional and behavioral problems. Therefore, our effectiveness in helping people in a meaningful and lasting way must rest on this foundation. This must be where we start. We ignore it at our own peril. In fact, the church, ignoring Christ’s teaching, has already paid the price. As any objective

observer can see, there is no noticeable improvement in family life, morals and interpersonal

relationships, and the negative effect on the witness and power of the church is evident.

A Balanced Perspective

In conclusion, I would like to say a number of things that will help keep things in perspective as we attempt to apply Christ’s teaching. First, we must minister with compassion and tenderness. A clinical, unfeeling approach to people’s problems is not biblical! Compassion marked Christ’s treatment of people, even those whose own sin had brought much misery and emptiness to their lives. The woman at the well comes to mind (John 4). Did not Christ look with compassion upon the multitudes beset with all manner of problems and miseries (Matthew 9:36-38)? Compassion must mark our ministry as well. Therefore, we must be people who listen. Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.” We must also be people who seek to understand. Proverbs 13:15 says, “Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard.” In other words, we must allow people time to tell their story, to bear their hearts and share the suffering they have experienced.

Secondly, we must focus on the heart in such a way as to give hope. People who are preoccupied with the evil treatment that has happened to them often have a victim’s mindset that tends toward depression and hopelessness. However, a person who is directed to their heart is able, by God’s power, to take control of their life. This is because such direction naturally points them to the Savior, who is able to deal with their heart and its need. It points them to Christ who heals, cleanses and transforms. Looking to the Great Physician and the Good Shepherd, they find that He knows how to cleanse of guilt and bind up the broken heart.

Lastly, we must realize this matter concerns a central issue of the gospel. The good news is that Christ came to deliver His people from their sins. He came to set His people free. Christ’s ability to set people free assumes His full awareness of what holds them in bondage, as well as His power to release them from it. This bondage is rooted in their hearts. Therefore, Christ’s assessment of the heart is at the center of the good news. He can deliver us because He knows what is fundamentally wrong with us. He needs no supplementation from men. He is His people’s all-sufficient Savior. He is their deliverer! To supplement Him is to diminish Him. May God give us humility to consider where we have gone amiss and the wisdom and courage to put Christ in the center of ministry once again.

CHAPTER SIX

Jesus and the Depressed

The Biblical Approach to Depression

Depression is an ancient human malady and a common human experience. It troubles at times even the most godly people. Paul himself said, “But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Corinthians 7:6). Occasional depression is sometimes a normal part of living. The problem is when depression becomes dominating and chronic, when it becomes what is called clinical depression. There have been many opinions of the causes and cures of depression. The most recent and popular view is that clinical depression is caused by a biochemical imbalance. It is viewed as a physical problem and is treated much like a physical disease. In this study we will look at what the Bible says causes depression. We will also give specific consideration to the theory of the biochemical basis of depression. This is an important issue for it relates to the all-sufficiency of Christ and His promise to deliver the downtrodden and the oppressed.

The basic issue is this: how should a Christian approach and view people diagnosed with severe clinical depression or bipolar disorder? And then more importantly, how can they be helped? First of all, we must remember that the Scriptures speak of such people. Christ speaks of “downtrodden and oppressed” people in Luke 4:18. He also speaks of “the distressed and downcast.” Matthew says of Christ that “seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

It would seem reasonable that those who suffer from what is labeled today as bipolar disorder and clinical depression would be among those Christ refers to. They are people who, in general, suffer the severe effects of living in a cursed and sin-plagued world. Surely those given the “disordered” label fit into one of these categories.

Christ uses strong and vivid terms. To be “distressed” actually means to be “vexed and troubled.” It even means, at times, to be “flayed” or “lacerated.” It is a vivid term describing the emotional state of people who, as it were, have been taken as spoil by the problems and pressures of life. The term “downcast” is just as vivid. It literally means to be “thrown down” or to “hurl down,” as Judas hurled down the 30 pieces of silver in the temple (Matthew 27:5). It refers to the misery that results from experiencing the problems and stresses of life—a misery often compounded by sinful responses in attempts to cope. Both terms are in the perfect tense, which emphasizes a permanent condition with no hope of deliverance. Surely today some of these people would be categorized as clinically depressed and some as Bipolar. Christ says their problem is that they have no divine shepherd. They are “sheep without a shepherd.” In other words, their misery can be alleviated only by Christ’s personal shepherding and delivering work in their lives.

So we can say the Bible speaks of people who, today, would be called clinically depressed. But what causes clinical depression and bipolar disorder from a biblical perspective? *Before we go on, it must be emphatically stated that there are physical problems—distinguished from a neurochemical imbalance—that cause depression. Hormonal imbalances, hypothyroidism, fatigue, chronic viral infections, liver disease, and even brain tumors, and the like, have been shown to cause depression. This must be recognized and steps taken by a physician to search this out.* Of course, depression caused or compounded by physical problems does not mean people are not responsible to live godly as they seek to discover the source of their depression.

However, the question remains: what causes depression not related to physical problems? We can begin by saying that depression is a common human experience, rooted in the stresses, disappointments, disillusionments, and heartbreaks of human experience. Therefore, sometimes it can be easily traced to its cause. At other times, because of the complicated and confused nature of human experience, it is not. Regarding its evident causes it can be said,

> Even when someone we know becomes extremely depressed, we are able to attribute the reaction to something specific, such as a death in the family, the loss of a job, a failure in love, passing a landmark in aging, feeling trapped or unproductive in one's life, or coping with a life-threatening or debilitating physical illness.1

From the biblical perspective, we can also say that an unbelieving or sinful response to life's problems often causes or intensifies depression. David acknowledged the depression that his guilty conscience before God had brought on him because of his sin. He said, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4). David described a heavy hand (is that not the basic significance of "depression"?) that was upon him continually. In another place he said,

> For Thine arrows have sunk deep into me and Thy hand has pressed down on me. … For my iniquities are gone over my head as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me … I am bent over and greatly bowed down I go mourning all day long … I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart. (Psalm 38:2-8)

King David had sinned. Severe depression was the result. In his words, God's hand "pressed down on me." Often we miss the significance of David's teaching for our own lives. David committed adultery and murder. He should be depressed! Therefore, because we have not sinned to the same degree, we miss the things that may be causing our depression.

I will give an example from my own personal experience. One of the most severe bouts of depression I have ever experienced occurred early in my Christian life. I literally woke up and went to bed depressed. I groaned all day long. I searched my life but saw no sin. I was perplexed. I was losing the joy of living. Finally in desperation, I cried out to God, asking Him to show me why I was so depressed. I was earnest, ready for Him to show me whatever it was. By means of a sermon, God pointed out the cause. Unknown to me I had a critical, self-righteous attitude towards other Christians which I could not or would not see. After all, I was serving the Lord. In my mind, my attitude was not a judgmental spirit; it was zeal for God. When I saw my sin and acknowledged it, the depression lifted. My point is this: we can miss the cause of our depression, because we do not immediately see something as sin. However, the smallest sin can bring God's displeasure and with it depression. Discontent with our station and place in life—ungratefulness in trial, a critical spirit misread as spiritual zeal, an undisciplined irresponsible life, even a wrong attitude towards one's spouse, the so called "smallest" of sins— can go undetected and cause depression. In other words, sometimes the cause of depression is clear. But at other times, it is hidden, hidden by our own self-deceived heart. From Scripture we learn that the Lord uses depression to deal with sinful attitudes, as well as sinful behaviors. Whatever it is, it must be acknowledged. When it is, and new attitudes are actively pursued, the depression is lifted and joy is restored.

There are things other than overt sin, however, that Scripture says cause depression. Things such as failed expectations and great disappointments. Elijah, for example, experienced severe depression to such a point that he saw death as his only escape. After he fled to the desert in despair he said, "It is enough now Lord, take my life for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). The Psalmist in exile declares, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?… O my God, my soul is in despair [sunk down] within me" (Psalm 42:5-6).

In both cases, a major disappointment and failed expectation was the cause of depression. In Elijah's case, revival had not come to Israel as an unrepentant Jezebel, with her idolatrous Baal worship, remained entrenched in power. In the Psalmist's case, great disappointment had overwhelmed him and he fled from his enemies, and was in exile far from Jerusalem (Psalm 42:2-4, 10). Therefore, failed expectations and disappointments from such things today as marriage, children and a career are often the cause of depression.

The disciples on the Emmaus road are another prominent example of those who experienced depression because of unfulfilled expectations. They themselves said, "We had hoped that He was the One who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). They were depressed, overwhelmed by shattered hope. Therefore, we can see from these Scriptures that

depression is sometimes caused by our attitude towards major disappointments and failed expectations. The cure in every case is a reorienting and renewal of the mind to the promises of God. Jesus said to the Emmaus disciples, “How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). The term “foolish” literally means “without mind.” In other words, they lacked understanding. They had not thought about something. The following states it well:

> The cure was first of all a mental reconstruction of the facts. What they had seen as disaster and an anticlimax was, according to the prophets and all the Scriptures the gateway to glory (verse 26). Soon they saw everything in a new light. They viewed it from God’s perspective and consequently emerged from their depressed condition.2

This was the cure for Elijah and the Psalmist as well. The Psalmist reminded himself, “Why are

you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence … The Lord will command His Lovingkindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night” (Psalm 42:5, 8). What we could call circumstantial depression is overcome by reflecting on God’s character and reclaiming His promises. Christ puts the mind at ease by His Spirit through His Word. In other words, Christ gives peace and hope even when circumstances remain the same. This is the “peace that passes all understanding” spoken of by Paul in Philippians 4:7. The following says it well:

> People in general, and Christians in particular, are not attentive enough to the truth of God about the life situations they encounter. They are carried away by the worldly interpretation of what is happening. Being emotionally wrapped up in setbacks and tragedies, they fall into the trap of being perpetually downcast. The mind absorbs this without any reference to God or Scripture and settles into depression, from which some people find it difficult to escape.3

Depression then is spoken of frequently in Scripture. Often it is rooted in disappointment and a sense of hopelessness. Satan, of course, traffics in hopelessness and despair. The believer must be encouraged and redirected to the faithfulness and love of God to renew their hope for the future. The following story aptly shows how the power of Christ through the Spirit and the Word cures depression:

> Several years ago a woman came to see me in a bad state of depression. She had suffered childhood rejection from her mother, with the result that she came to regard her own birth as a tragedy. Although happily married to a man who treated her with the utmost kindness, her traumatic childhood had taken away the desire to have children of her own and prevented her regarding her own three healthy children as a blessing. Medication had not relieved the depression into which she had descended. How did biblical cognitive therapy help her? I pointed out that her life was more surprising than mine. I was born because my mother wanted me, while she was born against her mother’s wishes. Clearly the hand of God was in it! The preservation of her sanity despite her mother’s rejection was attributable only to the protecting hand of God. Her conversion to Christ and the provision of a loyal Christian husband were crowning mercies. Finally God’s overruling to give her three healthy children despite her reservations about motherhood was further heavenly mercy. Would she think about these things? After two weeks she returned to say that after years of dark depression, she was set free at last. A few months later she told me that she had come off all medication.4

Bipolar Depression

One of the most severe depressions is that associated with bipolar disorder. We will now look at what causes it from a biblical perspective. Bipolar depression is cyclical depression. A period of elation is followed by a period of extreme depression or vice versa. This pattern is connected with unproductive attempts to deal with stress and problems. The depression is followed by an over-compensation of self-engendered optimism and exhilaration. One man who has dealt with Bipolar for 30 years says,

> The experience of going from low to high, or vice versa, is not unusual among human beings. Watch any football game or soccer match around the world, and if the stands are evenly divided, at any one moment half of the people may be displaying “depression” and the other half “elation.” Should the course of the game take an abrupt turn, a “bipolar” reversal might occur, with dramatic changes in the mood on each side of the field. The man jumping up and down, his eyes bulging, adrenaline pumping through his veins, screaming and shouting as if by sheer vocal force he could change the fate of the world, looks perfectly adjusted to life—in the stands at an exciting football game. So does the vastly dejected fan whose team has just lost the championship. But suppose there were no real-life football game going on. Suppose a woman is getting high or low about her life. Suppose she’s just desperate enough to be wildly rooting for—or against—herself. There’s no biochemical test to distinguish the so-called manic-depressive person from the elated or despondent football fan. Nor is there any reason to assume that the manic-depressive’s inner experience is driven by twisted molecules while the football fan’s is driven, at worst, by twisted values. We

> don’t call the behavior of football fans a “mental illness” or a “disease,” because we understand and accept the context in which it takes place and because it seems harmless and short-lived. When we don’t understand and accept the context of a human experience, and especially when it seems harmful or bad and lasts a long time, we tend to label it mental illness.5

Bipolar with its high of mania and its low of extreme depression is described by another as follows,

> Mania … is a barricade erected by the patient to block his own approach to the real business of life. … The most formidable phase of the mental disorder, as we have seen, occurs invariably when some urgent problem presses for solution and the patient has lost courage. In mania there is an effort to overcome this cowardice, and the patient pushes himself forward, exaggerates his actions, and talks and laughs with needless excitement. He is high-spirited and irritable, has great projects, is very superior and boastful of his power, and displays strong sexual inclinations. 6

Consistent with this, the author has insight when he says, “mania is, like all psycho-spiritual crises, a moral and social phenomenon to be understood in the context of basic human needs and strivings.”7 Therefore, as with any other non-physically caused depressions, bipolar depression is the result of problems, stresses, disappointments and the loss of hope. Usually the people who experience bipolar are highly driven perfectionists who are not able to balance their life. Typically they are unwilling to honestly face their personal problems, which often includes extreme emotional pain caused by rejection, abuse, or a devastating personal failure. In other words, severe depression involves a person’s struggle with God’s sovereignty over their life, even their life before salvation. It involves the struggle of accepting His providential dealings, including His allowance of great hurt and disappointment. Jeremiah, struggling with accepting his personal suffering and the recent horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem said:

> He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. And He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust. And my soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, “My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the LORD. (Lamentations 3:15-18)

Could there be a more vivid description of severe depression and the loss of hope? Yet, though Jeremiah greatly struggled, he came to accept God’s providential dealings and eventually yielded to His wise and good purposes; he said,

> The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him set alone and be silent since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is hope. Let him give his cheek to the smiter; let him be filled with reproach. For the LORD will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. (Lamentations 3:25-32)

Jeremiah struggled with anger and bitterness. But finally he yielded himself to God’s character whether he understood His dealings or not. This was critical to Jeremiah’s deliverance from despair.

Those who experience bipolar also typically are not willing to face the complete inadequacy of the patterns of behavior they have chosen in their attempts to cope. Often it is marked by anger, rage, and destructive behavior. These things, of course, the Bible does not attribute to a chemical imbalance, but to the human heart. In addition, the bipolar person usually complicates the problem by not eating or sleeping for long periods of time. All of these things combine to create its own chemical reaction in the body with the final result being a psychotic and delusional state. The imbalanced chemical state in the end is actually the final result, not the ultimate cause of the problem. It is like the proverbial chicken or egg question: which came first? Does the chemical state cause the problem, or is the chemical delusional state the final result of the problem? The evidence

would indicate the latter. This chicken or egg problem is recognized as at the heart of the issue:

> The fact that biochemical changes take place in the brain in association with intense moods proves nothing about which comes first. This confusion has led to misguided conclusions. It has long been known that all kinds of stress, including head injury and chronic fatigue can cause precisely the same effects.8

The Biochemical Theory of Depression

We will now take a look at the matter of the chemical and neurological basis of emotional problems. The acceptance of this theory effectively removes people from the realm of spiritual help and the delivering power of Christ. They are not viewed as people in spiritual need. They have a chemical problem much like a person with a physical disease. Therefore, they do not need Christ or spiritual help. They need a psychiatrist who can prescribe the right medication. Therefore, it is a matter of great importance to the gospel and ministry to the needy that this theory be substantiated and clearly proved. Contrary to what many today take for granted, the biochemical and neurological basis for emotional disorders has not been proven. The fact is that the scientific and medical communities do not universally regard it as an established fact. Phillip Breggan, a nationally known psychiatrist writes,

> A constant stream of propaganda from psychiatry tells the public that all forms of human distress are due to biochemical imbalances or even gross brain damage…within the confines of professional books and reviews, the claims are considerably more muted, if still badly exaggerated.9

For example, in the book *Biological Psychiatry*, the authors admit, concerning a major study trumpeted as proof of the biochemical basis of schizophrenia, that there is:

> … the absence of a consistent and generally accepted mode of genetic transmission of schizophrenia. … Because of psychiatry's influence in the media, most people think that there is a growing body of studies supporting the genetic origin of psychiatric disorders. In reality, literature supporting a genetic cause has grown sparse over the years.10

The American Psychiatric Press's *Textbook of Psychiatry* admits this when, in speaking of Bipolar, it refers to "ultimate, as yet unknown factors that cause the illness."11 Note that Bipolar Disorder is caused by "yet unknown factors." They go on to further admit, "unraveling causal connections awaits a better understanding of the genetic vulnerability."12 Finally it is admitted that "as it is true for most other major disorders in psychiatry, the etiology [cause] of affective illness is still unknown."13 In other words, what is publicly stated as fact is privately still regarded as theory and speculation.

As stated before, the public all but regards the chemical basis of most clinical depressions and other emotional problems as a proven fact, as something settled—a result of objective science. In fact, the change of terms from Manic Depressive Disorder to Bipolar Disorder was done in order to communicate this very thing:

> The very sound of the term Bipolar Disorder smacks of hard science. A synonym for the old term Manic-Depressive disorder, it has become associated in the public's mind with biological disease and lithium therapy. That was psychiatry's purpose in promoting the term.14

However, in spite of the scientific language the biochemical basis of clinical depression has yet to be proved. The following states well the speculative nature of these theories:

> No causal relationship has even been established between a specific biochemical state of the brain and any

> specific behavior and it is simplistic to assume it possible. … We cannot at present scientifically confirm the

> suggested relationship between sluggish serotonin neurotransmission and some destructive or self-destructive behaviors. … Scientific reviews of the biochemistry of depression have failed to identify a consistent biochemical basis.15

Don't Drugs Help People?

There is another matter that demands our attention. This is the question of how to respond to the apparent benefit that drugs and medications bring to people. People get better, it is said. How do you argue with that? This apparent benefit of psychiatric drugs confirms in people's minds that there must be a chemical problem. The reasoning being that if the chemicals in drugs solve the problem, then a chemical imbalance must have been the problem to start with. Moreover, it is usually assumed that psychiatric drugs are harmless, with no significant negative side effects—especially with regard to Lithium and Prozac, which are the common drugs prescribed for Bipolar Disorder and depression. To begin with, the reasoning concerning the benefits of drugs is faulty. This would mean that alcohol, marijuana, and other such substances would be legitimately employed in helping people as well. A recent *Time* Magazine article on depression and drugs, recognizing this problem, says,

> The line between illicit, feel-good drugs such as marijuana and amphetamines, and legal mood-altering substances such as Luvox, Wellbutrin, and Effexor is a blurry one. Many of the same optimistic claims—enhanced concentration, decreased anxiety, a renewed capacity for feeling pleasure—are made for both types of magic bullet, whether they are bought on the street or in a pharmacy. A profoundly mixed message is being sent to teens when certain substances are demonized for promoting the same subjective states touted on the labels of other compounds. Adolescents, who are famously alert to hypocrisy among their elders, will surely be the first to catch this irony.16

In other words, drugs do, in some sense, "work" (even those that are illegal). The question is, how do they work? Do they bypass normal processes? Do they blunt people or exhilarate them to the degree that they do not grow, develop, and mature normally? Do they bypass the normal processes of maturation and make a person something they are not? Do they give the appearance of helping when, in actuality, they have blunted a person's basic responses? This is, of course, what alcohol and illegal substances do. The research indicates this is exactly what prescribed psychiatric drugs do as well.

The fact is psychiatric drugs accomplish what is called a lobotomy effect. A lobotomy is a surgical procedure done to the frontal lobes of the brain that causes a blunting of the person's emotional and rational response to their surroundings. The following is a description of surgical lobotomy:

> Lobotomy usually refers to the surgical cutting of nerve connections between the frontal lobes and the remainder of the brain…. The frontal lobes are the seat of higher human functions; such as love, concern for others, empathy, self-insight, creativity, initiative, autonomy, rationality, abstract reasoning, judgment, future planning, foresight, will-power, determination, and concentration. The frontal lobes allow us to be human in the full sense of that word. Lobotomy basically knocks the frontal lobes out of commission. Depending on the amount of damage done, the effect can be partial or relatively complete.17

The point in mentioning the nature and effect of a surgical lobotomy is the fact that psychiatric drugs operate on the same principle with the same effect! In other words, many psychiatric drugs, in point of fact, actually produce a chemical lobotomy. Here is a description of the nature and effect of psychiatric drugs:

> Chemical lobotomy [drugs] largely interdicts the nerve connections to the same regions. Either way, coming or going it's a lobotomy effect. Thus the…action … is no mystery: clinically the drugs produce a lobotomy and neurologically the drugs produce a lobotomy. The drugs "work" by suppressing the major nerve pathways into the frontal lobes and the emotion regulating system …chemical lobotomy can have no beneficial effect on any particular human problem or human being. It puts a chemical clamp on the higher brain of anyone.18

Contrary to helping people in a real sense, the fact is that psychiatric drugs, in general, work on this principle of the lobotomy effect to a lesser or greater degree.

The idea that drugs "work," therefore, is a matter of perception. The person has actually been blunted, dulled and desensitized. The sobering reality of all of this is seen when it is realized that the former Soviet Union used these drugs to "control" dissidents. A nineteen year-old dissident poet named Olga Iofe was "treated" after she protested the resurgence of Stalinism. Harvey Fireside in his book *Soviet Psychoprisons* comments: "The massive drugs she was forcibly given were in fact a chemical lobotomy. Iofe, on her release, appears to be permanently damaged; an altered person."19 Lithium is no exception to this lobotomy effect. The public image is that Lithium is harmless. An NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) booklet says, "It rarely produces any undesirable effects on emotional and intellectual functioning. Only the symptoms are filtered out while the rest of the personality remains unaffected."20

The reality is, however, as the director of the NIMH acknowledges, that there is with Lithium "a general dulling, blunting of various personality functions."21 These negative effects are mentioned in the best-selling book by Kay Jamison where

she, in a moving narrative, relates her life-long struggle with Manic Depression and her total reliance on lithium. She acknowledges lithium dulling and desensitizing her. She says,

> I had discussed with my psychiatrist the possibility of taking a lower dose in hopes of alleviating some of the more problematic side effects. The effect was dramatic. It was as though I had taken bandages off my eyes after many years of partial blindness. A few days after lowering my dosage, I was walking in Hyde Park, along the side of the Serpentine, when I realized that my steps were literally bouncier then they had been and that I was taking in sights and sounds that previously had been filtered through thick layers of gauze. I wept for the poignancy of all the intensity I had lost without knowing it, and I wept for the pleasure of experiencing it again.22

So the case for the benefits of psychiatric drugs is a tenuous one. That they “help” people is open to serious challenge. Concern for the long-term well-being of people should cause us great reticence in using them.

When Drugs May Be Necessary

Helping people with severe emotional problems often demands an immediate, short-term solution. When people become self-destructive or put others in harm’s way, it requires urgent measures, if only to protect them and those in danger. I have had a number of experiences with what are called delusional and psychotic people. People who were self-destructive and in danger of harming others. The mind in conjunction with the body had become delusional. In every case, there was extreme stress, unsolved difficulties and personal problems mixed with anger (often veiled, but revealed later). Each also had a loss of sleep with poor or no eating over a number of days. Because of their destructive behavior, medication and hospitalization was the best thing for their immediate care and well-being. In effect these things functioned as a police action, but it was not their long-term solution. The Scriptures tell us that Christ gives rest; He shepherds the distressed and downcast (Matthew 9:38). He sets free the captives and delivers the downtrodden (Luke 4:18). However, people must be brought by His sovereign grace to see their need of Him. They must be brought to a teachable, humble repentant state of mind, or in Christ’s own words, they must become “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). Only God can do this. Therefore, sometimes our only recourse is persistent burdened prayer, which often is exactly where God wants us to put our hope. Christ states the terms for enjoying His rest and peace. People, Christ says, must “come to Me.” He Himself explains what this means when He says they must “take my yoke upon you and learn of Me” (Matthew 11:29). The question must be asked: what can we do with people who, in spite of all attempts to help them and to point them to Christ’s all-sufficiency, remain captives mired in self-destructive patterns? The use

of drugs may be their only recourse. Medication may be the only thing to keep them from their self-destruction and the destruction of others. But it must be recognized for what it is: a “police action” to prevent them from harming themselves and others. It is not their long-term hope. Christ is still the only hope for those who have a long established pattern of severe depression. We must remember that Christ promises rest for those who take His yoke upon them. It would be appropriate to quote the Lord’s words at this point. Christ offering Himself to those in great need says,

> Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

This rest would include the rest from the bondage of extreme depression and its destructive patterns. It must be said, as a matter of wisdom and care, that when someone desires to come off of medication, especially after long-term use, it must be done slowly under the supervision of a doctor and the oversight of a mature Christian pastor or counselor.

Conclusion

There is one compelling reason that has moved me to deal with these matters. Ultimately, it is not an issue of counseling philosophy or whether psychology can be integrated with Scripture. The issue is far more significant than this. The issue is the glory and honor of Christ. The issue is people's conception of the greatness and power of Christ. He is the glorious, all-sufficient Savior who delivers from the bondage and brokenness of sin. He is the one who sets captives free. Psychology and what has been called the New Biopsychiatry has, in effect, taken the broken, oppressed captives and cordoned them off to professionals who put them in greater bondage—the bondage of brain-disabling drugs. They are considered to be beyond the delivering ability and power of Christ. Professing believers in great numbers now regard people who suffer from such problems as beyond the pale of the Gospel, the ministry of the Spirit, and the Word of God. Worse, they regard them, in the final analysis, as beyond the delivering power of Christ. The whole psychology-biopsychiatry movement has succeeded in great measure in diminishing and denigrating Christ. He is no longer the Savior who delivers from anxiety, drunkenness, sexual sin and perversion, rage and hatred, and greed. These things have been renamed and recategorized as disorders caused by biochemical or neurological abnormalities. The end result is a tranquil, powerless Savior who can forgive the guilt of sin but is not able to deliver from its power and bondage. In essence, Christ has become a figurehead deliverer. The practical result for the church is far-reaching. People are not pointed to Christ for deliverance, and therefore as a whole, it does not see people being delivered. How many churches today can point to people who have been fully delivered from the bondage of dominating sins? How many can confidently say with Paul,

> Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God? (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Paul's list is a veritable cataloging of many of the very things that today are redefined and recategorized as disorders caused by chemical imbalances or genetic abnormalities. Notice that they "were" these things. A great deliverance and a great liberation has occurred. They are former drunks, former covetous, former adulterers, former homosexuals, etc. The very people Christ has delivered throughout history by His glorious all-sufficiency are now relegated to medical professionals and stupefied by drugs. Therefore, the issue touches the core of the Gospel. It touches the glory and all-sufficiency of Christ.

APPENDIX

Notes

Chapter One

Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon—A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 35-36.

Larry Crabb, *Inside Out* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1988), 24.

Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 40.

Gary Collins, *Can You Trust Psychology*, 91.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians: Darkness and Light*.

John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Audobon, NJ: Old Path Publications, 1994), 60.

Ibid., 8, 7.

Chapter Two

C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1978)..

John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), Vol. 1, 295.

Owen, 53.

Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 296.

Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000), Vol. 6, 494.

See a more detailed treatment of this word in the chapter "Jesus Heals the Emotions," page 35.

C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1980), Vol. 25, 506.

Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, (American Book Co.), 114.

Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), Vol. 1, 284.

Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 371.

Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 15.

Thayer, 290.

D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 127-128.

D.A. Carson's comments on this are helpful. He says, "For Greek-speaking Jews and other readers of the Greek Old Testament, the term would call to mind the *skene*, the tabernacle where God met with Israel before the temple was built…. Whether the allusion in John 1:14 is to the tabernacle or to the tent of meeting, the result is the same: now, the Evangelist implies, God has chosen to dwell amongst His people in a yet more personal way, in the Word-become-flesh…. The incarnate Word is the true, *skina*, the ultimate manifestation of the presence of God amongst human beings, for this Word became a man…. The glory of God manifests in the incarnate Word as 'full of grace and truth.'"

Thayer, 284.

Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, 933.

J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), Vol. 1, 35.

Spurgeon, Vol. 20, 231-232.

Spurgeon, Vol. 27, 122-123, 125-126.

St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1996), 183.

Chapter Three

David A. Seamands, *Healing For Damaged Emotions*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981), 12.

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 57.

Clyde Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 101.

Mark McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*, (Illinois: Tyndale House, 1996), 6.

I owe a significant part of the thoughts expressed in this chapter to Edwards' great work *The Religious Affections*.

Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 46.

Ibid., 47.

Ibid., 49-50.

Ibid., 46.

C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1974), Vol. 34, 496-498.

Seamands, 15.

John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), Vol. 21, 167.

Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), Vol. 6, 494.

Spurgeon, Vol. 34, 500.

Fritz Renecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 461.

Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 27-28.

Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 29-31.

Chapter Four

C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications).

J. C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Luke*, 117.

John Calvin, "Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Volume 1" in *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), Vol. 16, 228.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Fellowship with God" in *Life in Christ—Studies in 1 John*, Vol. 1, 43-44.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones' remarks on our tendency to view our problems as unique are insightful. He says: "Indeed, our central difficulty today, perhaps, is to fail to realize that all our troubles are, in a sense, exactly the same as the troubles of mankind always in the past, and that there is a common origin of all these things. But it is a part of our human conceit to talk about the problems of the twentieth century as if they were different from those of the first century—but they are not, they are exactly the same. There are differences, I admit, in the local or particular manifestation, but it is the cause of the trouble that counts."

Spurgeon, Vol. 19, 731.

Ibid., 691.

David Wells, "Guest Editorial" *World Magazine*.

Ibid.

Colin Brown, ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 122.

R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 137.

Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1972),

673.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Christian Warfare" in An *Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), Vol. 7, 216-217.

Calvin, 229.

Thayer, 557.

Ibid., 557.

Ibid., 557.

William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary Luke*, 253.

Calvin, *Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke,* 229.

Thayer, 18.

Hendricksen, 260.

Spurgeon, Vol. 19, 729, 730.

F. Kefa Sempangi, *A Distant Grief* (Regal Books, 1979), 46-49.

Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), Vol. 5, 504.

Thayer, 88.

Hendricksen, 253.

Ibid., 260.

Edward Young, "The Book of Isaiah," in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), Vol. 3, 459.

Spurgeon, Vol. 1, 406.

Spurgeon, Vol. 1, 408.

Lloyd-Jones, "Walking With God" in *Life in Christ—Studies in 1 John*, Vol. 2, 63.

Hendricksen, 253.

Henry, 564.

Thayer, 204.

Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According To Luke* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 122.

David Wells, "Guest Editorial," *World Magazine*.

Chapter Five

San Francisco Examiner, 2 August 1999.

Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, and Paul Meier, *Love Is A Choice* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 39

-40.

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Apostolic Christianity A.D. 1-100* (Peadody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), Vol. 1, 360.

Ibid., 360.

Ibid., 360-361.

Ibid., 360.

Walter Bauer trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 234.

Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House,

1972), 1537.

John MacArthur, *The MacArthur's New Testament Commentary on Matthew* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 157.

Hemfelt et al., 46, 47, 84.

Larry Crabb, *Understanding People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1987), 105-106.

Ibid., 107.

C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications), Vol. 13, 50-51.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 45.

John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Audobon, NJ: Old Path Publications, 1994), 33-34.

Time Magazine, 3 February 1992, 45-46.

J. C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Mark*, 82-83.

J. C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 110.

G. Campel Morgan, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1929), 197.

Spurgeon, Vol. 13, 50.

Chapter Six

Peter Breggan, M.D. *Toxic Psychiatry*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 121.

Martin Holdt, "The Christian and Depression," *Banner of Truth*, 2000, 17.

Ibid., 17.

Ibid., 18-19.

Breggan, 136.

Ibid., 137.

Ibid., 137.

Ibid., 144.

Ibid., 95.

Ibid., 95, 99.

Ibid., 143.

Ibid., 143.

Ibid., 143.

Ibid., 141.

Ibid., 142-143.

Howard Chua-Eoan, "Escaping From the Darkness*," Time Magazine*, 31 May 1999, 49.

Breggan, 53.

Ibid., 56.

Ibid., 57.

Ibid., 172.

Ibid., 177.

Kay Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind,* (New York: Random House, 1995), 161-162.