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A Portion of Chapter One
Deceptive diagnosis.
When sin is called sickness.

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Chapter One **A Prescription for False Hope and Evil**

The medical model of human behavior, when carried to its logical conclusions, is both non-sensical and non-functional. It doesn't answer the questions which are asked of it, it doesn't provide good service, and it leads to a stream of absurdities worthy of a Roman circus.

E. Fuller Torrey, M.D.
The Death of Psychiatry

For a long time, people have been led to believe that a person suffering from an excess of life's problems needs "expert" medical and psychotherapeutic intervention, thus allowing the "patient" to qualify for "illness" ... Such a view is dangerous nonsense. If we are not ill than we are well, although we may be unhappy.

Garth Wood, *Myth of Neurosis*

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
Apostle Paul, *Romans 3:23*

A New Vocabulary

Words can be powerful. They can inspire and comfort. Words can move us to action. They can calm a raucous crowd, and quiet a frightened child. Words like "*sola fide*" have shaped Christianity. A word such as "*freedom*" shapes our world. The words, "*One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind*" helped shape a generation. Words affect thoughts and behavior. Changing a word's usage can have far reaching consequences. Consider the word, "gay". Heard in conversation, its meaning a 100 years ago is not the same as it is today. Often, the impact of words on a culture is silent and slow. Sometimes the impact is considered positive, sometimes negative.

In the mid 60's, a remarkable event related to a word occurred in evangelicalism. The event would have a devastating effect on evangelism and the sanctification of believers. Yet, despite the destructive consequences, this event went unnoticed by many Christians.

At that time, a major shift began in how evangelicals viewed and dealt with sin. The church stopped calling sinful and deviant behavior “sin” and started calling it sickness. The sexual sinner Paul wrote about (1 Corinthians 2:13) became the sex addict. The thief (1 Corinthians 2:14) became the kleptomaniac. The drunkard (1 Corinthians 6: 10) became the alcoholic. The rebellious child (2 Timothy 3:2) became afflicted with “Oppositional Defiant Disorder.” A family in which the husband will not work, the wife will not keep the home and the children will not obey are no longer considered a sinful family. They have become a dysfunctional family. The liar became a compulsive liar. The gambler became a compulsive gambler. The idolater became a person who suffers from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. The “deeds of the flesh... which are immorality impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing” (Galatians 5:19-21) have all been redefined using psychopathological words.

Placing sin in the category of sickness compromises the message of salvation. It sets aside the historical-grammatical method of interpreting Scripture and replaces it with a hermeneutic centered on pathology of the flesh. This interpretation views man as a victim who is sick rather than a sinner who is responsible to God. It eliminates the necessity for repentance. As such, the doctrine of the total depravity of man is undermined. Culpability and guilt vanish and there is no need for a Savior. In a similar way, sanctification is hindered. There is no need for repentance and change, no need for discipleship and spiritual growth. Believers are duped into thinking they are sick and need recovery. This explanation removes accountability. For example, if one has the flu, one is sick and misses work. No fault is assigned, and one is not personally accountable for the sickness by one’s employer. If the drunkard has a disease called alcoholism, he is no longer accountable for his behavior, rather, he is sick. It is not his fault. He has no need to repent; he needs twelve steps to recovery. Sick people need recovery. Sinners need Christ.

The church today has lost sight of the fact that sin is the root of many problems and the source of many people’s troubles. Biblical definitions and categories (the words) have changed, and a new vocabulary related to disorders, “isms”, and chemical imbalances has emerged within the church. It is the vocabulary of humanistic psychology. Pastors and laymen alike are explaining the problems and difficulties of life in unbiblical terms like compulsions, addictions, phobias, dysfunctions, and low self-esteem. Believers have absorbed the same “strange doctrines” of men that Paul warned Timothy about in his first letter (1:3) thus creating a new hybrid Christianity, nearly indistinguishable from psychology. The faith once delivered to the saints has been thoroughly mixed with the theories of Freud, Rogers, Adler, and others. It is truly amazing how tolerable evangelicalism has become to bad theology! Christian men and women are more familiar with the psychological labels and jargon of our day than they are with Scripture. Pastors must realize when they turn sin into sickness in the pulpit or in ministering to others; they are preaching “another gospel.” Paul wrote:

I’m amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is {really} not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7, NAS).

While the church has lost sight of the word sin, there are still glimpses of it from time to time. Sin has not completely disappeared from our vocabulary. Even “unreligious” people use the word in serious conversation. Christians still talk about *the* sin, in other words, Adam’s

sin that lead to the Fall and resulted in his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. However, there is little talk about personal sin and the depression, anxiety, fear, guilt and other feelings and physical symptoms they cause. For the most part, believers and unbelievers are more dignified and modern when it comes to talking about sin. After all, one does not want to run the risk of being labeled intolerant, insensitive, fundamental, or radical. One must be careful to use psychologically approved speech, language (words) that is (are) non-directive and non-judgmental, and non-offensive.

WORLDLY WORDS AND SPIRITUAL WORD

The faculty of language and speech is one of the most amazing attributes God gave to mankind. Although it seems ordinary, language is one attribute separating man from the rest of God's creation. Of all the things man does, "talking" is one of the most important. The uniqueness of language is highlighted in God's revelation to man through His *Word*. Jesus Christ Himself is the living Word. When God spoke and wrote, He raised language to a place of significance. Spoken and written language became the principal medium of truth. Through words, God revealed Himself. Through words, God reveals His plans and purposes. Through words, God defined, explained, and interpreted the world around Adam and Eve: God said to them,

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so (Genesis 1:27-30, NAS).

God spoke, but Satan spoke also. For the first time, words were spoken that were contrary to God's words. God's authority was challenged, and His words were contested. The devil had a dramatically different way of explaining and interpreting Adam and Eve's world:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden.'?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the tress of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it or you will die.' The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3: 1-5, NAS).

We live in a world where there are many interpretations of the same set of facts. One person looks at a butterfly and is moved by the splendor of God who created it. Another looks at the same butterfly and is moved by evolution's ability to make such a delicate insect. One man looks at a child's behavior and sees a sickness that is said to be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that could be corrected using medications. Another man looks at a child's behavior and sees rebellion and sin.

It is not the facts (the child's behavior), but the interpretation of those facts (sin vs. sickness) at the core of the issue. Many explanations of life and the world do not recognize

the authority of God and are, therefore, incompatible with a biblical worldview. *The right things are not said because the right things are not believed.* Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and believed an interpretation that was contrary to God's truth. From that point forward, the war of words has been raging. Today, Christians are listening to sinful man's (or the serpent's) interpretation of the facts, rather than God's.

Christians are involved in the logical outgrowth of the war of words every day. It is the battle of ideas. While most believers, understandably, think of the battle in terms of its spiritual dimensions and "otherworldliness" we must realize that there is an intellectual side to the battle that must not be overlooked. Paul wrote:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against the rulers, against the powers, against the world force of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm (Ephesians 6:10-13, NAS).

Paul goes on to write about the various elements of the Christian armor. There are the defensive pieces and one offensive piece, which is described as the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). If the Word of God can be neutralized in the life of a Christian, he is left with no offensive weapons for the battle. He is struck time and time again, yet he cannot strike back. To any military strategist or, for that matter, to anyone, the defensive strategy alone can be seen as a losing strategy.

The church has always been involved in a defensive battle involving ideas and words. These battles can be found all through the New Testament and church history. There were debates as to who was this man Jesus (Matthew 16:13). There were disputes over Christ's bodily resurrection (Acts 17:18). There were arguments as to whether a person must keep the Law of Moses in addition to faith to be saved (Acts 15:5). In Paul's letter to Timothy, he spoke of his concern about worldly philosophies that were being taught at Ephesus (1Timothy 1:3). The battle of ideas and words continued throughout the centuries as one heretical idea arose after another. Conflicts of ideas and philosophies are what led the early church to organize its statements of doctrinal beliefs (catechisms and confessions of faith) such as the deity of Christ, personality of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity and so on. During the Middle Ages, perversion had crept into the church and a battle of ideas concerning the purity of the New Testament and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was fought by the reformers. In the eighteenth-century man became "enlightened" and optimistically believed his reasoning powers and scientific approaches would lead to a brighter future without God. In the nineteenth century problems and challenges arose from Darwinism and Freudianism. Since the church's inception, it has been in one skirmish after another with competing worldviews, ideas, and words.

A worldview is a set of beliefs that shapes the way a person views his world. It is the lens through which a person processes the events in his life. There is a biblical worldview, a naturalistic worldview and so on. Every person has his or her own worldview. Thus, the correct worldview is very important in understanding words, ideas, events, and behaviors. Many disagreements among individuals stem from their differing worldviews. Atheists and Christians, Protestants and Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Armenians and others have

different worldviews. In each case, man has constructed a grid, as it were, that filters out certain ideas and arguments (words) leading him to a belief or an interpreted fact. Those whose worldviews differ often find one another to be in error. Confused? Know this: God's Word is Absolute Truth.

Christians need to start thinking of Christianity not as a collection of bits and pieces of ideas to be believed, but as a whole or complete conceptual system – a total worldview, as it was originally designed. To break any worldview into pieces and disconnected parts will distort the true character of the worldview. To mix certain parts of a worldview with a competing worldview leads to confusion and chaos. Each worldview carries its own assumptions. Each set of assumptions is, for the most part, incompatible with others. However, particular pieces of differing worldviews may be similar, like two slightly different circles that are superimposed. They are quite similar, but they are not easily reconciled. For example, two people with differing worldviews may both be pro-life or pro-choice. They may be similar in their politics or their morality. However, a significant problem occurs when major elements of conflicting worldviews are integrated. The result, eclecticism, is borrowing from a variety of worldviews, and is common practice in “Christian” counseling today.

A biblical anthropology, which teaches that man is made in the image and likeness of God, is combined with naturalistic-evolutionary anthropology, which views man as merely an evolving biological organism. The resulting eclectic integrationism, like purely secular psychology, calls sin sickness by mixing two antithetical worldviews. It is an attempt to be true to both worlds. Plainly, the integration of psychology with Christian theology by sincere but misguided believers has, in the Christian community legitimized labeling sin as sickness. As a result, the church has become convinced that the elaborate systems and theories, based on competitive worldviews, are a necessary addition and compliment to God's Word. The Apostle Paul condemns the integration of man's imaginary “wisdom” or worldview and God's true wisdom or worldview writing:

Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} (1 Corinthians 2:13, NAS).

Evangelicals have been habituated to think and speak psychologically. Biblical words, words taught by the Spirit, have been replaced by worldly words, words taught by human wisdom. God's true words, which are supposed foolishness, are exchanged for man's words, which are supposed wisdom. Words like kleptomaniac and alcoholic (words taught by human wisdom) are misleading. They are euphemisms for sinful behaviors. The Bible never refers to a person as a kleptomaniac or an alcoholic. God's Word refers to a person who habitually gets intoxicated as a drunkard. A person who habitually steals is called a thief. In the sickness model, he needs recovery while in God's model, he needs to repent, put off the sinful habit, renew his mind, and put on the biblical alternative. Christians should use words taught by the Spirit as they accurately portray God's reality. The Apostle Paul wrote:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Colossians 2:8, NAS).

“Rather than according to Christ” is the pivotal phrase Paul used to describe the system of doctrine (worldview) that had found its way to Colossae. It was a philosophy setting up the

wisdom of man in opposition to the wisdom of God. “Man’s wisdom,” over the centuries, has taken many different forms, including the present-day sin-sickness movement. It has varied with time and culture, but it has always been present in one guise or another, to displace Christ’s sufficient Word with man’s wisdom.