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INTEGRATING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF  
APOLOGETICS WITH BIBLICAL COUNSELING

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Brian Keith Baker  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

INTEGRATING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF  
APOLOGETICS WITH BIBLICAL COUNSELING

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Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think,  
according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory in the church and in  
Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

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## PREFACE

My second-grade teacher told me I would never go to college. Her prophecy almost came true. But around the second year of my six-year enlistment in the navy, my friend and mentor, A. C. Musgrave, Jr. suggested that I consider going to seminary. I am forever grateful for his encouragement and for the many hours he spent discipling me.

I thank my dear wife, Jennifer, for making our life together precious and for encouraging me to continue my education. I thank our son, Benjamin, for being Ben. He has taught me that faith in Jesus is not about theological assertions to be swallowed without chewing. I thank our daughter, Lydia, who quickly surpassed me in her ability to think and write, for her encouragement, proofreading, and edits in this thesis.

Thank you, Les Walthers, for being a true pastor.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Robert D. Jones, for his helpful insights into the biblical counseling movement. My thanks extend to Dr. Theodore Cabal and Dr. Timothy Paul Jones for their work to make this maiden voyage of the Applied Apologetics program happen. To the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, thank you for remaining a stalwart of the Word of God.

Finally, I thank my dear parents, Bob and Carlene, for loving me and showing me what devotion in marriage looks like. Thank you, Carol Bond, for your sweet legacy that I see daily in my precious wife and children. See you and Dad soon.

Brian K. Baker

North Smithfield, Rhode Island  
December 2018

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Men may have atheistical hearts without atheistical heads.”<sup>1</sup> Stephen Charnock’s discourse on “practical atheism” insightfully and soberly warns of the dangerous possibility that one can know God’s Word while remaining unconverted. In other words, atheists can think like Christians. The inverse is also true: Christians at times think like atheists. Perhaps it could be said like Charnock, “Men may have atheistical heads without atheistical hearts.” The Christian church has the God-given responsibility to confront atheism in the head and heart of every person, whether unconverted or converted.

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commissioned his church to engage in two fundamental tasks: evangelize the lost and teach converts the things of God. Two distinct groups thus emerge within the church’s mind, non-Christians and Christians. Non-Christians are to be evangelized. Christians are to be “discipled.” Christian apologetics and biblical counseling are concentrated forms of evangelism and discipleship, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Apologists and biblical counselors fulfill callings by dutifully, but selectively, addressing their respective audiences. Generally speaking, apologists are interested in reaching the unbeliever while biblical counselors are interested in helping

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Charnock and William Symington, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2 vols. in 1 (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 89.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Jones cautions against segregating counseling and evangelism ministries. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that counseling non-Christians is an evangelistic task while counseling Christians is discipleship. This thesis affirms Jones’s lament and would suggest that evangelistic counseling is another reason apologetic acumen is necessary for biblical counselors. Robert D. Jones, “Biblical Counseling: An Opportunity for Problem-Based Evangelism,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 75-92.



the believer. The premise of this thesis is that there is value in and biblical warrant for integrating these two complementary disciplines.

The interplay between apologetics and biblical counseling becomes obvious once the parallels are brought to light. Acclaimed theologian John Frame writes, “Apologetics has value for both believers and unbelievers, since even believers in this life must wrestle with their unbelief.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Scott Oliphint defines apologetics as “the application of biblical truth to unbelief.”<sup>4</sup> Their use of “unbelief” is key. It shows that unbelief, not “unbelievers” per se, is apologetics’ true target—as when the biblical counselor identifies the joy-robbing presence of remaining atheism within the Christian counselee. Conversely, Jay Adams, regarded by many as the father of biblical counseling,<sup>5</sup> alludes to an apologetic element in counseling: “Counseling . . . must presuppose God not only as the Creator, but also as the Sustainer of this world.”<sup>6</sup> That statement sounds very much like *presuppositional apologetics*. Clearly, the apologist and the biblical counselor traffic in common circles.

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

The common ground connecting presuppositional apologetics and mainstream biblical counseling is Reformed theology.

### **The Theological Component**

The modern pioneers of presuppositional apologetics and mainstream biblical counseling, Cornelius Van Til and Jay Adams respectively, were professors together at

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<sup>3</sup>John Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 215.

<sup>4</sup>K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 29.

<sup>5</sup>David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>6</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 44.

Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Their shared theological foundation is evident in their writings and particularly in their approach in Christian apologetics.<sup>7</sup> Integral to Reformed theology, and evident in Van Til's *presuppositional apologetic*, is a high view of Scripture and a high view of God—*sola Scriptura* and *solī Deo gloria*: “There is but one true God; there is therefore but one true theism, the theism of the Bible. There is but one God, the God triune of the Scriptures. And it is the vision of this God in his ‘majesty’ that constitutes the essence of the Reformed Faith.”<sup>8</sup>

Adams's commitment to *sola Scriptura*, *solī Deo gloria*, and even Van Til's presuppositional theology are unmistakable. Adams's opening sentence in the foreword of *A Theology for Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*, stresses the *biblical* bedrock of *biblical* counseling: “*More Than Redemption* is a first attempt to consider the *biblical* theology of counseling” (emphasis mine).<sup>9</sup> He indicates that the symbiotic doctrines of God and Scripture hold the preeminent role in counseling not only by the content of his statements but by placing them emphatically first in chapter 1:

Man was created as a being whose very existence is derived from and dependent upon a Creator whom he must acknowledge as such [the doctrine of God] and from whom he must obtain wisdom and knowledge through revelation . . . “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1) says it all. Man needed God's Word from the outset [the doctrine of Scripture].<sup>10</sup>

Evidencing an unapologetically Reformed theology underpinning his system, Adams writes, “My own theological position is Reformed (Reformation theology). It is those views commonly held by Reformed theologians, therefore that I have assumed

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<sup>7</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 306.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 307.

<sup>9</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, vii.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1.

throughout. You are entitled to know this important fact.”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Adams makes clear Van Til’s direct influence in commenting, “Dr. Cornelius Van Til, of Westminster Theological Seminary, has shown the importance of presuppositional analysis. He has demonstrated that at bottom, all non-Christian systems demand autonomy for man, thereby seeking to dethrone God.”<sup>12</sup>

For these reasons, the comparative analysis section of this thesis uses literature associated with Van Til for the apologetics portion and Adams for the biblical counseling portion. This useful literature also reflects a thoroughly biblical treatment of the subject matter involving systematic theological works from the Reformed tradition and contemporary exemplars in the fields of presuppositional apologetics and biblical counseling.

### **The Apologetic Exemplars**

Cornelius Van Til’s impact upon Christian apologetics in general and Reformed apologetics in particular is well attested by the vast number of published responses, analyses, and critiques of his writing. For instance, John Frame, the J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida,<sup>13</sup> and a Van Tillian protégé, is a prolific author with widespread influence. Frame states, “Van Til became the greatest influence on my apologetics and theology.”<sup>14</sup> Van Til personally invited Frame to teach at WTS, where he

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<sup>11</sup>Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 34.

<sup>12</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (1970; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), xxi.

<sup>13</sup>Reformed Theological Seminary, “Dr. John Frame,” accessed October 15, 2016, <https://www.rts.edu/seminary/faculty/bio.aspx?id=502>.

<sup>14</sup>John Frame, “Backgrounds to My Thought,” John Frame and Vern Poythress: *Triperspectival Theology for the Church*, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://frame-poythress.org/about/john-frame-full-bio>, excerpted from *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

served alongside Van Til for four of his thirty-two years there, from 1968 to 1980.<sup>15</sup> His academic contributions are a significant resource for understanding Van Til, Christian philosophy, and presuppositional apologetics. While many other notable theologians could be mentioned, it is appropriate to acknowledge the contributions by the current professors of apologetics at WTS, William Edgar and Scott Oliphint.<sup>16</sup>

Scott Oliphint recently re-branded and distilled Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics in his 2013 book *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practices in Defense of Our Faith*. This volume provides an example of current and practical contributions to the field of presuppositional apologetics. Oliphint explains that the dual purpose of his book is to make Van Til's complex and often misunderstood concepts "more accessible" and to advance the dialogue toward the practical application of Reformed theology.<sup>17</sup> He writes, "My hope is that this combination of 'principles and practice' will move readers significantly forward in their interest in and practice of a defense of Christianity."<sup>18</sup> This thesis seeks to realize Oliphint's goal by wedding apologetic principles and practices to biblical counseling.

### **The Biblical Counseling Exemplars**

The biblical counseling counterpart to John Frame is David Powlison. Frame and Powlison were students of Van Til and Adams, respectively. For decades, these men have remained true to the essential tenets of their mentors' teachings and are recognized as experts in their disciplines.

Jay Adams's legacy can be traced through the two organizations his *nouthetic*

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<sup>15</sup>Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought."

<sup>16</sup>Westminster Theological Seminary, "Faculty," accessed October 15, 2016, <http://faculty.wts.edu>.

<sup>17</sup>Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 26.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

*counseling*<sup>19</sup> paradigm birthed, namely the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) and the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC), renamed in 2013 the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). CCEF served as the educational or intellectual body of Adams's nascent group,<sup>20</sup> while NANC functioned as the "quality control" arm to certify its practitioners.<sup>21</sup> The group eventually parted ways. David Powlison succeeded Adams as the editor of the *Journal of Pastoral Practice*<sup>22</sup> (renamed the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*).<sup>23</sup> He has been a longtime counselor and faculty member of CCEF and was appointed executive director in 2013. Powlison served on NANC's Board of Directors for twenty years and has taught biblical counseling at WTS since his early days at CCEF.<sup>24</sup> CCEF, as its name suggests, continues its emphasis on education,<sup>25</sup> having no certifying component.<sup>26</sup> ACBC still identifies itself primarily as a certification entity.<sup>27</sup> These descriptors are derived from the organizations' respective emphases growing out of their historical roots. That is not to say that CCEF lacks quality control or that ACBC makes no educational contribution to the

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<sup>19</sup>The terms "nouthetic counseling" and "biblical counseling" are used interchangeably in this thesis, denoting the Adamsian paradigm. However, writers like David Powlison and Heath Lambert point to nuanced differences and developments in the larger biblical counseling movements.

<sup>20</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 61.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>23</sup>CCEF, "About the Journal of Biblical Counseling," accessed October 15, 2016, <https://www.ccef.org/journal-of-biblical-counseling/about-the-jbc>.

<sup>24</sup>Counseling One Another, "An Interview with David Powlison (Part 1)," accessed October 27, 2016, <http://counselingoneanother.com/2013/01/10/an-interview-with-david-powlison-part-1>.

<sup>25</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 61. The first director of CCEF, John Bettler, styled CCEF as "the Harvard" of biblical counseling, in opposition to Adams, whose focus was "to equip practicing pastors."

<sup>26</sup>CCEF clarifies, "Please note that CCEF is not a certifying agency. CCEF does not 'certify' or 'endorse' counselors who have completed one of our certificate programs." CCEF, "CCEF Certificates," accessed October 15, 2016, <https://www.ccef.org/school/certificates>.

<sup>27</sup>ACBC explains, "For 40 years the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) has been certifying biblical counselors to ensure doctrinal integrity and to promote excellence in biblical counseling." ACBC, "Pursuing Excellence," accessed October 15, 2016, <https://biblicalcounseling.com>.

field. For instance, Heath Lambert, the executive director of ACBC from 2012 to 2018, is a seminary professor, author, and pastor.<sup>28</sup> Under Lambert’s leadership, ACBC upgraded its training program to include an “Advanced Theology Track.”<sup>29</sup>

David Powlison’s long history with Jay Adams, combined with his prolific writing and leadership in the biblical counseling movement, has earned him the place of primary exemplar. Powlison’s publications garner the lion’s share of attention (after Adams) in the counseling portion of this thesis. His work through CCEF, JBC, and WTS reflects the highest intellectual contributions to the field. Presuppositional apologetics’ influence upon biblical counseling is patent in his works.

### **Primary and Supporting Literature**

This brief history of presuppositional apologetics and biblical counseling identifies some exemplars of both disciplines whose works represent the most relevant literature to this thesis. Van Til’s *The Defense of the Faith* and Adams’s *Competent to Counsel* and *A Theology of Christian Counseling* are the primary sources. The collective writings of Frame and Powlison are given significant attention as authorities in their fields. These men have supplemented Van Til’s and Adams’s original works and made particularly relevant contributions to the evolution of the respective movements.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, since Van Til’s and Adams’s Reformed theology—especially the doctrines of God, Scripture, anthropology, and hamartiology—is integral for bridging presuppositional apologetics and biblical counseling, Reformed theological reference works have been utilized such as the following: Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*,

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<sup>28</sup>ACBC, “Dr. Heath Lambert,” accessed October 27, 2016, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/staff/dr-heath-lambert>. Dr. Lambert’s tenure as executive director ends as of October 2018.

<sup>29</sup>ACBC, “Training,” accessed October 27, 2016, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/training>.

<sup>30</sup>While the men behind the subjects are acknowledged here, this thesis analyzes the relationship between the fields of presuppositional apologetics and biblical counseling and does not compare the theologians themselves.

Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Frame's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Faith*, Robert Reymond's *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, and Michael Horton's *Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly, the literature for this thesis has been limited to only a brief interaction with the primary opposing view to presuppositional apologetics, namely classical apologetics. This position is developed most clearly in *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*, by R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey.<sup>32</sup> Further research is needed to determine whether Sproul's differing approach to apologetics has sufficient agreement with Adams's theology that could allow it to coalesce with the biblical counseling paradigm. If so, then perhaps the scope of the biblical counselor's apologetic repertoire can expand beyond presuppositionalism while maintaining the Reformed theological integrity that is crucial to Adams's counseling foundation.<sup>33</sup> The comparative analysis in this thesis will focus on the use of presuppositional apologetics in biblical counseling, and it may also bring to light commonalities between presuppositional and classical apologetics.

### **Void in the Literature**

Thus far it has been argued that presuppositional apologetics and what is

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<sup>31</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); John T. McNeil, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960); John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013); Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

<sup>32</sup>R. C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>33</sup>It should be noted here that R. C. Sproul was among the most influential and respected contemporary Reformed theologians. Therefore, his opposing approach to apologetics warrants a voice within Reformed circles.

essentially Reformed biblical counseling are two areas of practical theology that have historically been directed at two different audiences. Apologetics emphasizes evangelism, focusing on the unconverted, while biblical counseling emphasizes discipleship, focusing on the Christian. Since the common theological system of presuppositional apologetics and biblical counseling teaches that the Christian continues to battle against his unconverted, atheistic worldview and sinful habits, those elements of apologetics that were useful to his salvation carry over to being useful in his sanctification. Thus, an apologetic methodology has a place in biblical counseling. Yet, the link between apologetics and biblical counseling has gone largely, if not entirely, unexplored by the biblical counseling community—evidenced by a dearth of literature on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

Powlison has not written a systematic theology for counseling, though he has indicated the need for one.<sup>35</sup> His works masterfully apply rich theological and philosophical truth to the practice of counseling. He offers no treatment of apologetics proper; however, his books and articles are a treasure trove of keen theological and practical insight, ready to be mined for their apologetic elements.<sup>36</sup>

Another benefit of integrating apologetics with biblical counseling is to remedy a misperception that biblical counseling lacks intellectual merit. Powlison writes, “Critics have misread simple for simplistic. Biblical counseling is informed by a highly developed theological tradition. Its roots are as intellectual as they are practical. Biblical counseling is, however, like the Bible, anti-intellectualistic.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, a formal

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<sup>34</sup>I recognize that biblical counselors utilize apologetics; however, I suspect the majority’s perspective limits apologetics to counseling unbelievers.

<sup>35</sup>Powlison once remarked, “I believe that the church needs above all else a comprehensive and case-wise pastoral theology, something worthy of the name *systematic biblical counseling*. But I am no triumphalist.” David Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 25.

<sup>36</sup>David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003). This work serves as one example of many useful publications to identify presuppositional apologetics within biblical counseling.

<sup>37</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 253.



treatment of the philosophical component of apologetics in biblical counseling is warranted.

Powlison comes very close to addressing the significant aspects of this thesis. He explicitly states his gratitude to the Reformed theologians and apologists who have influenced him, namely Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Van Til, and Frame.<sup>38</sup> He also explicitly recognizes the place of apologetics in biblical counseling, “The fourth element in every counseling model is apologetics.”<sup>39</sup> In *Seeing with New Eyes*, Powlison goes so far as to announce plans to write on the subject, “The third book will focus on the apologetic component, understanding our times and critiquing other models, while also attempting to further develop our own model as we listen to the critiques that others offer of us.”<sup>40</sup> As of 2018, however, the third volume of his anticipated trilogy on biblical counseling has not been published.

Lambert took up the challenge to write a formal theology for biblical counselors. However, it excludes apologetics. Like Powlison’s collective works, Lambert’s *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* indirectly identifies critical, theological components of biblical counseling that are pertinent to apologetics. For instance, Lambert acknowledges the principle that every person sees life according to his own worldview<sup>41</sup> and then goes on to note, “When someone is having a conversation about a problem they are having, that other person in the conversation is articulating an understanding of what it means to be human and experiencing life.”<sup>42</sup> The significance of Lambert’s statement is that biblical counseling actively engages a fellow man on spiritual matters through the

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<sup>38</sup>Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 13.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>41</sup>Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 16.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

lenses of worldviews, which assumes competing worldviews or else there would be no need for counseling—and all of that is an apologetics task. However, Lambert’s book makes no overt correlation with apologetics nor suggests an apologetic methodology.

The various Christian-oriented counseling organizations have provided a plethora of articles, books, and conference material concerning cultural and theological issues relevant to the Christian life, yet they too offer no work specifically synthesizing the complementary aspects of apologetics and counseling.<sup>43</sup>

Others have noticed the relationship between presuppositional apologetics and biblical counseling. Oliphint affirmed the correlation in an interview conducted with the Reformed Forum in February 2012. The moderator asked Oliphint if he sees a relationship between Van Til’s apologetics and the counseling ministry of David Powlison. Without hesitation, Oliphint responded, “I do.” He went on to say emphatically, “It was patently obvious to me that what [Jay] Adams and those guys [at CCEF] were trying to do was to take the centrality of scripture and the reality of scripture and apply that to people’s situations and . . . there is an apologetic dimension to that. There’s a defense of Christianity in the midst of that.”<sup>44</sup> Though Oliphint clearly acknowledged the near intuitive and obvious relationship between the disciplines, his literary work fails to explore the topic. This thesis will begin the dialogue and will fill that lacuna.

## **Thesis**

### **Integrating Christian apologetic principles and practices into a biblical**

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<sup>43</sup>The Biblical Counseling Coalition, accessed June 10, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/>. The Biblical Counseling Coalition is a consortium of biblical counseling organizations. Its website provides a “one-stop shop” of sorts for the counseling community. A search of its resources revealed no works on the topic of utilizing apologetic principles and practices in counseling.

<sup>44</sup>Camden Bucey, host, “Apologetics and Counseling” (podcast), The Reformed Forum, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://reformedforum.org/dfs18>.

counseling model is biblically warranted and beneficial. To this end a comparative analysis of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics and Jay Adams's biblical counseling using contemporary exemplars John Frame and David Powlison is presented. Furthermore, two goals of this thesis are to convince biblical counselors to incorporate apologetics into their paradigm for counseling Christians<sup>45</sup> and to generate academic discussion on the complementary aspects of apologetics and biblical counseling.

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<sup>45</sup>This thesis is delimited to the usefulness of apologetics in counseling Christians while affirming the practice of counseling unbelievers. Apologetics for counseling unbelievers is assumed.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRINCIPLES OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

This chapter covers some of the theological and philosophical principles of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics that are pertinent to Jay Adams's nouthetic counseling. Summarizing the relevant aspects of Van Til's complex thought requires the help of other scholars who have sought to understand, explain, defend, or criticize him. His detractors interpret him as confusing, contending that his positions are rife with problems. His admirers interpret him as profound. A common response of a die-hard Van Tillian presuppositionalist to any such detractor is "you just misunderstood him." Apparently, that is easy to do! Detractors and admirers alike comment that his writing lacks organization and precision. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Van Til, John Frame's conclusion cannot be disputed: Van Til was not just a great thinker, but the leader of a movement.<sup>1</sup>

Presuppositional apologetics has influenced the modern church significantly. Its primary detractors acknowledged in 1984, "Presuppositionalism has become the majority report today among Reformed theologians, although it cannot even be called a minority report of church history."<sup>2</sup> Sproul and co-authors, Reformed theologians themselves, made an important observation in noting that the majority of Reformed theologians have adopted presuppositional apologetics as their standard. But how can

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<sup>1</sup>John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 10.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 183.

presuppositional apologetics be Reformed if its origin is so late? Why does it show up only in the twentieth century with Van Til rather than with the sixteenth-century Reformers, or at least with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan theologians? Oliphint justifies the Reformed credentials of presuppositional apologetics, saying that it is “‘reformed’ to the extent that it takes its cue from Scripture and the theology that flows therefrom.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps what makes presuppositionalism popular is its wide acceptance as *the* Reformed apologetic.

The recent movement labeled “Young, Restless, and Reformed” or “New Calvinism” has provided a resurgent wave upon which presuppositional apologetics rides.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Torres writes in the introduction to Frame’s *Apologetics*, “If adherents to the New Calvinist movement are looking for a seasoned guide to direct their journey for an apologetic that magnifies the sovereignty and glory of God, they have to look no further than John Frame.”<sup>5</sup> Torres’s opinion suggests that New Calvinists essentially have no viable, apologetic alternative. After all, what true Christian would think of adopting any other apologetic system than *the one* that “magnifies the sovereignty and glory of God?” It is something like bundled software, preinstalled in a new computer. Adherents to Reformed theology—whether decidedly confessional or simply pop-Reformed—have largely accepted presuppositional apologetics as de facto Reformed apologetics. But consensus alone is insufficient. For the label to mean anything, presuppositionalism must prove its consistency with historical, Reformed doctrine. Those doctrines are the

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<sup>3</sup>K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton, eds., *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 10.

<sup>4</sup>John Piper, “Why Do You Think Christianity Is True?” (video), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-do-you-think-christianity-is-true>. I define New Calvinists as nonconfessional and partially Reformed. I consider John Piper a leading figure of New Calvinism. Piper’s apologetics method appears to be eclectic, working out of a presuppositional framework.

<sup>5</sup>John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), xxvii.

substantive elements that support nouthetic counseling (which has avoided the Reformed label).

Presuppositionalism and biblical counseling arise from the same cultural and theological environment. Presuppositionalism predates nouthetic counseling by a few years. A review of its historical and theological context shows the influence presuppositionalism had upon biblical counseling. The biblical counselor will therefore benefit by understanding his presuppositional heritage and integrating apologetics into his knowledge base and methodology. The remainder of this chapter explores the context of presuppositionalism. Chapter 3 does the same for biblical counseling.

### **Some of the Backstory**

Apologetics for Cornelius Van Til was simply Reformed theology applied. He was the consummate loyalist to Reformed theology: “Now the basic structure of my thought is very simple. I have never been called upon to work out any form of systematic theology. My business is to teach apologetics. I therefore presuppose the Reformed system of doctrine.”<sup>6</sup> Later he states, “As Reformed Christians we wish to show men that it is Reformed theology, not Romanism, nor even some lower form of evangelical Protestantism, that they need.”<sup>7</sup> Determining whether Van Til communicated a consistently Reformed apologetic has led to much debate between him and his devotees.

Context is always king when attempting to understand a writer. Van Til was embroiled in the theological and philosophical controversies of his times, including those within his own Reformed family. Did he side with his fellow “Old Princetonians” who fought against German liberalism’s departure from biblical inerrancy and who founded

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<sup>6</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 27.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

Westminster Theological Seminary, which became the bastion of Reformed orthodoxy?<sup>8</sup> Yes, absolutely. Or did he succumb to the philosophical influences of the world and abandon the truth of Reformed theology by moving away from notables such as Abraham Kuyper?<sup>9</sup> The answer is yes and no. The theological and philosophical concerns of his era undoubtedly shaped him, and he became somewhat of a Reformed integrationist.

Kuyper and Van Til present an enigma when it comes to clarifying Reformed apologetics. Kuyper's view of "antithesis" led him to see no value in apologetics whatsoever, yet he was dubbed "the father of worldview thinking in apologetics."<sup>10</sup> Van Til's apologetic method had an affinity with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant,<sup>11</sup> though Van Til rejected all non-Christian philosophy, "The Christian philosophy of nature and the Christian philosophy of history are the diametrical opposites of the non-Christian philosophy of nature and the non-Christian philosophy of history."<sup>12</sup> Van Til's apologetics was a shift from Kuyper but not a total abandonment. The shift reflected an amalgam of the two Reformed families. Edgar and Oliphint explain, "Van Til sought to take the best of the Kuyper/Bavinck tradition [Dutch Reformed], together with the best of Old Princeton (as exemplified in B. B. Warfield) and to reestablish the discipline of apologetics for Reformed theology."<sup>13</sup> The result was controversy and attacks from both

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<sup>8</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 9n37. The "historic Reformed theologians" follow the lineage of Abraham Kuyper, Warfield, Bavinck, and later Hodge, Machen, and Berkhof. The "Reconstructionists" were generally the Dutch Reformed (Berkhof is an exception) and included Van Til.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 1-24. Kuyper's significance is discussed below. For now, the point is that Van Til's apologetics clearly reflects the theological tensions at play in his day. Kuyper and Warfield were not in lockstep, nor were WTS and Calvin Theological Seminary. Therefore, which branch is truly "Reformed"? The term is a prized possession, equivalent with orthodoxy in the minds of many.

<sup>10</sup>William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, eds., *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 2:307. Kuyper's *antithesis* is discussed later.

<sup>11</sup>John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 254. Frame notes that Van Til described his own method as *transcendental*, a term borrowed from Kant.

<sup>12</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 42.

<sup>13</sup>Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 2:454.

sides. Edgar and Oliphint postulate there were nefarious motives behind some of the attacks because Van Til declined an offer to transfer from Westminster to Calvin Theological Seminary: “Did Van Til’s earlier move from the Christian Reformed Church to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church produce such animosity? Was it the fact that Van Til was critical, in places, of both Kuyper and Bavinck that raised the ire of his critics? The answers to these questions may never be forthcoming.”<sup>14</sup> These controversies provided a valuable service by forcing Van Til to clarify his positions in writing and satisfy exactly what he means by presenting *the* Reformed apologetic.

Reformed theology was born out of the works of Luther and Calvin and was succinctly expressed in the creeds, confessions, and catechisms that followed the Protestant Reformation—the Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Heidelberg Catechism (to name a few). It is that rich tradition of the Reformers to which Van Til ascribed wholeheartedly—equating Reformed theology with Christian, biblical orthodoxy.<sup>15</sup> He therefore defends his apologetic system as orthodox by recapitulating and affirming Reformed systematic theology.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Bible Is First**

The Reformed doctrine of *sola Scriptura* was Van Til’s starting point in his apologetics and in his defense of his apologetics. Van Til repeatedly stated that since the Bible is God’s special revelation, then it alone has the right and ability to govern our thinking. The Bible is supremely and uniquely trustworthy. He wrote, “I base all my thinking on the Bible as the infallible Word of God. I have closely adhered to Scripture as

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<sup>14</sup>Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 2:455.

<sup>15</sup>This is admittedly a broad statement, but it reflects the seriousness of what it means to be Reformed.

<sup>16</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ch. 1.



self-attesting.”<sup>17</sup> Further evidence of this mind-set is present when he affirmed, “The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. And *it speaks of everything*.”<sup>18</sup> Again he writes, “There would be much more plausibility in charging me with holding to an extreme rather than a loose view of Scripture.”<sup>19</sup> However, to reduce Van Til to merely “having a Bible verse for everything,” would be an oversimplification.<sup>20</sup>

The Bible’s credibility had been under severe attack by German liberalism prior to and during Van Til’s lifetime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The battle afforded Reformed theologians like Van Til a great opportunity to proclaim and reinforce *sola Scriptura*. It is therefore easy to see why Van Til’s apologetics stressed an unwavering solidarity to the comprehensive authority of the Bible. He had to prove his commitment to *sola Scriptura* to his detractors. But it was no mere lip service. The Bible permeated his thought at every level.

Again, biblical thought for Van Til was Reformed thought. His apologetic methodology argued in accord with other principal systematic doctrines—the doctrines of God, man, Christ, salvation, the church, and the last things.<sup>21</sup> He stated, “It is therefore the system of truth as contained in Scripture that we must present to the world. The various theological disciplines contribute to the setting forth of this system.”<sup>22</sup> The presentation of the Bible, of theology, to “the world” is the heart of his apologetics.

Clearly, Van Til’s epistemology, his blueprint for knowledge, was wholly

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<sup>17</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 203.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 (italics original).

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 29n7.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

defined by Reformed doctrine. The opening lines of his chapter entitled “Christian Epistemology” is explicit:

It [knowledge] was there [in previous chapters] seen to be involved in the historic Reformed position with respect to Scripture, the self-contained God, the creation of all things by God, the creation of man in God’s image, the fall of man as involving the principle that the sinner is *in principle* desirous of suppressing the truth but is in practice restrained from fully doing so by God’s common grace.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Van Til emphasizes that his “historic Reformed” epistemology is not like that of Kuyper, the Old Princetonians, Roman Catholicism’s natural theology, or evangelicalism.<sup>24</sup>

The key stopping points in this task of summarizing Van Til’s thoughts (while maintaining a view toward Adams) are the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man (particularly the noetic effects of sin and common grace) and the doctrine of salvation, which involves what will be called herein “the noetic effects of grace.”

### **Philosophy and the Doctrine of God**

The debates within Christian apologetics are entwined with those of secular philosophy and theology. The apologist has historically argued first for the existence of a monotheistic God against a backdrop of all other views of God, including agnosticism and atheism. The classical apologetics method approaches the debate from the perspective that mankind has a God-given ability to reason and that the Christian faith is reasonable. Classical Christian philosophers and theologians defend Christianity by engaging in established philosophical discussion. Ancient philosophers laid the groundwork, introducing the talking points and perspectives that Christians later placed into the category of natural theology. That is, Greek philosophy moved away from myth and sought to explain the natural and the metaphysical worlds by developing the tools of

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<sup>23</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 277.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 277-85.

intellect, reason, and knowledge to explore what it means “to be.”<sup>25</sup> Their ideas were limited by that natural world and its natural means, divorced from the spiritual world and spiritual means as defined by biblical theology. The philosophy of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others became the accepted foundation for Western thought and affected many Christian thinkers.<sup>26</sup>

The classical apologist entered this arena of ideas largely using the rules and context of secular philosophy. His first battle would seek to convince the skeptic of the existence of a god using rational arguments. For this enterprise, the church adopted Anselm’s ontological argument: “By definition, God has all perfections, and one of these is *existence*, therefore God exists.”<sup>27</sup> It has also accepted Aquinas’s “five ways.”<sup>28</sup> These arguments, which are used in apologetics today, work from an epistemology of reason, assume that our sense perceptions plus the rules of logic are sufficient grounds for knowing what we know to be true. This model accepts the notion that man can reason from a pool of knowledge acquired on his own, without divine revelation.<sup>29</sup> The task of the Christian apologist is to first convince his hearer of the existence of a god. His second step progresses to present the God of the Bible, namely Jesus, as that one and only, true and living God.

Van Til’s approach was different. He wrote, “We must first ask what kind of a God Christianity believes in before we can really ask with intelligence whether such a

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<sup>25</sup>Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, chs.1 and 2.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 3. Frame writes, “Philosophy over the centuries has had a major influence on Christian theology” (3).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 766.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 147. Aquinas’s five arguments are the argument from motion, the argument from efficient cause, the argument from possibility and necessity, the argument from gradation, and the teleological argument.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 151-54.

God exists.”<sup>30</sup> From there, he argues from the standard, Reformed doctrine of God: the aseity of God (i.e., that God is self-existent) and the incommunicable attributes—God is absolute, immutable, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, transcendent, immanent, simplistic (God is a unity, not composed of parts from outside of himself), and Trinitarian.<sup>31</sup>

The rationale for beginning with the biblical doctrine of God rather than a generic god is that “we are not interested to have anyone prove to us the existence of any other sort of God but this God. Any other sort of God is no God at all, and to prove that some other sort of God exists is, in effect, to prove that no God exists.”<sup>32</sup> Van Til essentially reasoned that God’s attributes indicate he is the source of all things. Furthermore, God’s perfect and comprehensive knowledge means that his interpretation of all things is true. Therefore, if men have any hope of attaining a right knowledge about anything, they must begin with the God of the Bible as he presents himself, rather than with some truncated, distorted version of him. Van Til would argue that the classical apologetic starting point is wrong-headed because its object is skewed. In other words, according to Van Til, bringing a person to agree to the existence of an unnamed, abstract deity is of no value, for it presents something other than the one and only, true and living God of the Bible. It essentially leads them to a false god.

The moniker for Van Til’s approach, “presuppositionalism,” reflects, in part, that the starting point of reason (and apologetic dialogue) must presuppose the God of the Bible and his divine characteristics. Presuppositionalism seeks to explain, not prove, this Supreme Being exists and that he has communicated truth about himself, mankind, the natural world, and reality. God has revealed truth progressively throughout human

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<sup>30</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 30.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 30-34.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 34.

history, recorded in the pages of the Bible, in a manner consistent with his moral character: honest, accurate, and sufficient. Furthermore, Van Til argues that presuppositions are unavoidable for everyone. Secular philosophical thought has its own set of presuppositions. For instance, it presupposes an exclusively naturalistic world and man as capable of ascertaining truth and reality apart from the one true and living God.

Van Til begins his discussion of God by stating, “We must first ask what kind of a God Christianity believes in before we can ask with intelligence whether such a God exists.”<sup>33</sup> A discussion of man would then follow: “We must first ask what sort of a man do Christianity and philosophy each believe in before we can ask with intelligence whether such a man can know anything rightly.” In other words, it is one thing for God to speak, but can man rightly comprehend divine revelation?

### **The Doctrine of Man and the Noetic Effects of Sin**

Van Til’s presuppositionalism continues its line of reasoning by building upon orthodox Protestant Christian doctrines of anthropology and hamartiology. Mankind originated from two historic persons created by God in the image of God. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and became corrupted, thus incurring the forewarned curse of sin and death for themselves and their progeny—the entire human race. This is a cardinal belief of Christianity. What is disputed is the extent to which that corruption affected mankind’s ability to apprehend truth and his justification for his knowledge.

To say that man was created *imago Dei* means that God endowed mankind with certain attributes consistent with his own. These attributes constitute the communicable attributes. Van Til elaborates, “Then when we wish to emphasize the fact that man resembles God especially in the splendor of his moral attributes, we say that when man was created, he had true knowledge, true righteousness, and true holiness.”

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<sup>33</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 30.

The topic of man's knowledge rises to significance in presuppositionalism and hence in this thesis.

Van Til is clear that the communicable attributes of God are limited in degree because of man's finiteness. For instance, though mankind can know things, he can never know comprehensively, as God does. Man was not omniscient in the garden, and he will not be omniscient in glory. Only God knows everything fully. However, the knowledge that man was given and can gain, albeit limited, is true knowledge. Van Til puts it this way: "We are therefore like God so that our knowledge is true, and we are unlike God and therefore our knowledge can never be comprehensive."<sup>34</sup>

But the *imago Dei* was altered by the fall. Christian anthropology naturally includes the doctrine of sin. The Reformed doctrine of sin is known as total depravity. Chapter 6 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, "By this sin they [Adam and Eve] fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body" and "They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation."<sup>35</sup> According to these statements, the effects of sin were thorough, complete, or "total." The fall affected every aspect of humanity in breadth and depth. No human (apart from the God-man Jesus Christ) escaped it and no part of man went unscathed.

Louis Berkhof provides a standard explanation of total depravity:

Negatively, it does not imply (1) that every man is as thoroughly depraved as he can possibly become; (2) that the sinner has no innate knowledge of the will of God, nor a conscience that discriminates between good and evil. . . . Positively, it does indicate that the inherent corruption extends to every part of man's nature . . . and that there is no spiritual good, that is good in relation to God, in the sinner at all, but only perversion.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 64.

<sup>35</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6.2 and 6.3.

<sup>36</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 2:247.

What, then, are the effects of total depravity upon man's ability to apprehend knowledge? The question introduces the subdoctrine of the noetic effects of sin. Total depravity suggests that while man's mind was negatively affected by sin, it was not corrupted utterly. Man does not go about like a rabid animal without control of his faculties and actions. But to what extent was he corrupted? If sin did not annihilate man's ability to reason, did it leave him incapable of comprehending God rightly? According to Sproul and his co-authors, "We suggest that classic Reformed orthodoxy [argued through exemplars John Calvin, Heinrich Heppel, and Jonathan Edwards] saw the noetic influence of sin not as direct through a totally depraved mind, but as indirect through a totally depraved heart."<sup>37</sup> Frame says that these classical apologetics authors agree with Van Til on this point. Man's problem is not so much an intellectual one as it is a moral one.

The noetic effect of sin is a concept from the negative perspective. Its positive corollary is common grace.<sup>38</sup> These two doctrines are two sides of the same coin. The noetic effect of sin explores the ill-effect of sin upon man's mind and his inability to properly understand the world around him; while common grace explores the effect of God preserving something of the *imago Dei*. By restraining the curse, God left man with some ability to understand God and the world around him. Contemporary theologian Wayne Grudem offers this definition: "The common grace of God in the intellectual realm also results in an ability to grasp truth and distinguish it from error, and to experience growth in knowledge that can be used in the investigation of the universe."<sup>39</sup> In other words, the natural man has a great deal of insight into his world. Van Til seems to agree, up to a point. He stated,

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<sup>37</sup>Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, 243.

<sup>38</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2:432-34. Berkhof traces the doctrine in Reformed theology, noting, "Up to the present Kuyper and Bavinck did more than any one else for the development of the doctrine of common grace. . . . The name 'common grace' . . . cannot be said to owe its origin to Calvin."

<sup>39</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 659.

Reformed Christians should realize that the non-Christian may have, and often does have, a brilliant mind. . . . We may greatly admire such a mind for what, in spite of its basic principle and because of the fact that God has released its powers in his restraining grace, it has done. For all that, it must not be forgotten that this mind is still, be it Aristotle, a covenant breaker in Adam.<sup>40</sup>

This seeming doublespeak is an example of the difficulty in pinning down Van Til's perspective. John Frame comments, "Although Van Til affirms the ambiguity of the unbeliever's position under common grace, he nevertheless often writes as though the unbeliever knows and affirms no truth at all and thus is not at all affected by common grace."<sup>41</sup> Again Frame writes, "There are points at which he [Van Til] seems to say that unbelief always leads to intellectual error and that no propositional truth is possible apart from the Spirit's witness . . . he has admitted some difficulty in this area."<sup>42</sup>

The "difficulty in this area" most likely stems from Van Til wrestling with the axiom presented in Romans 1:18-19, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." The difficulty lies in the fact that there are obviously very intelligent non-Christians. Furthermore, many non-Christians believe there is a god. How can these facts be reconciled with Van Til's position? As this verse explains, some measure of truth about God comes preinstalled, born in man's conscience ("evident within them"), and some truth is learned from observing nature ("God made it evident to them"). The awareness of truth in all people is common grace. Yet unregenerate man willfully suppresses the truth God has given. He suppresses the truth by choosing to either ignore or reject it. Nevertheless, he still knows it. It is understandable, then, how Van Til can acknowledge common grace upon the intellect on one hand, while on the

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<sup>40</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 292.

<sup>41</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 189.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 414.



other hand address the absence of true knowledge. The a priori truth about God gets minimized to obscurity by an unconverted heart. One might say then that the extent of the noetic effect of sin is dynamic, increasing over time—even hastened by God’s reaction of withdrawing, giving them over to their depraved, autonomous mind (Rom 1:28). It is a self-imposed ignorance or deception.

After considering God and the effect of sin upon man’s thinking, the question arises, “What effect does salvation have upon man’s knowledge?” If there is a noetic effect of sin, is there a reversal of its effects that accompanies salvation? Is there a noetic effect of grace?

### **The Doctrine of Salvation and the Noetic Effects of Grace**

The last stop on this journey through Van Til’s Reformed systematic theology considers his soteriology. Perhaps surprisingly, Van Til’s *Defense* offers only a very brief treatment of the topic. Not surprisingly, he emphasizes the sovereignty of God in salvation.<sup>43</sup> Van Til bases his apologetics entirely on a theological foundation beginning with who God is. And this God is the God who actively involves himself in the lives of his creatures. God must be the one who takes the initiative and chooses to save man. Fallen man is incapable of taking the initiative with God because he is naturally opposed to God. He cannot and will not do anything that will make himself favorable to God. Even if he attempted, which he won’t, his efforts would be rejected by God because of their utter insufficiency to overcome the great offense against God. Salvation must be the deliberate work of God upon a person who would otherwise *never* bend his will and heart to God. If sin has so affected the heart to render man spiritually dead, causing him to voluntarily suppress whatever true knowledge about God he does have, then any change

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<sup>43</sup>Van Til, *A Defense of the Faith*, 39-41.

or advancement in knowledge must come from outside of himself. It must be initiated by God. This overtly Calvinistic doctrine of salvation is critical to Van Til's apologetic methodology. Presuppositionalism is a theological worldview that goes beyond a mere argument for the existence of God. The ultimate goal of Van Til's apologetics is for the Spirit of God to bring these truths of the gospel to bear upon the hearer's mind, affect his conscience, and give life to his soul.

Van Til explained that true understanding, real knowledge, is bound up in the principle that Christ's work *for* a person involves Christ's work *in* a person.<sup>44</sup> The Holy Spirit's regenerating work upon the soul brings about a change in the mind, in knowledge and thinking, as well as giving a new heart. Therefore, to continue the flow of thought on Van Til's epistemology, one must further consider the effect of saving grace upon the mind by comparing the differences between unregenerate and regenerate persons.

### **Antithesis**

The concept of *antithesis* is attributed to Dutch Reformed theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper. Van Til's formative years of theological education were spent in the Dutch Reformed tradition, where he was influenced by Kuyper.<sup>45</sup> John Frame explains, "Van Til is, following Kuyper and Machen, a kind of apostle of antithesis. This antithesis is the diametrical opposition between belief and unbelief and therefore between belief and any compromise of revealed truth."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Frame writes, "The concept of antithesis is one of Van Til's major concerns, and is the element in his thought that has brought him the most criticism."<sup>47</sup> In antithesis, common grace takes a back seat to the stark differences between the noetic ill-effects of sin upon mankind and the restorative

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<sup>44</sup>Van Til, *A Defense of the Faith*, 40.

<sup>45</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 20-21.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.* Note also that this thesis relies heavily upon Frame's analysis of Van Til's view.

effects of saving grace upon Christians.<sup>48</sup>

The issues at play in the topic can be described somewhat like a man choosing his automotive mechanic. He may reason that he should take his car to a Christian mechanic over a non-Christian mechanic. But why would he think this way? Does being a Christian make one a better mechanic than a non-Christian mechanic? Has the Christian mechanic been given special knowledge, even divine insight into automotive engineering? The man quickly realizes the obvious absurdity. As in all areas of life, there are non-Christians whose skills exceed those of Christians and vice versa. He might further reason in favor of a Christian mechanic because Christians are more honest—even if the price is higher, at least he knows that he will not be taken advantage of. After all, Christians, by definition, are morally superior to non-Christians. Or are they? The man then reflects upon his Sunday School class from chapter 9 of *The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* about remaining sin:

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; *yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions, he doth not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.*<sup>49</sup>

If Christians are neither intellectually nor morally superior to non-Christians, then how will the man choose his mechanic?

The mechanic conundrum captures some of the problems dealt with in apologetic theories. Van Til's approach is not about the noetic effects of sin diminishing the capacity for intelligence or even the degree of moral depravity. The difference between the mechanics would become evident as the customer speaks to them about God, about spiritual matters. The non-Christian's antithesis would be exposed. According to

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<sup>48</sup>Van Til would probably go further and limit the restorative effects especially to Reformed Christians.

<sup>49</sup>*The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, 9.4.

Van Tillian ideas, the Christian mechanic has the advantage of his spiritual faculties being regenerated. By contrast, the non-Christian mechanic, will not be able to perceive the world accurately because he “interpret[s] everything . . . without reference to God.”<sup>50</sup>

Although Van Til nuanced his hardline antithesis position, he still drew the hard lines. Again, Frame recoils a bit from Van Til at this point when he writes, “On this extreme antithetical view, it would almost seem as if no unbeliever can utter a true sentence. It would also seem as if no communication is possible between believer and unbeliever. Unregenerate man cannot know what the good is, so how can he understand sin and the need for redemption in Christ?”<sup>51</sup> An example of Van Til’s struggle with his own hard lines leads him to speak of the unregenerate man having a “mixture of truth with error.” And Frame notes, “But that view of the unbeliever’s mentality provides a rather weak basis for all the strong antithetical language.”<sup>52</sup>

It is important to consider another practical aspect of Kuyper’s antithesis of which Van Til was a kind of apostle. Do Kuyper and Van Til apply their view of antithesis to their own construct? Specifically, their hardline antithesis position speaks ill of the non-Christian’s ability to rightly interpret his world, yet Kuyper and Van Till use the very language and concepts of secular philosophers.<sup>53</sup> Their principles and practice often seem at odds.

Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman offer helpful insight by taking Kuyper’s cultural context into account, “Dutch Calvinism was keenly concerned about the rise of secularization, the principled exclusion of faith from the ordinary activities of life,

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<sup>50</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 70.

<sup>51</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 191.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>I have in mind common terms and concepts with philosophical origins such as *worldview*, which comes from German philosophy (*Weltanschauung*), Kant’s *transcendentalism*, and the criticism surrounding Van Til’s *idealism*.

including the sciences, the arts, and politics.”<sup>54</sup> For Kuyper, antithesis caused him to believe that there really was no point in engaging in apologetic encounters. The fundamental gulf between the Christian and non-Christian was too great. They cannot speak the same language. Furthermore, “Since revelation was the acknowledged *principium* of the church, there seemed to be no common ground between the regenerate and the unregenerate.”<sup>55</sup>

One might expect, then, that Kuyper would encourage Christians to retreat from secular thought and its influence. However, his more comprehensive thought on the Christian “worldview” directed Christians in the opposite direction. He was thoroughly engaged in battling the culture. He established the Free University of Amsterdam for the express purpose of equipping Christians with a broad education.<sup>56</sup> Rather than establishing a Christian “bubble” to isolate Christian thought, Kuyper wanted Christians to understand the non-Christian’s worldview so that they could deconstruct it. Nevertheless, Frame confirms the suspicion that such hardline antithesis language risks an undesired effect when he wrote, “The notion is abroad in some circles that Van Til’s thought forbids us to seek to learn anything at all from unbelievers, or even from non-Reformed Christians.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 232.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>56</sup>On its website, the Free University of Amsterdam states, “Ever since it was founded in 1880, VU Amsterdam has been known for its distinctive approach to knowledge. VU is an open organization, strongly linked to people and society. What matters is not just the acquisition of a greater depth of knowledge, but also a wider one. We ask and expect our students, researchers, PhD candidates and employees to look further—to look further than their own interests and their own field, and further than what is familiar and further than the here and now.” Free University of Amsterdam, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.sti2.org/free-university-amsterdam>.

<sup>57</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 212.

## A Summary of Van Til's Worldview

Van Til's presuppositionalism is very much a continuation of Kuyper's Calvinistic worldview.<sup>58</sup> While trying to set forth a balance between the Reformed doctrines of total depravity and common grace in Kuyper's antithesis, he unavoidably appeared to emphasize one over the other with any given comment. His discussion of antithesis thus lacked academic precision. Yet, at a higher level—looking more at the forest than the atoms on the bark of the trees—his ideas ring true to many Christians who have an open Bible and a grasp of historic Christian doctrine.

The threat of German liberal theology was real, and its effect continues today. Likewise, anti-Christian philosophies infiltrate the church and must be fiercely fought. Van Til's perspective was that biblical Christianity is rationally and intellectually superior to all other systems. God's historic plan of redemption explains reality, including God, human existence, the events of human history, good and evil, the meaning of life, and the afterlife into eternity. Unlike other apologetic systems, Van Til claims that his is built entirely upon historic Reformed theology. Frame recalls class lectures where Van Til

insisted that Christianity has a "two-circle" worldview, as opposed to secular thought, which has only "one circle" thinking. Nonbiblical thought makes all reality equal: if there is a God, he is equal to the world. But for Christianity, God is the sovereign Creator and Lord; the world is in no sense equal to him. That is, in essence, the 'simple structure' of Van Til's thought.<sup>59</sup>

Academic apologetics discussions consider the rightful use of natural theology and human reasoning within the Christian's supporting theological framework—which becomes evident in Van Til's methodology. Presuppositionalism is an attempt to inculcate all we know about God—the one and only true and living God who has revealed himself to mankind in the person of his Son, the Savior, Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible—and to proclaim those biblical truths to a lost and dying world. The presuppositional

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<sup>58</sup>Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics*, 2:334.

<sup>59</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 53.

method is not interested in arguing for the existence of God apart from Christ or through formal logic. Christians have been given eyes to see what the non-Christian cannot or will not see; and it is their duty to communicate special, not general, revelation.

### **The Evolution of Presuppositionalism**

Frame concludes his analysis of Van Til's thought with a perspective on the evolution of presuppositionalism. Van Til's views have been adopted, to varying degrees, by an eclectic group of theologians, many of whom Van Til would certainly not endorse. This group includes theonomists, dispensationalists, and even the renowned Francis Schaeffer.<sup>60</sup> Among those who would be more consistent Van Tillians are Frame, Bahnsen, Edgar, and Oliphint.

Oliphint has emphasized the covenantal aspect of Van Til's thought. William Edgar applauds Oliphint's work for fortifying the biblical and theological foundations.<sup>61</sup> Building upon the Creator/creature worldview, as Frame noted, Oliphint elucidates the covenant-making God's relationship to mankind. Rather than recapitulate his work here, it is sufficient to observe that Oliphint's practice coincides with his principles. He does not avoid different worldviews but addresses them and uses them without sinking into the quagmire of philosophical and theological conundrums. Oliphint utilizes the insight of ancient Greek philosophers to enhance the biblical theology in a way that does not contaminate orthodoxy.<sup>62</sup>

Frame is explicit in his agreements and disagreements with Van Til. He unapologetically describes himself as Van Tillian. Interestingly, Frame acknowledges that Van Til's approach lends itself to its own form of antithesis—one is either wholly

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<sup>60</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 389-96.

<sup>61</sup>K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 18.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 123-60.

presuppositional or not. Frame has sought to organize and compartmentalize Van Til in such a way that he isn't wholly Van Tillian, agreeing mostly and disagreeing too, while still calling himself a presuppositionalist.<sup>63</sup> He agrees with the “big picture” aspects of the Reformed theological paradigms and the Creator/creature distinction. He disagrees with the “application of these principles in the Clark controversy, and his sometimes-confusing statements about the use of reason, logic, and evidence.”<sup>64</sup> Here, in Frame, is a good measure of agreement with Oliphint. Whereas Kuyper and Van Til seemed to contradict themselves in practice because of their hardline rhetoric of antithesis, Frame jettisons a commitment to strict party-politics and embraces a more eclectic or integrative apologetic. Frame and Oliphint, as Van Til's spiritual and academic descendants, do a better job of knowing where to draw the lines between the principles and practices of Reformed doctrine.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter is to present components of Van Til's presuppositional apologetics that are pertinent to integrating apologetics with biblical counseling. The wide influence of presuppositionalism upon conservative evangelicalism is obvious—whether confessionally Reformed, nominally Reformed, or non-Reformed. Van Til's “movement” has been a boon for the church in terms of reinforcing *sola Scriptura*, the doctrine of God, and overall sound doctrine that opposes a secular world, bent on promoting everything that is antithetical to God. The church's struggle against her enemies of sin, the world, and the devil has not relented, and she must remain vigilant. The church is admonished to adopt the Berean spirit and soberly evaluate every man's teaching against the pages of Scripture—even Van Til's teaching.

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<sup>63</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 397-98.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 398.



This evaluation of Van Til and Adams reveals that Van Til's movement has had a significant influence upon Adams's movement. Frame also observed, "I believe that the 'nouthetic counseling' of Jay Adams, which continues to be developed by the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, has a strongly Van Tillian thrust, particularly in its antithetical relation to secular psychology and its determination to uphold Reformed, biblical presuppositions in all counseling theory and practice."<sup>65</sup> This thesis will develop those observations next by analyzing the pertinent principles and practices in Adams's counseling paradigm and the evolution of that system in the CCEF and ACBC organizations.

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<sup>65</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 394.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Jay Adams’s biblical counseling movement is undeniably an application of Reformed doctrine. In the second paragraph of his theological treatise of nouthetic counseling, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*, Adams states, “In *More Than Redemption* I could take space to restate doctrinal positions that are plainly presented elsewhere by Reformed theologians; I could make observations about numerous aspects of various doctrines that are obvious to all.”<sup>1</sup> He says that he hopes his readers will appreciate that he assumes they can develop the obvious for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Among the Reformed theologians to whom Adams referred was his colleague at Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS), Cornelius Van Til. Adams shared a theological system with Van Til, which explains why one can overtly integrate presuppositional apologetics with biblical counseling.

Parallel to chapter 2, this chapter begins with a summary of the historical background and cultural milieu from which the biblical counseling movement began and then progresses to a synopsis of key doctrines that will be analyzed in chapter 4.

#### **Some of the Backstory**

Jay Adams’s personal story begins where all Christians begin their stories, when he was born again. Adams was converted to Christianity at age fifteen and

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<sup>1</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), vii.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

promptly entered theological training at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia in the fall of 1945.<sup>3</sup> By 1951 he had completed two bachelor's degrees and was soon ordained as a pastor in the United Presbyterian Church. Adams furthered his education with a master's degree in sacred theology in 1958, a Ph.D. in 1963, and a second dissertation in 1965.<sup>4</sup> Adams was educated to be a preacher, not a counselor.<sup>5</sup> WTS invited Adams to teach fledgling preachers the practical tasks of public speaking and pastoral ministry. He was appointed assistant professor of pastoral theology in June 1966.<sup>6</sup> Adams remained a professor at Westminster until 1975. In examining his curriculum vitae, one begins to understand how nouthetic counseling came to be.

Adams did not purpose to start a counseling movement. The genesis of the biblical counseling movement was simply one man's desire to become a better shepherd to the small flock God had entrusted to him. Adams was a young pastor who struggled to counsel well. With a pioneering spirit, he set out on a quest for a solution to his predicament. His efforts revolutionized pastoral ministry for his generation and for generations to come.

Like all pastors, Adams faced ministerial trials. He encountered trials from his own congregation and from the broader Presbyterian denomination. Adams's life-work really began one day after a church service when a grief-stricken man in his congregation approached him for help and "broke into tears, but could not speak." Adams wrote, "I simply did not know what to do. I was helpless."<sup>7</sup> A month later the man died,

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<sup>3</sup>David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 31-34.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>7</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (1970; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), xi.

presumably without consolation. Agonized by this failure, Adams devoured all the available counseling material he could find. He quickly discovered that the church offered paltry and anemic help. By contrast, secular counseling literature was abundant and thriving in popularity. Society was engulfed by the psychiatric theories of Freud, Adler, Jung, and Rogers, which coincided with the wave of German liberal theology from the late 1800's. By the mid-1900s mainline churches doubted God's Word and psychiatry dominated the discipline of counseling. Though the evangelical church fought theological liberalism valiantly and remained steadfast concerning the reliability of biblical texts, on the counseling front, it largely succumbed to the dogma of secular psychology. John Bettler, Adams's first protégé, made a similar statement as he reminisced about the early days of the Christian Counseling and Education Federation (CCEF):

While evangelicals spent the first half of the twentieth century defending the faith and struggling to save their seminaries and churches from liberal takeover, those same liberals were free to define and develop pastoral counseling as they wished without input or opposition from those upholding full biblical authority.<sup>8</sup>

The church's inattention to these innovative concepts of the mind and human behavior unwittingly created a perspective that the average pastor—trained *merely* in theology and sermonizing—was ill-equipped to address people's problems. After all, pastors and congregants alike reasoned, psychology was science. The unseen mind and emotions were being investigated empirically by the best research universities. Pastors began to outsource hurting souls (like the distraught man who sought help from Adams) to psychologists and psychiatrists, the "experts." Adams also felt the pull of this current: "I soon became disillusioned with the standard books and was tempted to fall into the common practice of referring nearly all counselees with serious problems to psychiatrists or state mental institutions."<sup>9</sup> Unlike many of his peers, Adams resisted the tide.

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<sup>8</sup>John Bettler, "CCEF: The Beginning," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 46.

<sup>9</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xii.

After diving into secular resources to comprehend their insights, Adams concluded they were devoid of substance. Furthermore, the problem facing Christian counseling was not that the church lacked resources; rather, the church's shepherds were ignoring the treasure trove of wisdom that God provides in the Bible. Faith in God's Word spurred Adams to go to Scripture for insight and not to godless systems propounded by godless men like Freud, Jung, Adler, Rogers, and others.

Adams experienced increasing success by "simply telling counselees what God required of them."<sup>10</sup> Yet, his methods were spotty and haphazard. His thinking needed clarity and maturity—not only as a pastor, but by this time as professor of practical theology at WTS. Adams was faced with teaching other shepherds how to care for souls. But where could he develop his ideas?

Adams found an unlikely ally in clinical psychologist O. Hobart Mowrer. Mowrer, distinguished as a one-time president of the American Psychological Association, was decidedly anti-Freudian, rejected the Medical Model of psychology for a Moral Model, and "boldly threw down the gauntlet to conservative Christians as well."<sup>11</sup> Adams spent the summer of 1965 in Mowrer's graduate study program, working at two mental institutions where he "and five others . . . flew with him, drove with him, ate with him, counseled together with him and argued with him five days a week."<sup>12</sup> Mowrer was not a Christian, but neither was he a typical psychologist. Adams observed, "Mowrer's emphasis was upon responsibility. Mowrer urged people to 'confess' their wrongs (not to God, but) to others whom they had wronged and to make restitution wherever possible."<sup>13</sup> In other words, this secular professor and clinical psychologist built

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<sup>10</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xiii.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

a practice of treating institutionalized patients with principles of moral responsibility that somewhat aligned with Scripture, rather than psychoanalysis and behavior modification. Adams summarized his conclusions about Mowrer's work this way: "Christians may thank God that in his providence he has used Mowrer and others to awaken us to the fact that the 'mentally ill' can be helped. But Christians must turn to the Scriptures to discover how God (not Mowrer) says to do it."<sup>14</sup>

Adams, often criticized for having a vehemently antithetical view of psychology, began his research alongside a psychologist. This committed and faithful pastor was open to explore unconventional methodologies. Adams seems to have had no previous opposition to psychology. He immersed himself in the full spectrum of available literature, from conventional psychology and alternative psychology to a mixture of psychology and Christian theology. He found all of it lacking because, at his core, he was a conservative Presbyterian minister with a thoroughly Reformed worldview. Adams was committed to the sufficiency and authority of God's Word. His theological system fortified his resolve that the covenant-keeping God had indeed provided his covenant people with all they needed for life and godliness. From where did such passion and resolve come?

Adams's personal, pastoral trials were not the only anvil on which he hammered out his system of biblical counseling. His views were simultaneously being forged by the heat of denominational furnaces stoked by controversies over biblical inerrancy and inspiration. The Protestant church in America experienced a seismic transformation in the early twentieth century that divided mainline churches and fostered the non-denominational church.

This rise of modern evangelicalism occurred during Adams's early life in the

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<sup>14</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xviii.

Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, like other mainline Protestant denominations, was greatly affected by these shifting ecclesiastical tectonic plates. Jay Adams was born in 1929, the year the “Old Princetonians” defected and founded Westminster Theological Seminary over the modernism versus fundamentalism controversy. The seminary recounts their history as follows:

[J. Gresham] Machen left the prestige of Princeton to stand for the truth of the Bible. He knew that theological compromise would harm the spiritual power of the church. His fight for Christianity cost him a great deal. Not only did Machen lose his position at Princeton, but his church also declared him guilty of insubordination and stripped him of his credentials as a minister.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, in describing its heritage, WTS mentions that “Machen’s faculty and their successors equipped generations of incisive scholars and bold preachers throughout the 20th century.”<sup>17</sup> Machen’s prize faculty included Cornelius Van Til, and one of those equipped successors and bold preachers was Jay Adams.

The conservative evangelical church experienced an explosion of growth in those days. Newly minted Bible institutes and seminaries peppered the United States in response to the theological liberalism of the mainline churches.<sup>18</sup> These conservative organizations were committed to promoting the fundamentals of the faith, the Bible, and the gospel. Though the doctrinal battles were a boon for nondenominationalism, they created heart-wrenching division for many Reformed Christians. Such breaks never occur along smooth, clean lines. Adams was not immune to the turmoil. Powlison writes,

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<sup>15</sup>Joel A. Carpenter, “Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942,” *Church History* 49, no. 1 (March 1980): 62-75, Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Society of Church History, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3164640>.

<sup>16</sup>Westminster Theological Seminary, “History,” accessed Nov. 16, 2017, <https://www.wts.edu/history>.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Carpenter affirms the rapid emergence of Christian schools: “A survey of evangelical higher education in 1948 found that the total enrollment of seventy such schools in the United States doubled between 1929 and 1940.” Carpenter, “Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism,” 68.

“Adams’s ecclesiastical affiliations occurred within a series of small conservative Presbyterian denominations, several of which had splintered from the northern Presbyterian Church in the 1930’s.”<sup>19</sup> Adams’s ecclesiastical affiliations undoubtedly shaped his counseling movement.

The appeal of nouthetic counseling soon extended beyond Presbyterians. It struck a chord with fundamentalist Baptists and other evangelicals committed to the doctrines of biblical authority, inerrancy, sufficiency, and infallibility.<sup>20</sup> Those doctrines remain the bedrock and rallying point of biblical counseling. However, their practical applications brought disagreement to the fledgling movement, irrespective of ecclesiastical affiliations. The camps diverged over the position that psychology plays in counseling. Can and should psychology inform a genuinely biblical model, a Reformed model, of counseling?

Adams’s very first pastor-student at CCEF, John Bettler, addressed issues that have dogged the movement to this day.<sup>21</sup> Powlison asserts, “Most of the major fault lines in the [biblical counseling] movement would map onto the differences between Adams and Bettler.”<sup>22</sup> He also posits, “Bettler had been raised fundamentalist and reacted against it, coming to embrace a version of Reformed theology with a broad vision for social and intellectual engagement. Adams had been a-religious and had embraced separatist Presbyterianism.”<sup>23</sup> This thesis affirms Powlison’s observation and contends that more precisely it was Adams embracing a Van Tillian version of Reformed theology that polarized him. Bettler exposed the divergent perspectives within WTS during CCEF’s

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<sup>19</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 12.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>This statement does not blame Bettler for any of the problems. Instead, it recognizes that the difficulties arising from Adams’s system arose at the outset. Bettler just happened to be the first person to broach them.

<sup>22</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 41.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.



incubation:

I remember, as a student at Westminster Seminary in the mid-sixties, leaving a class in Apologetics in which Cornelius Van Til railed against the incorporation of unbelieving thought into a consistent Christian world-view and then walking to a class on pastoral care where Rogerian methods were taught and practiced uncritically-and nobody blinked. One year later Jay Adams began teaching that course, and the counseling revolution began.

Furthermore, Bettler identifies a key Van Tillian perspective, rudimentary to integrating apologetics with biblical counseling, namely, that a worldview of unbelief separates psychology from biblical counseling's worldview of belief.

This historical review of Adams and the biblical counseling movement provides some insight into the personal and ecclesiastical forces that shaped Adams and his movement. It also makes clear Adams's proximity to Van Til—geographically, chronologically, professionally, and ecclesiastically. Because the biblical counseling paradigm is rooted in presuppositional apologetics, then articulating those connections is valuable. Like Van Til, Adams sought to apply Reformed doctrine, and a movement was born.

### **The Bible Is First**

A doctrinal summary of Adams's counseling paradigm is essentially "copying and pasting" Van Til. Both men adhered to the Reformed creeds, principally the Westminster Confession of Faith. Like Van Til, Adams set forth the Bible at the beginning, middle, and end of all he did. Quoting his own article published in Dallas Seminary's student publication *Kethiv Quere*, Adams writes, "The Christian's basis for *counseling*, and the basis for a *Christian's* counseling is nothing other than the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is his counseling textbook."<sup>24</sup> Rather than reiterate the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, this section highlights two aspects that have

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<sup>24</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, xiii.

risen to the forefront of the biblical counseling discussion: the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.

As a committed biblicist, Adams approached counseling by simply trusting what the Bible said about itself: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16) and furthermore “seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence” (1 Pet 1:3). Adams’s presupposition is clear: “There are scriptural principles and practices to cover all circumstances of life.”<sup>25</sup>

The sufficiency of Scripture is indeed the bedrock of nouthetic counseling (and subsequent forms of truly biblical counseling) and has remained the defining issue for CCEF and ACBC. One would think the primacy of Scripture is a given among evangelical Christians and the last thing to argue over; however, this fundamental tenet is continually challenged and must be restated often. David Powlison of CCEF captured the crux of the sufficiency controversy when he wrote,

The first issue is an old issue. The problems that animated biblical counseling at its start remain live problems today. Counseling in the Christian church continues to be significantly compromised by the secular assumptions and practices of our culture’s reigning psychologies and psychiatries. Biblical-nouthetic counseling was initiated to provide two things: a cogent critique of secularism and a distinctly biblical alternative.<sup>26</sup>

These comments by Powlison from 1988 seem timeless. As one online article that ACBC published nearly thirty years later shows, controversy over the sufficiency of Scripture among the counseling community is a perennial current issue:

Since Jay Adams first published his book *Competent to Counsel* in 1970 and the contemporary biblical counseling movement began, several core distinctions have

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<sup>25</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 25.

<sup>26</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 241.

marked biblical counseling. We suggest that those core distinctions include the sufficiency and superiority of Scripture. . . . There was an article published on the Biblical Counseling Coalition (BCC) website on September 10, 2011 entitled, “The BCC Weekend Interview Series: Defining Biblical Counseling.” This series interviewed a number of biblical counseling leaders who presented several definitions of biblical counseling. The above referenced article collated these definitions of biblical counseling and when we first read them we had a concern about what was *not* mentioned. Not one of the definitions mentioned the sufficiency of Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

The conflict rages on.

Besides the sufficiency of Scripture, biblical counseling stresses Scripture’s divine inspiration and its accompanying authority. “The authority inherent in the New Testament prefacing phrase, ‘It is written,’ should be apparent in every serious Bible student. This is the very note that is needed in counseling.”<sup>28</sup> It is argued that having divine revelation and authority at hand there is little need for input from any other source. Mankind is obligated to understand and obey his Creator’s Word only, which Christian counselors and pastors are obligated to point out to their counselees.

Adams’s high view of Scripture is consistent with the historic Protestant faith as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.”<sup>29</sup>

Adams maintains that biblical counseling does not exclude psychology altogether, yet, for him, psychology plays a minimal role. Lambert seeks to buttress this position for ACBC when he writes, “The call to be compassionate counselors requires

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<sup>27</sup>Dale Johnson and John Babler, “Issues in Biblical Counseling: Addressing the Elephant in the Room,” ACBC, accessed November 17, 2017, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/2017/11/issues-biblical-counseling-addressing-elephant-room>. This citation from the ACBC blog shows that the sufficiency-of-Scripture issue remains current. Contrary to the article, the BCC confessional statement clearly mentions the sufficiency of Scripture. “BCC Confessional Statement,” BCC, accessed July 9, 2018, <https://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>.

<sup>28</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 20.

<sup>29</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6.

that a thoroughgoing theology of biblical counseling must not only address the sufficient resources for counseling within Scripture, but must also address the sufficient resources that exist outside of Scripture.”<sup>30</sup> The ACBC position needed buttressing because biblical counseling detractors accuse the movement of going too far in its emphasis upon Scripture’s sufficiency and authority. And certainly, some biblical counselors promote that more extreme side. The problem exists largely because of Adams’s blunt comments such as, “The Bible’s position is that all counsel that is not revelational (biblical), or based upon God’s revelation, is Satanic.”<sup>31</sup> It is a fair critique that the biblical counseling movement appears to be simultaneously black-and-white and gray.

Despite some controversy over the role of psychology in counseling,<sup>32</sup> the historic doctrine of Scripture is firmly established as the foundation for Adams’s counseling structure. It is appropriate to now consider the load-bearing walls that is his systematic theology—beginning with the doctrine of God. This doctrine does not exist as a self-contained body of thought isolated from the doctrine of Scripture, but is steadfastly anchored to it.

### **Psychology and the Doctrine of God**

Because psychology is the science of mind and behavior, the doctrine of man logically garners the most attention. Nevertheless, the doctrine of God is vital and must precede the doctrine of man. Nouthetic counseling was a reaction against the wave of psychology that inundated the church. Therefore, Adams framed his theology with respect to psychology.

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<sup>30</sup>Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 66.

<sup>31</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 4.

<sup>32</sup>Eric L. Johnson and David G. Myers, eds., *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010). Differences largely center around one’s definition of psychology. In ch. 6 Powlison identifies six ways the term “psychology” is used.

As the church welcomed popularized theories of the psyche (a Greek word for the soul), Adams shouted a clarion call to the church to remember that God is the maker of the soul of man. The church's crowning discipline of systematic theology reflects the centrality of God in the Christian worldview: bibliology is the study of the Word of God; hamartiology is the study of transgressions against the laws of God; Christology is the study of the Son of God; ecclesiology is the study of the people of God. Likewise, psychology is a component of anthropology that is the study of man—the greatest creature, made in the image of God.

Adams is foremost a pastor-theologian, not a philosopher or a psychologist.<sup>33</sup> As a Reformed theologian, his doctrine of God emphasizes the Sovereignty of God over every aspect of creation, both “visible and invisible” (Col 1:16). *Soli Deo gloria*, the glory of God alone, is the aggregate of the Reformation's five *solae*. God's glory is demonstrated in his perfections, his holiness. God's divine attributes, communicable and incommunicable, provide the reference point and standard for human thought, motive, and behavior—the very sphere in which mankind exists. Adams states, “The omniscient, omnipresent God is our environment, inescapably so! And though most people rarely recognize it, they are deeply influenced—in all their thoughts and actions—by their environment.”<sup>34</sup> From Revelation 4:11, “Our Lord and our God, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power because You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created.” Adams explains, “This great verse teaches us that counseling—as indeed all human activity—must presuppose God not only as the Creator, but also as the Sustainer of this world. There is nothing more important to do in counseling than to

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<sup>33</sup>Adams's counseling paradigm is theologically driven. While his formal education included a bachelor of divinity and a master's in sacred theology, his PhD was in speech. At WTS Adams taught in the field of practical theology.

<sup>34</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 340.

help the counselee recognize this and find hope in it.”<sup>35</sup> The present and active involvement of the sovereign God, manifesting his own glory through the character and affairs of men is patent in Adams’s comments.

Adams’s approach to life and its problems is intended to be a biblical approach. It is unlike the secular psychologist’s approach, which does not consider God as a real, living, and active agent in the affairs of man. For instance, the Rogerian model, a popular model among church leaders by the 1960s, sees man as an independent, autonomous being.<sup>36</sup> Adams argued that a minister using a Rogerian model, which assumes man is self-governing, is hard-pressed to call his counseling “Christian.” Adams describes such an amalgamation of theology and psychology pejoratively as syncretism.<sup>37</sup>

A counseling paradigm built exclusively upon a thoroughly developed doctrine of God, given by God, offers real help; whereas a system devised by men that excludes the counsel of God will surely be bankrupt. The implications of the existence of God in the Reformed tradition, highlighting the sovereignty and glory of God, are many and significant for counseling. Adams’s view of the centrality of God in counseling is evident when we wrote,

God exists; therefore godly counseling must exist. Counseling like this puts God at the center; it doesn’t unnaturally tack Him on to the end. God is its goal. The purpose of such counseling is to honor Him and bring counselees into a deeper relationship with Him. It takes as its guiding principle Romans 11:36: “Indeed everything is from Him, and through Him and for Him. To Him be glory forever! Amen.” Biblical counseling will recognize God as the Giver of its principles (and even of many of its methods). It will, therefore, be a God-oriented system derived from His revelation about the world, man and Himself. From start to finish, the fact of God’s existence will permeate the counseling context.<sup>38</sup>

There is comfort and hope in the truth that God not only knows the effects of every

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<sup>35</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 44.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 46-47.

possible combination of events, but he ordained those events to simultaneously bring glory to himself and accomplish the personal good of his people. Therefore, it is only rational to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6).<sup>39</sup> Adams communicated as much: “If God controls the universe, the counselee’s problem may be difficult, but it is not out of control. It is not beyond solution. Indeed, in some way . . . these problems are a part of God’s plan and purpose for the counselee.”<sup>40</sup> But of course, counseling more often than not deals with people who are broken, not those who think, act, or believe rationally or with theological sophistication.

### **The Doctrine of Man and the Noetic Effects of Sin**

One’s understanding of who man is determines the approach he will take in “fixing” a broken man. Like Van Til, Adams approaches anthropology according to the Reformed doctrine of man, which follows the biblical, historical storyline of God’s plan of redemption.<sup>41</sup> Man was created in the image of God, pointedly as a morally unstained creature. His corruption came through disobeying God. Though God would be just to condemn all men, being the merciful and loving Creator, he saves some men from their guilt through the atoning, substitutionary sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. This salvation not only involves the forgiveness of sin but imputes the very righteousness of Christ upon his people, the church. The church experiences a measure of relief from sin’s corruption in this life and finds hope in the promise that the stain of sin will be fully removed when

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<sup>39</sup>Phil 4:6 is not the quintessence of Adams’s counseling method as it relates to the doctrine of God—as if quoting this verse to a counselee works like a panacea. That assumption would be too simplistic. But it presents a presupposition about God necessary for counseling biblically.

<sup>40</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 47.

<sup>41</sup>Adams avoided parroting basic Reformed doctrines; as was noted previously, “They are plainly presented elsewhere by Reformed theologians.” Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, vii. An example of one of his doctrinal summary statements is provided in his lament that the humanistic approach to counseling does not operate from “a framework of creation, fall, redemption, and providence (in which the triune God and His glory is of prime importance).” *Ibid.*, 95.

Christ returns.

Therein lies the biblical overview of man's tragic condition and glorious hope from which Adams operates. His anthropology digs deeply into the nature of sin because sin is the root of man's problems.<sup>42</sup> Adams quips, "People wonder why we stress sin; answer: because God does."<sup>43</sup>The first act of disobeying God was not a mere misstep but an insurrection. At that moment, man transferred his allegiance from God to Satan. Rather than exercising his free will to achieve the grandeur of divine-likeness and the freedom that the devil promised, man became foul and enslaved. Adams explains, "Man turned from God's counsel to heed Satan's counsel. In doing so, Adam attempted to achieve independence of God and assert his own autonomy."<sup>44</sup> Adam's rebellion, according to Adams, brought confusion, heartache, fear, ignorance, and death—"He had only exchanged a holy, beneficent and liberating counsel for a devilish, demonic, enslaving one."<sup>45</sup> The first Adam exchanged the benevolent almighty God as his master for a wicked taskmaster. Man has ever since been ruled by a sinful, rebellious nature, from which he is unwilling and powerless to escape. He became the opposite of the divine image in which he was created. The disease was thorough, infecting every aspect of his being (total depravity). Furthermore, this evil exists at every stratum of relationships—environmental (the natural world), governmental, vocational, familial, and individual.<sup>46</sup> Total depravity is not limited to describing sin's affect upon the individual; it

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<sup>42</sup>Adams is compelled to qualify this often-misrepresented point by explaining that sin is responsible for all maladies of creation including man's nature. Adams does not mean that every counselee's problem is the result of some personal sin. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 139-40. Nevertheless, confronting individual sin and calling Christians to confess and repent is central to nouthetic counseling. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 45. He states categorically, "All suffering may be traced back to Adam's sin." Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 271.

<sup>43</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 147.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>46</sup>Adams addresses the social aspect of humanity and remarks that "while sin has corrupted, perverted and destroyed all of these wonderful social capacities, none has been so effaced as to erase every vestige of it." *Ibid.*, 126.



describes man's entire context. In other words, the world is not as evil as it could be, but every area of life is corrupted.

Adams's biblical anthropology involves the doctrine of the noetic effects of sin.<sup>47</sup> He states that, because of total depravity, "human beings do not think straight!"<sup>48</sup> Therefore, "the noetic effects of sin . . . creep into all areas of Christian living—the home, work, the church, prayer, etc."<sup>49</sup> Since the negative effects of sin upon the mind is pervasive, it not only does harm to personal lives, it also skews our evaluations of our own problems. But man's problem is not only wrong thinking; he has a corrupt heart. Adams recognized that the counselor is "engaged in an intellectual-moral battle;" whereby, "with Paul, he must 'tear down arguments and every high barrier that is raised against the knowledge of God.'"<sup>50</sup>

The topic of the noetic effects of sin as part of Adams's anthropology brings this discussion full circle to offer another explanation for why he rejects all secular, psychological systems and appeals exclusively to the Bible for his paradigm. Because sin has distorted man's thinking, all counseling systems that men devise apart from divine revelation must be erroneous. One might question if Adams should be more sympathetic to the integrationist perspective based on the doctrine of common grace.<sup>51</sup> Adams corrects that notion, "It is nearly blasphemous to claim (as a number do) that such [Freudian et al.] systems, full of errors, falsehoods and anti-Christian teachings, are the product of God's common grace!"<sup>52</sup> Here is another dimension of Adams's assertion that counseling is an

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<sup>47</sup>Adams affirms the Reformed doctrines of total depravity and the noetic effects of sin. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, ch. 11.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>51</sup>"Common grace" was explained in ch. 2, subheading "Antithesis."

<sup>52</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 8.

“intellectual-moral” battle.<sup>53</sup> According to Adams, the integrationist is “duped into the acceptance of pagan thought and practice in counseling *when they do not think theologically.*”<sup>54</sup>

Adams puts himself forth as one who does think accurately and theologically because his rationale is based on the Reformed doctrine of the Bible, from which come the Reformed doctrines of God and man. Biblical counseling, Adams would argue, is the only model for counseling Christians because it is the only one that properly interprets and applies divine revelation. It is the only model for non-Christians because it is the only one that will set forth salvation, repentance, and faith in Jesus as a requirement for counseling. All efforts in counseling conducted apart from regeneration are futile— “It is important to restate the fact that salvation is what makes Christian counseling possible; it is the foundation (or basis) for all counseling.”<sup>55</sup>

By contrast, for Adams, psychology has no spiritual framework in its anthropology. Secular psychology does not view the psyche within the purview of a holy God. Instead, man is compared with other men; men are gauged by consensus. The standard by which it measures human beings is whatever society presents collectively as normal. “Abnormal” is simply a divergence from the group.<sup>56</sup> Psychology works on a bell-curve model, identifying the statistical outliers. It fails to consider that there may be an inherent problem with its system. That is, if man does not have the ability to think properly, then the scientific method governing his observations are skewed. And if the observations are skewed, then his conclusions are wrong. He is measuring himself with an uncalibrated meter.

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<sup>53</sup>This chapter is limited to summarizing Adams’s system rather than critiquing it. The intellectual-moral issue is analyzed in ch. 4 as part of integrating apologetics with counseling.

<sup>54</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 9 (italics in original).

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.

## **The Doctrine of Salvation and the Noetic Effects of Grace**

For Adams, the counselee's salvation is necessary for biblical counseling to work. Not only does Adams state this emphatically, his theology seems to demand it. Reformed theology makes a logical connection between total depravity and God's sovereignty in the work of regeneration that begins to undo sin's corruption. The totality of man's depravity has left him incapable and unwilling to make a move toward God. And thus, man will never and can never change his corrupt character. Ephesians 2:1 is a literal, albeit spiritual, reality: "And you were dead in trespasses and sins." The apostle Paul goes on to explain, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:4-5). Forgiveness, justification, sanctification, and glorification are God's works of saving grace. The Spirit of God must intervene and grant repentance and faith. God must give life, or else the sinner remains dead. Concomitant with this new birth is a renewed heart and mind—a new nature and way of thinking.<sup>57</sup> Adams asserts, "Regeneration (a new life given by the Spirit) brings with it a new capacity for knowing and for doing God's will."<sup>58</sup>

By saying that regeneration "brings with it a new capacity for knowing," Adams indicates a belief in what this thesis calls the noetic effect of grace. Becoming a Christian has a positive effect upon one's ability, or capacity, to comprehend truth. The twofold implication for this factor in counseling follows the pattern made throughout this chapter. First, the counselor can have confidence in his counseling because he knows the

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<sup>57</sup>This is not a comment about dichotomy or trichotomy. The Scripture mentions the spiritual renewing of both heart and mind (Ezek 11:19, 26; Jer 31:33; Rom 12:2; and Heb 8:10). The issue of heart and mind are dealt with more thoroughly in ch. 5. Adams's view of man is dichotomous, not trichotomous. He prefers the term "duplex" for it communicates Scripture's unity of the parts of man, not their separation. Adams thinks the integrationist's trichotomous view makes an unbiblical distinction between soul and spirit. Therefore, the psychologist wrongly excludes matters of the soul (psyche) from counseling by. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 110-ff.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

counselee has been divinely equipped in the inner man to receive and apply the help he needs, which is derived from God’s counseling book, the Bible. Adams states, “Only the Christian, then, can be counseled.”<sup>59</sup> Second, there is no place for adopting psychological systems into the biblical counseling paradigm. Because the noetic effects of sin can be overturned only by regeneration, “any approach [to counseling] that doesn’t involve the putting off of sin and the putting on of knowledge, righteousness and holiness that comes from God’s truth, is unworthy of the label ‘Christian.’”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Evolution of Nouthetic Counseling**

Adams mentioned often that he wanted others to develop the biblical counseling precepts he had set forth: “All along the way I have tried to point to doctrines that ought to be explored much more fully in relationship to counseling. It is my hope that many of these challenges will be taken up by biblical counselors in the near future; the need is great.”<sup>61</sup>

Biblical counselors have indeed taken up the challenge, evidenced by the explosion of ensuing biblical counseling ministries and literature. Adams’s legacy is remarkable. No longer can a young pastor bemoan a lack of counseling resources. ACBC notes that “the training and certification of ACBC counselors is recognized worldwide with over 1,600 counselors in 30 countries that speak 30 languages, with these numbers growing yearly. ACBC also has over 60 certified training centers ranging from seminaries to churches.”<sup>62</sup> CCEF has faithfully and consistently published articles in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* and has trained many men and women, with a view to refining Adams’s biblical counseling paradigm:

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<sup>59</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 120.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 370.

<sup>62</sup>ACBC, “About,” accessed February 19, 2018, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about>.

As CCEF entered the 1980's and 90's, it was apparent that the second and third generation of leaders benefited from the strengths of their predecessors as well as learned from their weaknesses. They moved CCEF in a direction of increased sensitivity to human suffering, to the dynamics of motivation, to the centrality of the gospel in the daily life of the believer, the importance of the body of Christ and to a more articulate engagement with secular culture.<sup>63</sup>

Noticeably absent from these two organizations is any wholesale divergence from their roots. The theological and doctrinal foundations Adams laid have remained intact. Heath Lambert has written the only formal systematic theology of biblical counseling since *More Than Redemption*. In that work, Lambert states, "My prayer is that this book will build on Adams's good work in helpful ways. . . . I hope to develop much of the theology that Adams initiated in that early book."<sup>64</sup> In other words, he is not changing anything. Furthermore, Lambert, like Adams, seems to walk the fine line of appealing to evangelicals whose identification as "Reformed" is gray, without compromising the substance of Reformed theology.<sup>65</sup> CCEF, while distancing itself somewhat from many of the rigid statements in nouthetic counseling, remains "closely affiliated with Westminster."<sup>66</sup>

Adams accomplished the Herculean task of course-correcting much of the evangelical church on matters of theological counseling. He successfully boosted the church's confidence in God's Word to help people with what ails them. Yet, in pointing out such large-scale errors, he may have overstated some points, which has contributed to misunderstandings and the accusations of going too far.

Portions of this survey of Adams's theology of counseling focused on his

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<sup>63</sup>CCEF, "History," accessed February 19, 2018, <https://www.ccef.org/about/mission-beliefs-history/history>.

<sup>64</sup>Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 33.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 41-42. For instance, regarding the place of biblical sufficiency and systematic theology in counseling, Lambert explains how modern issues are different from Reformation era issues, yet "We will be like the Reformers . . . by applying their biblical convictions to threats they never faced" and goes on to cite the Second Helvetic Confession and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

<sup>66</sup>WTS, "Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation," accessed August 7, 2018, <https://students.wts.edu/resources/ccef.html>.

criticisms of psychology and the integrationist controversy because that has been a defining issue of the movement. The theology behind his criticisms is also key to developing the relationship between counseling and apologetics. Unfortunately, the attempts of the biblical counseling movement to counterbalance the antithetical statements by acknowledging a proper use of psychology—even by Adams—have been largely ignored. The trumpet call “Psychology is bad” was sounded too loudly and drowned out the relative whisper “Psychology is not all bad.” Lambert is correct to point out that there are areas of agreement between the biblical counselor and the integrationist, or “Christian counselor”:

Biblical and Christian counselors agree that psychologists make true observations that are often helpful. . . . Many have doubted that biblical counselors agree with it. Those doubts notwithstanding, a belief in the helpful nature of psychological observations goes back as far at the foundational ministry of Jay Adams.<sup>67</sup>

Lambert’s theology of biblical counseling diverges from Adams’s work by inserting a chapter on the doctrine of “common grace” between the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of God. Lambert returns to the subject in an appendix entitled, “Biblical Counseling, General Revelation, and Common Grace.” These additions indicate the significant role the doctrine of common grace has in biblical counseling, harkening to Kuyper and the discussion of *antithesis* in Van Til’s apologetics. Such an approach further affirms my thesis that there is warrant for integrating apologetics and biblical counseling under the umbrella of Reformed theology.

### **Conclusion**

The biblical counseling movement arose indirectly from the evangelical church’s reaction against attacks on the reliability of the Bible. The church fought valiantly against liberal theology but was unwittingly outflanked by the other

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<sup>67</sup>Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 26-27.

discipline—psychology. Jay Adams recognized that a vast and dangerous chasm existed in the church, separating pastoral counseling from Scripture. The concomitant effects included a dearth of theologically astute and biblically oriented counseling resources that perpetuated pastoral insecurities and cast doubt on the sufficiency of Scripture as the ultimate counseling resource. Pastors were outsourcing their counseling responsibilities to the so-called experts of psychology, who trusted theories devoid of a biblical worldview.

Adams responded to the counseling crisis by formulating his model of nouthetic counseling and touted it as an exclusively biblical and theological model. His nouthetic counseling was unashamedly Reformed—of the WTS variety.

Over the nearly fifty years since *Competent to Counsel* launched Adams's movement, its legacy, embodied in CCEF and ACBC, has withstood a maelstrom of criticism while maintaining the movement's theological integrity. This chapter has highlighted concepts in Adams's theology that reveal Van Til's influence, which Adams recognized explicitly. The next chapter will go beyond acknowledging the similarities between the two disciplines by analyzing those similarities more closely. It will argue that apologetics is a foundational discipline that the biblical counselor needs to incorporate into his counseling ministry.

## CHAPTER 4

### APOLOGETIC PRINCIPLES IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The goal of this chapter is not to convince the reader that apologetics needs to be integrated into biblical counseling. The goal of this chapter is to convince biblical counselors that apologetics is *already* integrated into biblical counseling. Furthermore, after the counselor recognizes the existing apologetic nature of counseling, he will have access to an alternative roadmap by which he can minister. The discipline of apologetics will inform the counselor's mind and enrich his own spirit in fresh ways, which will in turn benefit other souls in his care.

Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that Van Til's apologetics and Adams's biblical counseling are foremost applications of Reformed theology; though they differ from each other. Van Til's apologetics is a more abstract application of Reformed theology, while Adams's counseling is theology in practice. Van Til did not provide an evangelism method using Reformed theology or even a clear method for apologetics. Presuppositional apologetics presents a theological and philosophical worldview that claims to be the biblical worldview. Adams wholeheartedly adopted Van Til's theology and philosophy. This chapter shows that nouthetic counseling is a practical application of Van Til's Reformed apologetics by noting Adams's overt statements, identifying the philosophy and theology of *worldview* that is integral to the paradigm, and establishing the biblical and methodological warrant for incorporating apologetics into the counseling scheme.



## Overt Statements

Adams purposefully applied presuppositionalism to nouthetic counseling. Not only are the concepts detectable within his writing, but Adams peppered his writing with overt statements about presuppositionalism. For instance (quoted previously but more fully here), Adams wrote,

The conclusions in this book are not based upon scientific findings. My method is presuppositional. I avowedly accept the inerrant Bible as the Standard of all faith and practice. The Scriptures, therefore, are the basis, and contain the criteria by which I have sought to make every judgment. . . . I do not wish to disregard science, but rather I welcome it as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong interpretations of Scripture. . . . In the area of psychiatry, science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and gross speculation.<sup>1</sup>

Adams clearly takes an apologetic tone in justifying the need for nouthetic counseling. Besides admitting to a presuppositional method, he places the fundamental principle of his methodology, *sola Scriptura*, within a context of apologetics by mentioning the science-versus-Scripture debate and by identifying the archrival as humanistic philosophy.

Adams's Van Tillian worldview considers psychiatry a pseudoscience that is not based upon clear, unbiased empiricism, as the world has been led to believe. Rather, modern science is rooted in humanistic dogma.<sup>2</sup> Adams's foe is the antibiblical, humanistic worldview driving psychology. The entire nouthetic counseling enterprise is thus in some sense an apologetic endeavor, defending the sufficiency and authority of Scripture against an atheistic worldview. Adams saw that the unbelieving worldview of society had infiltrated the church through the medium of psychiatry. Not only does this observation awaken the biblical counselor to the apologetic element of his system, but it also speaks to practical implications with his counselees. For instance, counseling the

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<sup>1</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (1970; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), xxi.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

psychologized Christian<sup>3</sup> becomes an apologetic task of exposing the counselee's worldview problem and presenting the biblical worldview to him. The counselor acquainted with apologetics is better able to diagnose issues related to the counselee's secular culture. Such a counselor would be adept at approaching pockets of unbelieving thought by combining his counseling gifts with apologetics.

The entire chapter 7 of *Update on Christian Counseling*<sup>4</sup> forms a second overt statement by Adams and makes the point that nouthetic counseling is a presuppositional apologetics task. The following are key statements: "All counseling systems rest upon presuppositions. . . . So does biblical counseling depend upon its presuppositions. . . . [the apostle] Paul makes it clear that false presuppositions enslave."<sup>5</sup>

In Adams's emphasis on presuppositions, he wisely encourages and warns counselors that "Presuppositions are of great importance (as I said) because they govern all that we do in counseling (and elsewhere). Therefore, it is important to become aware of our presuppositions."<sup>6</sup> Adams continues, "Becoming aware of presuppositions is vital to any serious thought and practice in counseling."<sup>7</sup>

The study of apologetics exposes the counselor to such areas of helpful self-examination. Not only is self-examination a part of one's sanctification to uncover unconfessed sin and promote holiness, but an intellectual self-examination using apologetics challenges the counselor to take inventory of his own epistemology. Adams suggests counselors make a list of their presuppositions and identify how he knows what

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<sup>3</sup>David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), ch. 15. Ch. 15 addresses a common biblical counseling topic, the psychologized Christian.

<sup>4</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 2 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 1:35 and 37.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1:37.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

he knows is true.<sup>8</sup> To achieve this, the counselor can ask himself questions such as “How do you know that is correct?” or “Can you identify where that doctrine originated?” He could ask, “Are my presuppositions gleaned from a biblical worldview, or are some from a humanistic worldview?” Does humanistic philosophy ever get anything right? If yes, where? If no, where? Do not assume the answers. Biblical counseling and presuppositional apologetics teach that Scripture is the only justifiable epistemology. Self-examination would ask, “Do I agree because Adams and Van Til taught that? How would I defend it in a debate?” Taking it a step further, becoming aware of one’s own presuppositions involves reading books by and talking with those who disagree. In other words, do the work of an apologist.

This exercise may seem futile if it proves to simply affirm the counselor’s commitment to a biblical epistemology. However, there is great value in struggling through the rigors of this sort of self-examination and intellectual inquiry because the counselor moves beyond knowing *that* he trusts in Scripture toward knowing *why* he trusts in Scripture. Bahnsen captures something of this spirit in the following:

It has been the further genius of Van Til’s approach to recognize that an epistemologically self-conscious method of defending the faith is not simply philosophically necessary (given the presuppositional issue) and morally appropriate (given the Creator-creature relation). It also constitutes the strongest intellectual challenge that can be directed to thinking of the unbeliever. God’s revelation is more than the best foundation for Christian reasoning; it is the only philosophically sound foundation for any reasoning whatsoever. Therefore, although the world in its own wisdom sees the word of Christ as foolishness . . . Christians need not sit in an isolated philosophical tower, reduced to simply despising the philosophical systems of non-Christians. . . . We must challenge the unbeliever to give a cogent and credible account of how he knows anything whatsoever, given his espoused presuppositions about reality, truth, and man (his “worldview”).<sup>9</sup>

Bahnsen has the apologist’s interaction with the unbeliever in mind; however, he also challenges Christians to study and understand philosophical systems so that they can

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<sup>8</sup>Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 1:37.

<sup>9</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 4-5.

articulate their weaknesses and not resort to ad hominem attacks.

The counselor's personal journey into the apologetic disciplines of philosophy and theology enhance his ability to help counselees with their journeys. For instance, Kuyper's teaching of antithesis, mentioned in chapter 2, adds an epistemological dimension to the doctrines of the noetic effects of sin and common grace. One's way of interpreting his world can be a distortion caused by the noetic effects of sin, or it can be accurate because of common grace. The ideas of dichotomy and tension of opposing worldviews that Kuyper presented were passed on to Van Til, to Adams, and to the biblical counselor. The counselor who is unaware of his own presuppositions and never questions his own worldview is vulnerable to adopting and promoting "party line" doctrines rather than biblical doctrines.<sup>10</sup> The counselor should strive to avoid advocating principles and practices simply because they come "pre-installed" with the theological or counseling system he has adopted.

Adams identified twenty-five of his own presuppositions about biblical counseling, even while admitting that this list is not exhaustive:

1. There is such a thing as peculiarly *Christian* counseling.
2. Not all counseling done by Christians is Christian counseling.
3. The Bible is the sufficient source for the principles needed to do Christian counseling.
4. God is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe.
5. Counseling depends ultimately upon the work of God's Spirit.
6. Man was created in God's image as a responsible being.
7. Human thought and behavior is moral.
8. Man is a sinful being, guilty and corrupt as the result of the fall.
9. Man's corrupt nature leads to sinful behavior and behavior patterns.
10. Sin results in misery.
11. Unregenerate persons cannot be changed by counseling in a way that pleases God.

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<sup>10</sup>I submit that the propensity to adopt party rhetoric fuels division in the church, observed in dissensions in apologetics and biblical counseling, and promotes ignorance. For instance, I have witnessed ministers tout loyalty to presuppositional apologetics and oppose the study of philosophy only to later host video lectures on apologetics by R. C. Sproul—arguably the greatest critic of presuppositional apologetics and an advocate for philosophical inquiry.

12. Regeneration by the Spirit is a prerequisite for biblical change and obedience.
13. Problems of regenerate persons can be solved by God's way by God's power.
14. God requires and equips His officers in the church to counsel as a life calling.
15. God requires and equips all believers to counsel.
16. The church must become involved in counseling.
17. Church discipline is an important factor in biblical counseling.
18. Methodology must grow out of biblical principles and practices.
19. Non-Christian content or methods may not be eclectically incorporated into a Christian system.
20. Counselors should expect and see results from Christian counseling.
21. Counselors must study the Scriptures telically.
22. True counseling is a ministry of the Word leading to sanctification.
23. Unbelievers must be evangelized before they can be counseled.
24. Problems with an organic base should be handled medically.
25. The Scriptures set forth the principles for human living that were demonstrated in the life of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

This list of Adams's presuppositions is an amalgam of Reformed theology, presuppositional apologetics, and biblical counseling—further showing that apologetics is already integrated into biblical counseling. However, a more formal and thorough treatment of apologetics for counseling needs to be developed.

### **Apologetics Topics**

Christian apologists have been engaged in philosophical dialogue from the beginning. The key verse for Christian apologetics, 1 Peter 3:15, is a good place to begin: “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” The term *apologetics*, derived from the Greek ἀπολογία, is translated “a defense,” which is simply a speech. In the Christian context, ἀπολογία expresses an “eagerness to defend oneself” and for “defending the gospel.”<sup>12</sup> According to Frame,

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<sup>11</sup>Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 1:36.

<sup>12</sup>William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, 2nd ed., augmented (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “ἀπολογία.”

apologetics can also go on the offensive, “attacking the foolishness of unbelieving thought.”<sup>13</sup> Paul took an offensive posture at the Areopagus in Athens, where he addressed the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers from their worldview, using their terms and informing them of their “unknown God” (Acts 17:23-24). Furthermore, inscripturating the philosophers Epimenides and Arastus, Paul taught that in this unknown God “we live and move and exist,” and “as even some of your own poets have said, ‘we also are his children’” (Acts 17:28-29).<sup>14</sup>

Oliphint explains that Paul was not validating Greek philosophy per se by quoting Epimenides and Arastus; rather,

Paul is able to take those statements and transplant them back into their proper, biblical, context and thus to move them from false and idolatrous expressions to expressions of the truth. . . . There is value, therefore, in using the language of the philosophers, poets, and others to show them just how the truth of Christianity fulfills the aspirations expressed in that language.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, philosophy is the handmaiden of theology. Philosophy serves theology at several points. Oliphint posits that philosophy, as far as it speaks to natural theology, “can be used to better confirm things that are revealed by God, things that are true and certain in themselves.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, “philosophy can help theology in its ability properly to distinguish and to clarify the truth as it is found in Scripture.”<sup>17</sup> He warns the church that she is susceptible to perpetuating the erroneous postmodern philosophy that newer is better and older is dead by remaining historically uninformed and “irrationally self-absorbed.”<sup>18</sup> Oliphint essentially rebukes the church for her intellectual isolationism. His

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<sup>13</sup>John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 2.

<sup>14</sup>K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 29n.

<sup>15</sup>Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, 30-31.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

positive admonition is that philosophy, when properly applied, is useful in providing “a deeper, fuller elucidation and application of what God has taught the church for two millennia.”<sup>19</sup> Philosophy and theology have a symbiotic relationship. Paul’s theology informed and checked the philosophers, but he used their concepts and language as his entry point.

As science has identified various laws of nature, so philosophy has identified the laws of reason and logic. Philosophical thought has honed man’s understanding of knowledge (epistemology) and being (metaphysics). Responding to the question, “Why study philosophy?” Frame answers in part,

Philosophers are in the business of thinking clearly, cogently, and profoundly. To understand and evaluate their work is excellent mental exercise. People involved in nonphilosophical fields can benefit from exposure to the rigor of philosophical formulations and arguments. That includes Christians. And in my view, Christian theologians, preachers, and teachers generally need to improve the quality of their thinking, particularly their argumentation.<sup>20</sup>

Biblical counselors and their counselees certainly are among those who need to improve the quality of their thinking—as are all Christians, particularly Christian leaders.

In saying “My method is presuppositional” and “science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and gross speculation,”<sup>21</sup> Adams makes clear the philosophical and apologetic aspect of his counseling paradigm. For Adams to accurately criticize the philosophy *de jour*, as Paul did, he must be acquainted with that philosophy. As chapters 2 and 3 explained, Reformed theology makes strong claims about who man is, how man thinks, why man’s thoughts are skewed, what man’s problems are, and how man ought to think about God and his world. Since theology and philosophy are symbiotic and, as Adams claims, man is engaged in an intellectual-moral battle, then philosophy, theology,

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<sup>19</sup>Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, 32.

<sup>20</sup>John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 3.

<sup>21</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xxi.

apologetics, and counseling are integrated disciplines. Secular and religious people alike benefit from all of them, even the ones who seem to be in opposition to their worldview. The unbeliever profits from theology, and the believer profits from philosophy.

The theological and philosophical contributions of apologetics—aimed at persuading the unbeliever and edifying the believer—are immediately beneficial and applicable to the biblical counselor who targets the *unbelief* within both audiences. The counselor can be assured that the person before him is a fallen human being engaged in an intellectual-moral battle. The transforming process of salvation and sanctification is a head and heart enterprise—“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). From the example of Paul, as well as the testimony of Christian scholars like Van Til, Adams, Frame, Oliphint, and Powlison, it is reasonable to conclude that one significant way to strengthen the mind and the heart for personal edification and for ministry is to be a student of both philosophy and theology. The starting point for that endeavor is epistemology.

### **Epistemology**

The beauty of Christian apologetics is that it accompanies the unbeliever and the philosopher into the deepest caverns of human thought but carries into that darkness the light of divine revelation. One such cavern is epistemology—the study of knowledge. “It asks, ‘What is knowledge?’ ‘How is knowledge possible?’ ‘How should we go about knowing?’ ‘How do we distinguish truth from falsity, reality from appearance?’”<sup>22</sup> Frame continues, “Typically, philosophical epistemology deals with the *subject* of knowledge (a person), an *object* of knowledge (what he knows), and some sort of rule that determines whether the subject *knows* the object.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 11.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*



With that definition, epistemology sounds like the work of the counselor: a person (the Christian counselee) presents an object of knowledge (a circumstance) but has difficulty identifying or implementing the rule (Scripture) that determines whether he *knows* what he knows is true—whether he is interpreting the circumstance correctly. The counselee may struggle with either discerning reality or handling reality. He may believe there is truth but be ignorant of it. He may know the truth but lack the wisdom to apply it to his circumstance. He may know the truth and how to apply it but lack the power to apply it. Or he may know the truth and how to apply it, being aware that the Holy Spirit empowers him, but refuses to obey God—which raises the question of whether he really believes the truth and wants the truth to govern his life. The biblical counselor can approach the Christian counselee epistemologically by identifying the point of disconnect between what he claims to know and what he is experiencing. Is the counselee living to some degree in opposition to God, as Charnock expressed it, as a practical atheist?<sup>24</sup>

### **Neutrality**

Van Til's apologetics responded largely to philosophical issues concerned with proving the existence of God. He saw that an accurate epistemology cannot be located within man's fallible reason and logic but is found in the revealed Word of God. Adams, in contrast, responded largely to issues of psychology and was concerned with reminding the church of its true source of knowledge. He argued that true biblical counseling cannot approach the *psyche*, the soul of man, from a fallible analysis of himself; rather counseling must originate from the revealed Word of God. Adams was applying presuppositional apologetics to the specific area of psychology. Van Til and Adams elicited passionate responses that were far from neutral.

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<sup>24</sup>This approach is one consideration among many for the counselor. He must exercise wisdom and compassion, being careful to not see *every* problem as the counselee's sin of practical atheism. Ch. 5 explores the practical application of apologetics in counseling.

Neutrality relates to several topics that have emerged in this thesis: total depravity, noetic effects of sin, common grace, natural theology, antithesis, worldview, and apologetic method—all of which spill over into biblical counseling. Neutrality gets at the heart of why Van Til’s system is dubbed “presuppositional.” In Frame’s critique of Sproul—quipping that he can “welcome Sproul as an honorary presuppositionalist”—Frame provides a good explanation of neutrality: “[Sproul] recognizes that the apologetic encounter between believer and unbeliever is not between two parties who are seeking to think neutrally, but between an unbeliever who is biased against the truth and a believer who is seeking to correct that bias and is therefore inevitably biased in the opposite direction.”<sup>25</sup>

Lambert echoes these apologetic topics in his theology of counseling at several places, but he does not relate them directly to apologetics. In one of the many sections portraying the evils of secular psychology, he communicates the presuppositional dogma of neutrality, stating, “The work of secular counseling practitioners is not neutral and is not scientific.”<sup>26</sup> He is stating the truth that the secular counseling profession and its professionals are not passive or indifferent about God and the Christian Scripture. Propelled by the winds of the times leading up to the 1900s, the pioneers of psychology intentionally sought to usurp pastors. Commenting on Freud, Lambert writes, “The term *counseling* was not in vogue in Freud’s day, so amazingly, he described the task of helping people as the ‘pastoral’ task. In this book [*The Question of Lay Analysis*], Freud makes clear that his task was to remove counseling from the ministerial context and place it in a secular one.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Frame, *Apologetics*, 5n11.

<sup>26</sup>Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 18.

<sup>27</sup>Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 32.

The topic of neutrality enters apologetics by doctrinal and philosophical pathways. The doctrine of total depravity teaches that man's reasoning faculties were negatively affected by sin; this teaching is the doctrine of the noetic effects of sin. All agree, however, that man is not such a brute that he has lost all cognitive ability; that is, the doctrine of common grace enters the discussion. Nevertheless, some argue that because unregenerate man is unable and unwilling to think properly about God—because he is in fact opposed to God—he cannot think properly about any reality. After all, Romans 8:6-8 states, “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” From this progression come discussions of natural theology, antithesis, neutrality, and what helps come from the noetic effects of grace. The different ways theologians have systematized those doctrines explains the different methods of evangelizing and defending the faith against unbelief.

Christians of an Arminian persuasion—believing that man, of his own free will, can choose God—tend toward evidentialist apologetics. Through using facts and arguments of probability these apologists believe they can, and must, convince the unbeliever about God. Reformed, or Calvinistic theologians—believing man's enslavement to sin makes him willingly oppose God—tend toward presuppositional apologetics.<sup>28</sup> For the presuppositionalist, logic is not man's problem—sin is. Convincing a man of the existence of a god (theism) or the probability of a god falls short of saving knowledge. Man is not a neutral thinker who can be persuaded with logic and facts. The presuppositionalist reasons that every man is born a theist who is biased against God. The

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<sup>28</sup>Categorizing the apologetic methods along these theological lines is commonplace among presuppositionalists at least. Bahnsen presents the theological distinctions in depth and on multiple issues. For instance, he wrote, “Van Til criticized the traditional method of doing apologetics as it is found in Roman Catholic and Arminian circles. For them, an epistemological ‘point of contact’ can be found with the unbeliever.” Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 440n48.

unregenerate man willfully and intentionally suppresses the correct knowledge about God inherent to his reason<sup>29</sup> and which is evident in nature. This presuppositional argument stands squarely on Romans 1:18-20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Sin deceives man into thinking he is an autonomous creature. Man operates as if he is a law unto himself, not subject to the laws of his Creator. Man's epistemology, his rule for determining what is true or false, is his own reasoning. This concept of mankind's autonomy should resonate with the biblical counselor because he often encounters autonomy wreaking havoc in the lives of his counselees.

The Christian's internal, intellectual-moral battle is a battle of the already-not yet reality of his spirit. He struggles with having only a taste of perfection, the hope of perfection, without its full apprehension. The Christian lives in the tension of knowing and believing God's Word while failing to live consistently by that Word. The Christian longs for a life of purity, of impeccable holiness free from sin's contamination, but finds instead a gray mixture of intellectual dullness and moral ineptitude. The intellectual-moral dilemma produced in the Christian is captured in Kuyper's concept of antithesis. Antithesis, from the apologetic vantage point, offers a conceptual explanation for struggles that find resolution through the practice of biblical counseling.

### **Antithesis, Worldview, and Unbelief**

Frame defines antithesis as "the opposition between Christian and non-

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<sup>29</sup>Calvin comments, "There is within the human mind, indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity." John T. McNeil, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:43. Calvin's *Divinitatus sensum* is the Reformed epistemology driving the theology of Kuyper, Van Til, and Adams.

Christian worldviews.”<sup>30</sup> Antithesis relates to biblical counseling at the paradigmatic level and the practical level. The counseling war between integrationists and biblical counselors is a conflict over the compatibility of Christian and non-Christian worldviews. In daily life, these opposing worldviews contend in society, the church, and the individual. Antibiblical, philosophical paradigms that influence culture (e.g., humanism, secularism, and scientism) find their way into church doctrine and practice and into the minds of the individual Christian.

God’s people have always been commanded to stand against godless influences. For instance, God commanded the ancient Israelites to not marry their pagan neighbors because “you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). The New Testament echoes this principle, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteous and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light and darkness . . . what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Cor 6:14-15). However, Christians are called to not take the path of least resistance and isolate themselves from the culture, but to engage the culture so that the culture might be changed. Jesus’s famous metaphors of salt and light (Matt 5:13-16) communicate both the command to engage the world and the warning against being influenced by the world: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? . . . You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” Perhaps the command and warning is most clearly stated in John 17:14-18, when Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying,

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me

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<sup>30</sup>Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 741.

into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

As in any war, battles will be won and lost. Ground will be taken, and ground will be given.

Presuppositional apologetics proper is like engaging the enemy—confronting the unbeliever about his false worldview and introducing him to the true, biblical worldview. Apologetic counseling is like an army medic treating fellow soldiers who are wounded or have become infected from their engagement with antithesis. The “infection” is unbelief. Frame and Oliphint define apologetics as a defense against unbelief wherever it is found, “in the believer as well as in the unbeliever.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, if unbelief can reside within the believer—disrupting his sanctification and causing trouble— and apologetics combats unbelief, then the biblical counselor should use apologetics as another physic for the counselee.

Lambert again speaks of the integration of presuppositional apologetics in biblical counseling by using the concepts of antithesis:

The only question is whether a counselor adopts a theological vision of reality that God believes is faithful—or unfaithful. . . . Secular counseling is a conversational intervention where an unbelieving man or woman seeks to provide secular answers, solutions, and help to a person with questions, problems, and trouble. Such counsel bubbles up out of the overflow of a commitment to a secular view of life.<sup>32</sup>

Powlison likewise proves the integration of apologetics and counseling by the concept of worldview thinking throughout his book *Seeing with New Eyes*. The cover of the book displays a pair of eyeglasses to communicate the book’s theme of perspective. It is a book about “counseling with an unusual twist.”<sup>33</sup> That “twist” is “to help us see God in the counseling context. How can we see what he sees, hear what he says, and do what

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<sup>31</sup>Frame, *Apologetics*, 2; K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 29.

<sup>32</sup>Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 17-18.

<sup>33</sup>Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 1.

he does.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the goal of counseling is to gain and promote a theological, biblical perspective, also called a biblical worldview. Powlison’s association with Reformed scholars, pastors, and apologists further emphasizes the relationship of presuppositional apologetics and counseling: “It is no accident that I acknowledge pastor-apologist-theologians [Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Van Til, Frame, Adams, and Jack Miller] who make it their life’s work to bring the Word to life.”<sup>35</sup>

The concept of worldview is commonplace today. Worldview thinking, including antithesis, seems to be an obvious concept—like the concept of gravity. These terms conjoin our reason with our experience. Gravity explains why people are not hurled into space though they stand on a spinning earth. Worldview explains competing knowledge structures—why one person interprets the world differently than his neighbor does. Man has not always been aware of gravity or his need to have the concept of gravity. The consensus of Christians and non-Christians until approximately 1725 was that the earth was fixed. John Lennox explains,

The first hard evidence that the earth moved was not found until 1725, when James Bradley, Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford and later Astronomer Royal, deduced it from his observation of the aberration of the star Gamma Draconis. The earlier Christian interpretation of Scripture in terms of a fixed earth did not attract the ridicule of nonbelievers, since fixed earth was the dominant view in society as a whole at that time. For many centuries most people never even bothered to question it, simply because there was no reason to.<sup>36</sup>

The Copernican revolution began a change in society’s and the church’s literal perspective of the world. The church benefited from science in this case and changed the way it interpreted Scripture. The hermeneutic category of “phenomenological language” was recognized. The Bible was not wrong about the universe, but the church’s

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<sup>34</sup>Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 3.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>36</sup>John C. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning according to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 34.

interpretation of the Bible was. The solar system did not change, but man's perception of the sun did. Similarly, society and the church have not always thought philosophically in terms of a worldview. Worldview comes to us from the annals of sophisticated philosophical inquiry and relatively late through the German school and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Frame explains that “the dominance of Christian thought came to an end”<sup>37</sup> with the Enlightenment. Kant stood supreme among the German philosophers and still influences the world today.<sup>38</sup> According to Frame, Kant's genius that propelled him to the pinnacle of Enlightenment philosophy was his “comprehensive *rationale* for autonomous reasoning.”<sup>39</sup> Frame continues, “It was Kant who argued that we *must* reason autonomously and must never reason in any other way. . . . Those arguments are still with us; we deal with them all the time.”<sup>40</sup> Kant challenged the philosophical status quo by critiquing the centuries-old assumptions, or presuppositions, of reason. Rationalism and empiricism argued that knowledge is either a priori or a posteriori—it is gained from what is inherent in the mind (a priori), like the laws of logic, or it is knowledge gained from observation and experience (a posteriori). Kant argued that to have true knowledge, one must first ask, “What must the world (including ourselves) be like? This is the *transcendental method*: not following the impressions of the senses or the steps of a deduction, but asking what such activities *presuppose*?”<sup>41</sup>

Frame's analysis highlights that Kant's transcendental method attempted to

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<sup>37</sup>Frame, *A History of Western Theology and Philosophy*, 251. This portion of the thesis is a summary of Frame's analysis of Kant. An original analysis of Kant is beyond the scope of this thesis, which seeks to understand the views of presuppositional apologetics. Frame's analyses of Kant and Van Til are thus significant, as Frame is the primary apologetics exemplar.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 254.



solve the age-old dilemma of reality versus the perception of reality. Kant calls this distinction the *noumena* and the *phenomena*.<sup>42</sup> Noumena is the world as it is in itself; phenomena is the world that we perceive. Kant believed that perception is a process. The raw data, reality, enters through the senses, and the mind processes the information using four categories, each with three subcategories.<sup>43</sup> The categories act as containers that give shape to the reality. These categories are not arbitrary and meaningless because they are unified by a greater context of consciousness. Frame comments that “(here is Kant’s distinctive qualification) this consciousness is a *presupposition* of experience, not an item of experience.”<sup>44</sup> Summarizing Kant, Frame states,

Kant argued . . . we do not know what the world is really like, we know only how it appears to us, and how it appears to us is largely what we make it to be. Thus, the mind of man is not only its own ultimate authority, but also replaces God as the intelligent planner and creator of the experienced universe. And, to Kant, the human mind is also the author of its own moral standards.<sup>45</sup>

Even the beginning student of Van Til will recognize in Kant the very terms identified with Van Til’s apologetic: presupposition and the transcendental method.<sup>46</sup> According to Frame,

If Kant taught the world of secular unbelief the essentials of its own (until then, subconscious) theory of knowledge (“epistemology”), Van Til did the same for the Christian. As Kant said that we must avoid any trace of the attitude of bowing before an external authority, so Van Til taught that the only way to find truth at all is to bow before God’s authoritative Scripture.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Frame makes the following important comparison between the

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<sup>42</sup>Frame, *A History of Western Theology and Philosophy*, 252.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 258. Kant’s categories are (1) quantity (universal, particular, singular), (2) quality (affirmative, negative, infinitive), (3) relation (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive), and (4) modality (problematic, assertoric, apodeictic).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>45</sup>John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 45.

<sup>46</sup>Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 254.

<sup>47</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 46.

two great philosophers:

As Kant presented his view transcendently, as the inescapable ultimate presupposition of human thought, so Van Til made and defended transcendently the same claim for the revelation of God: that God's Word is the only presupposition that does not destroy the intelligibility of human thought. . . . Because of Van Til, we can at last define the essential philosophical differences between the Christian and the non-Christian worldviews.<sup>48</sup>

Herein is an essential part of the thesis for integrating apologetics and biblical counseling. Antithesis, defined by Frame as non-Christian and Christian worldviews in competition, is tantamount to the biblical teaching of sin and rebellion against God. Non-Christian worldviews arise from unregenerate man's hostility toward God. The natural man is not neutral. He is not subject to the law of God because he sees himself as autonomous. But Scripture teaches that man is not autonomous. He is a slave to sin; sin is his master. Though Jesus frees the Christian from sin's enslavement and becomes his master, the Christian struggles to obey. Pockets of his old worldview, ignorance, and unbelief remain. Kant's humanistic worldview presents the supreme antithesis to Van Til's Christian worldview. Adams counsels from this Van Tillian worldview, called presuppositionalism.

The irony is that from a biblical worldview, Kant lives in his own phenomenal world, not the noumenal. He lives in the world of his own mind and not in reality. The theological explanation for Kant's shortsightedness is that his thinking has been distorted by the noetic effects of sin. He is oblivious to reality, which comes only from being in Christ. His soul is dead. His human spirit and mind attempted to make sense of the world, but like all secular philosophers he could only fall short of truth.

The Christian may be astonished by how extraordinarily close to reality the unbelieving philosopher often comes. Some Christians find the insights of such philosophers useful in navigating through life. However, Adams warns Christians to be careful to avoid such

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<sup>48</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 46.

notions. Though such insight may be helpful, it is satanically motivated. Apologetics has its counterpart—the presuppositionalist warns the evidentialist that though his methods consist of many pragmatic helps, reason and probabilities about the existence of God is not the saving truth of the gospel. The evidentialist, like the integrationist, may come close to truth but risks falling short of the ultimate reality—the God of the Bible. If the Christian’s response to Kant is that he “lived in his own world and not in reality,” does that not show that he agrees with Kant after all? Kant’s philosophy would affirm that he shaped reality to form his own worldview, as we all do. The Christian must admit that it seems as if there are as many perspectives as there are individuals—each wears his own glasses. The presuppositionalist would argue that every true Christian has the same worldview, which comes from outside of himself, from God. The Christian’s days of creating his own reality or interpreting the world as he sees fit are gone. Kant’s philosophy may satisfy the conundrum of a priori or a posteriori knowledge as well as any other theory, but it does not comport with Scripture and the experience of being born again.

The biblical counselor using apologetics does not concern himself with proving or disproving Kant. But understanding the philosophical history of ideas and how worldview-thinking fits in Western culture does help the counselor recognize it in his Christian counselees. He trusts that the internal antithesis, the rebellion, in his counselee has been defeated.<sup>49</sup> Where the counselee was once polarized against God and the Bible, his polarity has been swapped. He is now repolarized, brought into alignment with reality. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who makes him a willing recipient of truth and knowledge. The biblical counselor, as apologist to the unbelief in the Christian, has a comparatively easy task. At least his audience is spiritually alive and not dead. He speaks

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<sup>49</sup>Granted, the Christian continues to struggle with remaining sin and rebellion. However, the disposition of the true Christian has changed from opposition to an allegiance with God.

to someone whose has opened ears. The Christian counselee has a glimpse of the proper worldview and is committed to a thorough transformation. The counselor helps the counselee identify the remaining autonomy, the remaining old worldview, so that he can make progress with transforming his mind. The tools of the apologist in the hands of the counselor should now be effectual in helping his brother in Christ to stop thinking and living as a practical atheist.

The counselor, like Paul, Kuyper, and Van Til, benefits from understanding the philosophy of the world. Philosophy hones the ability to think and reason, using logic and analysis. Familiarity with philosophy provides the counselor with a point of connection to the counselee—"I see you are a religious people and have an unknown God. Let me tell you who this unknown God is." The apologist counselor says in effect, "I see that you perceive your problem in the same way your culture does. Let me help you see it from God's perspective."

Though Kant may represent the epitome of humanistic, autonomous philosophy that stands antithetical to the Christian worldview, his philosophy is not the only enemy to Christianity. The competing schools of rationalism and especially empiricism continue to influence modern culture and negatively affect the Christian's progress in sanctification. Empiricism expressed in modern science captivates the present, technology-driven culture. Debate about science is fodder for the ongoing Christian counseling wars. Biblical counselors address the effects of culture upon their Christian counsees, and they must take a methodological position on the proper role of science in counseling. Therefore, once again, apologetics concerns the counselor regarding his counseling paradigm and his daily practice.

### **Science and Defending the Faith**

A leading impetus for Adams's counseling movement was his negative reaction to modern science's input about the human condition. He wrote,

The conclusions in this book are not based upon scientific findings. My method is presuppositional. . . . I do not wish to disregard science, but rather I welcome it as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong interpretations of Scripture. . . . In the area of psychiatry, science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and gross speculation.<sup>50</sup>

The amount of ink his successors have spilled repudiating integrationist counseling attests to the significant place that science has in the nouthetic counseling paradigm. As previously explained, Adams diagnosed the church's counseling malady as the cancer of humanistic philosophy in psychiatry. Presuppositional theology was Adams's method of treatment; we thus again see the integration of apologetics in biblical counseling.

There is a fine line between apologetics and polemics. Both argue for theological truth and oppose falsity. Akin to traditional apologetics and biblical counseling, one difference is their audience. Polemics are in-house debates, family squabbles. One may argue that counseling Christians in the manner presented here is nothing more than polemics, not apologetics. The distinction is important and reinforces the premise that apologetics in counseling is a defense against unbelief, not against false doctrine. The object of the apologetic counselor is to seek to influence the counselee's belief system.<sup>51</sup> Even when a counselor engages his peers over the integrationist controversy, he is doing apologetics, not polemics; according to Adams, psychiatry, rooted in an opposing, unbelieving worldview, is antithetical to Christianity.

Adams and others have engaged in the integrationist controversy so vigorously because they see it as a threat to orthodoxy. Psychology is not a neutral worldview but is humanistic philosophy biased against God and his Word. Defending the biblical counseling paradigm becomes a defense of the faith, exposing and demolishing the ungodly presuppositions of scientism and erecting an epistemology of divine revelation

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<sup>50</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xxi.

<sup>51</sup>This perspective should allay some of the tension among professing Christians who differ on counseling methodology by not making counseling methodology a litmus test for one's salvation. The biblical counselor's problem with the integrationist is not that he thinks the integrationist is an unbeliever but that the psychiatry he promotes is rooted in philosophical unbelief.

as the only reliable and authoritative basis for truth.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter affirms the thesis that integrating the principles and practices of apologetics with biblical counseling is biblically warranted and beneficial. Apologetics is biblically warranted in general because defending the faith is the responsibility of every Christian (1 Pet 3:15). Apologetics in Christian counseling is biblically warranted and beneficial because the object of apologetics is unbelief, and removing unbelief is part of the Christian's process of sanctification. The target audience for apologetics is therefore not restricted to unbelievers—a point made by every apologetics exemplar consulted in this thesis. Counselors who incorporate apologetics into their counseling methodology are more adept at recognizing and countering the antithetical, autonomous, philosophical worldviews competing against a biblical worldview and causing problems.

The warrant for integrating apologetics into counseling is reinforced by the nouthetic counseling paradigm (to which the biblical counselor subscribes), which is overt presuppositionalism. Apologetics is not an addendum to biblical counseling but is integral to biblical counseling. Van Til's Reformed, presuppositional apologetics was expressly foundational to Jay Adams's counseling theology, and it remains so in the two primary counseling branches, CCEF and ACBC. The theology of Van Til and Adams is keen to defend Christianity against the humanistic philosophies of Immanuel Kant and British empiricism, which continue to influence culture in the modern world. The apostle Paul established a precedent for Christians to be educated in the philosophical milieu of their culture as an apologetic tool. Philosophical and theological thought have coincided for the entirety of church history.

The final reason that the biblical counselor should develop his understanding and practice of apologetics is that his defense of nouthetic counseling against integrationism is an apologetic task. Apologetics has long explored the proper, biblical

response to the philosophy of science known as scientism. If indeed scientism is a worldview derived from unbelief in the God of the Bible, then the counselor benefits from knowing those arguments. Furthermore, a developed theology of science will be useful for counseling the psychologized Christian. With the principles of apologetics firmly established, the final chapter will develop the practices of apologetic counseling.

## CHAPTER 5

### APOLOGETIC COUNSELING IN PRACTICE

The final chapter in this thesis considers how the principles of apologetics may be practically applied to biblical counseling. Because Adams built his biblical counseling system on the foundation of presuppositional apologetics, the bulk of the methodology is firmly in place. In many ways biblical counseling is presuppositional apologetics applied. For instance, biblical counselors are taught that the Bible is the source for epistemology, for it is divinely inspired and sufficient. The paradigm presupposes the existence of God and the Bible as divine revelation. And biblical counseling has a firm grasp of antithesis. The Reformed doctrines that drove Van Til to produce a Reformed apologetic likewise drove Adams to produce what could arguably be called Reformed counseling. However, this thesis argues that Adams's methodology can be improved and fine-tuned by adding an overt element of apologetics.

#### **A Balanced Counseling Methodology**

The biblical counseling paradigm begins with the gospel, which involves a radical change to a person's heart (Ezek 36:26) and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Biblical counseling acknowledges that though a new heart is given at salvation (the doctrine of justification), the heart's transformation is progressive and will not be completed this side of heaven (the doctrine of sanctification). Therefore, counseling

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<sup>1</sup>After presenting the problem of using psychology as a foundation for Christian counseling, Adams established his foundation with these words: "Counseling is the work of the Holy Spirit . . . Counseling, to be Christian, must be carried on in harmony with the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit." Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (1970; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 20.



targets the problematic, rebellious areas of the heart that are in transition in the process of sanctification. Powlison presented a vivid and helpful approach to addressing heart-problems when he applied the biblical concept of idolatry to counseling.<sup>2</sup> The approach was so successful at making counseling theory more accessible that it became a dominant methodology among the ranks of biblical counselors. Much like passengers flocking to one side of a boat alters its pitch and influences its course, counselors flocked to “idols of the heart” and pitched the biblical counseling movement accordingly. Lambert bemoaned the practice of counselors going on “idol hunts.” Powlison agrees that biblical counselors can overly focus on rooting out idols of the heart.<sup>3</sup> Some in the movement took the concept too far. Powlison’s teaching is not so monolithic. Counselors would do well to pursue balance. Assuming Powlison’s premise is correct that idolatry as “the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires” is “the problem of human beings,”<sup>4</sup> it still does not follow that the counselor’s sole approach should be to identify the counselee’s idol(s), convince him of it, call him to repent and move on with life.

One path to balance is to reconsider the profundity and complexity of the biblical metaphor of heart, which speaks to the totality of the inner being, the spirit of a man.<sup>5</sup> The heart is multifaceted, comprising the mind, emotions, desires or affections, conscience, character, will, and beliefs—but the mind stands supreme. The Scriptures affirm that concomitant with a new heart is a mind that is being transformed (Rom 12:2).

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<sup>2</sup>David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 35-50.

<sup>3</sup>Powlison wrote in an email to Lambert, “I’m not hung up on the word ‘idols.’ I think it’s overused among biblical counselors and has become a kind of jargon. People are often so captivated by its explanatory power that they go a bit overboard on it.” Lambert states, “So Powlison seems to agree that there needs to be a kind of correction in the development of the movement regarding motivation and idolatry.” Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 150.

<sup>4</sup>Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” 36.

<sup>5</sup>Adams says that the heart “includes the entire inner life.” Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 115.

If a counselee’s heart-affections are misplaced upon some inordinate desire rather than upon the true and living God, his understanding about God is likely skewed. High-handed rebellion is a different matter—it suggests the counselee’s understanding of God is fine, but his heart has not been changed.<sup>6</sup> Apologetics complements the counseling task by addressing the heart through the gateway of the mind, challenging the troubled soul to take inventory of what he truly understands and believes about God.

The counselor as apologist walks in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, who explained to the Corinthian church (i.e., other Christians) that his bold approach toward them was not an act of his own sinful flesh; rather, he was using spiritual weapons that were “divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Cor 10:4). The purpose of these weapons was to destroy, literally “to pull down.” The object of their destruction, the unseen spiritual “fortresses,” were “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God”—in short, the things of the mind. Paul continued, “We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Second Corinthians 10:5 is often misunderstood and thus misapplied to motivate the individual Christian to gain control of his own thought-life.<sup>7</sup> However, in context, the verse extends the warfare metaphor and refers to Paul and company as captors taking captive the Corinthians’ erroneous thoughts and beliefs about God. The passage is better applied to the counselor addressing unrecognized faulty speculations and lofty things like antithetical, nonneutral worldviews and cultural practices that are “raised up *against* the knowledge of God.” This application is well attested. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says, “Paul is

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<sup>6</sup>The role of volition in the complex interactions of these component parts is worthy of further analysis. However, the chosen biblical texts address affections and the mind, not the will. The person who understands but willingly opposes God might not be a true Christian and must be called to repentance.

<sup>7</sup>Other passages instruct Christians to control their thoughts. Consider Philippians 4:8-9: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on [ponder] these things.” Counselors should help counsees in this area. However, 2 Corinthians 10:5 more accurately speaks of the work of the ministers battling against harmful ideas within the church.

mounting an offensive; with the help of true Christian *gnosis* he will attack and pull down the bulwarks of human sophistry (λογισμούς) to the glory of Christ.”<sup>8</sup> The commentator Paul Barnett wrote, “This captive-taking stage of the siege metaphor is a striking image for the apostle-minister as a military general who takes fortified rebels captive and brings them into submissive obedience to Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge noted, “Not persons, but thoughts, are intended by this figure. It is everything which the pride of human reason exalts against *the knowledge of God*. . . . The conflict to which the apostle here refers is that between truth and error, between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Paul saw that the path to solving the Corinthians’ heart-problem was via the mind—one’s understanding of Jesus and the gospel—for he wrote, “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your *minds* will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). Paul did not place the onus of one’s affection for Christ upon the inordinate desires themselves. There is a place for recognizing the object of one’s true desires and endeavoring to conform those desires properly—for instance, Jesus explained that the greatest *commandments* are to love God and to love your neighbor. Nevertheless, Paul assigned the responsibility for “purity of devotion to Christ”<sup>11</sup> to the mind.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, he demonstrated a methodology for

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<sup>8</sup>Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-), s.v. “καθαίρεσις.”

<sup>9</sup>Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 466.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (1857; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 611.

<sup>11</sup>The key word, “devotion,” would not appear in a word-for-word translation. The NASB adds “of devotion” in its translation of ἀγνότης (the genitive form of ἀγνός, meaning “purity”) to communicate its nuance. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains that “(ἀγνός) implies ‘chastity’ in the narrower sense . . . here being an expression of wholehearted inward dedication to Christ.” Proverbs 20:9 in the LXX is an explicit example of the nuance, connecting cultic purity (ἀγνός) with heart (καρδία) devotion: ἀγνήν ἔχειν τὴν καρδίαν, “I have cleansed my heart.” Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “ἀγνός.” Also, while the tendency may be to focus on devotion, the thrust of Paul’s word choice is “purity.” Perhaps “of devotional purity” would be a better translation.

<sup>12</sup>I am not saying that Powlison’s “idols of the heart” (defined as inordinate life-ruling desires) is wrong or that the counselor should not be looking out for idolatry. Desires are entwined with knowledge

integrating apologetics with biblical counseling. He penetrates the heart by correcting the mind's theological misunderstanding—which amounts to a false Gospel in a false Christ, or belief in a different god. He is combatting a form of idolatry at the battlefield of the mind. Paul boldly confronted Christians (nouthetic counseling) by defending the faith to them (apologetics).

The principle apologetic methodology for the counselor is to root out *unbelief* (which could also be misbelief) within the believer. Unbelief is the biblical counselor's concern. At first glance the notion that unbelief exists within the believer may appear contradictory—after all, belief defines a Christian; however, the Scripture and Christian experience attest to the reality of the internal struggle between belief and unbelief, between faith and skepticism.

The possibility of the professed Christian returning to a state of unbelief, apostasy, is affirmed by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews when he warned the Christian church, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Heb 3:12).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the gospel of Mark recounts the story of a desperate father wavering between belief and unbelief. The frantic man brought his possessed son to Jesus for help but doubtfully exclaimed, “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” “And Jesus said to him, “If you can”?” All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the boy's father cried out and

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(belief) about God such that they seem to be in a loop, reacting to each other. Paul's answer to the cause-or-effect conundrum is to treat it phenomenologically—while affections are treated as a separate entity from the mind, beliefs lead devotion, affections are really a matter of the mind. Desires, or “affections,” are not just emotions but that for which a man's spirit (inner self or heart) values most, even worships.

<sup>13</sup>This statement should not be interpreted as denying eternal security. However, the warning passages in Hebrews must indicate a real threat. Because we ultimately cannot know the state of someone else's soul, Hebrews (and therefore we too) addresses eternal security phenomenologically. It only appears to us that a believer may go to hell, but a true Christian cannot. I therefore use the phrase “*professed* Christian.” I am also mindful of the opposite problem of hyper-Calvinism that offers no assurance. The warning passages call us to self-examination, but not to hopelessness. They motivate us to resolution founded on God's character and his truth, evidenced by belief or trust. Again, the Bible attributes the state of the heart, devotion or hardening, to belief or unbelief.

said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief’” (Mark 9:22-24). Charnock addressed the reality of the Christian’s struggle against unbelief in his teaching on “practical atheism.” Many Christians sing and affirm Robert Robinson’s lament “Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.”<sup>14</sup>

The temptation to return to a state of unbelief is heightened by the persistent pressure from a culture given to unbelief and opposition to the Bible. Paul acknowledged this fact and gave the antidote in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Powlison’s insightful article “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair’” also associates the concept “idols of the heart” with worldly influences—John Bunyan’s “Vanity Fair.” Powlison posits, “The Bible treats idolatry as a central feature of the social context, ‘the world,’ which shapes and molds us.”<sup>15</sup> Powlison goes on, “That idolatries are both generated from within and insinuated from without has provocative implications for contemporary counseling questions.”<sup>16</sup> He is exactly right. The natural, sinful, internal idolatrous heart with its antithetical beliefs is fortified by antithetical beliefs and false teaching about God coming from outside of itself—from the world in which the Christian lives and from unsound doctrine taught by the church. The counselor must therefore be equipped to address the social influences that negatively affect the counselee—cultural, marketplace, familial, etc. The counselor should consider the origin of the false understanding and ask about the counselee. Does he have truth-distortions gained from the world, from the church, or from his own mind? Powlison makes the case for apologetic counseling. It is not surprising to see that the same *JBC* issue in which Powlison’s “idols of the heart” article was published opens with

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Robinson, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1975), 12 and 13.

<sup>15</sup>Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” 36.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

Frame's article about apologetics, "Scripture and the Apologetic Task."<sup>17</sup>

Apologetic counseling hones in on some specific ways the Christian can go about renewing the mind. Because the discipline of apologetics has a long and rich history of argumentation against unbelief, it provides a deep reservoir from which the counselor can draw much assistance. Apologetics aids the Christian in thinking through his doubts about his faith. Apologetic counseling exposes culturally ingrained thought processes and behaviors that disrupt the Christian's life. Apologetic counseling also helps those Christians created with a philosophical bent who struggle with penetrating questions such as the meaning of life and theodicy. Two recommended apologetics-focused areas to begin with are the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus.

### **A Robust Doctrine of God**

The proposed apologetic counseling method emphasizes the doctrine of God. Since the Western world is a post-Christian, secular culture, the church should expect that basic tenets of the attributes of God are becoming increasingly foreign concepts, even among its congregants—ironically. Perhaps a generation ago the influence of Christianity upon American culture meant that there was a modicum of understanding about the God of the Bible. Research continues to document that the trend in our modern world is toward ignorance about or rejection of the God and the Bible. The Barna Group reported,

It may come as no surprise that the influence of Christianity in the United States is waning. Rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, belief in God, prayer and Bible-reading have been dropping for decades. Americans' beliefs are becoming more post-Christian and, concurrently, religious identity is changing. Enter Generation Z: Born between 1999 and 2015, they are the first truly "post-Christian" generation. . . . They might be drawn to things spiritual, but with a vastly different starting point from previous generations.<sup>18</sup>

That significant "starting point" is captured by similar research from the Pew Research

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<sup>17</sup>Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" 9-12.

<sup>18</sup>Barna Group, "Atheism Doubles among Generation Z," January 24, 2018, accessed May 26, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.

Center which has also marked the downward trend in American culture over the years. They went further than assuming the respondents accurately understood the distinctions of the gospel and biblical Christianity and considered content—what exactly are people rejecting when they say they do not believe in God? An even more poignant question they researched was, “When respondents say they do believe in God, what do they believe in—God as described in the Bible, or some other spiritual force or supreme being?”<sup>19</sup>

The conclusion was that one-third of adults say they believe in a “higher power” but not God as described in the Bible. The numbers continue to plummet with descending age groups, “Whereas roughly two-thirds of adults ages 50 and older say they believe in the biblical God, just 49 percent of those in their 30s and 40s and just 43 percent of adults under 30 say the same. A similar share of adults ages 18 to 29 say they believe in another higher power (39 percent).”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the research determined the respondents’ definition of “the biblical God” was extremely broad and therefore questionable. The recognized divine attributes were limited to his being all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful. In sum, the article states, “Nearly all adults who say they believe in the God of the Bible say they think God loves all people regardless of their faults, and that God has protected them.” Noticeably absent from the research is any mention of the divine attributes associated with the gospel, such as God’s holiness, justice, wrath against sin and sinner, or that this “all-loving God” demonstrated that love in the substitutionary, atoning sacrifice of his son, Jesus. There is no mention of the Trinity—a cardinal doctrine essential to a biblical understanding of God and vital to a healthy Christian life.

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<sup>19</sup>Pew Research Center, “When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?,” April 25, 2018, accessed May 26, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean/>.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Adams, Powlison, CCEF, and ACBC clearly communicate that biblical counseling is discipleship, teaching a robust doctrine of God. What is different about an apologetic counseling approach is that the doctrine takes a more prominent role. Homework assignments would be geared to ascertain the counselee's knowledge of God and how he correlates those attributes with his circumstances. The counselor should anticipate resistance to those doctrines and be prepared to defend them. Once the practical, life-problems of an anemic knowledge and belief of God's true attributes are manifest, the counselor will find himself needing to rebut the same bad arguments and poor reasoning "lifted up against the knowledge of God" that he may expect from an unbeliever in a post-Christian culture. Powlison's comment is apropos, "Idolatry is a problem both rooted deeply in the human heart and powerfully impinging on us from our social environment."<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the most important counseling-related, apologetic aspect of the doctrine of God is the problem of theodicy. Theodicy—the question of God's goodness and omnipotence in light of the existence of suffering and evil—is a logical conundrum for the philosopher and theologian. Yet, the question demands more than a sterile, logical analysis. Theodicy exists where people experience life. For instance, the scholar and self-acclaimed apostate Bart Ehrman points to the problem of evil as the final shoe that dropped in his journey away from God. After studying the reliability of the critical texts, Ehrman rejected divine inspiration, which led to him jettisoning the historic doctrines of the church and concluding that the God of the Bible was a farce in light of the pain and suffering in this world.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" 38.

<sup>22</sup>Bart Ehrman's personal testimony of deconversion is presented in his book *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 1-15. The role theodicy played in Ehrman's apostasy is missing from that source. However, in a column posted by N. T. Wright, Ehrman wrote, "Suffering increasingly became a problem for me and my faith. How can one explain all the pain and misery in the world if God—the creator and redeemer of all—is sovereign over it, exercising his will both on the grand scheme and in the daily workings of our lives?" N. T. Wright, post, "Bart Ehrman: How the Problem of Pain Ruined My Faith," *Beliefnet* (blog), accessed May 28, 2018,



Frame shows the counseling-apologetic connection with theodicy when he wrote,

Who of us has not cried out, “Why Lord?” when beset by tragedies in our experience? We simply feel a terrible discrepancy between our experience and what we believe God to be. That cry from the heart may be simultaneously a cry of pain, a cry for help, a cry for enlightenment, and a cry of doubt that questions our own deepest presuppositions. That “Why, Lord?” says everything that the philosophical argument says and more.<sup>23</sup>

The problem of evil is everyone’s problem. Each person is affected by pain and suffering. The pain deepens when the evil is perpetrated by a friend, spouse, or pastor. Then there is the internal torment of shame and regret that the Christian perpetrator experiences.

Whatever the counselee’s difficult circumstances are, most assuredly it involves some degree of evil. How the counselee processes evil in the context of God, his Savior, is of utmost importance. What he knows about God—who God is, what God has done, what God demands of him, how God is involved in his affairs, what resources God has given him—will largely determine how well he responds to biblical counseling.

Adams reminds biblical counselors that Christians often respond to their suffering with non-Christian views evidenced by questions like, “Does God care?” or ‘Is God really in control?’ or ‘Do you really think a good God would permit this if He could do anything about it?’”<sup>24</sup> After warning the counselor that he cannot be theologically weak in this area, Adams explains, “The greatest help a counselor can bring to a counselee is to convince him of the fact that behind all suffering there is a good God Who—for His own righteous purposes—has brought all this about.”<sup>25</sup> His use of the

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<http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/blogalogue/2008/04/why-suffering-is-gods-problem.html#G6VIIkEw5Xw1PAJX>.99. The issue of theodicy prompted Bart Ehrman to write the book, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

<sup>23</sup>John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 156.

<sup>24</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 154.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

word “convince” conveys the integration of apologetics in counseling.

Lest the point be misconstrued, presenting a robust doctrine of God with apologetic arguments at-the-ready is not the sole approach to all counseling matters. The heart is multifaceted, and multiple remedies must be applied. However, a solid theology proper is paramount. Powlison’s story of counseling a victimized wife is helpful. Her husband led a double life for years, having three mistresses in three cities. When the evil became unmanageable and could not be hidden any longer, her life with him sadly crumbled. Powlison recounts the case and points to the attributes of God as her help,

Ministry to Helen must help pick up many pieces. She needs daily comfort, consolation, and encouragement of pastor and friends. She needs the church to play grace-giving hardball with her husband about his sins. . . . Helen needs legal advice. . . . She needs immediate financial help, and then financial counsel about where to go from here. She needs medical advice, about whether she had contracted a sexually transmitted disease from him. She needs corporate worship: to praise God, to hear the Word of life, to participate in the Lord’s Supper, to join in interceding with God. She needs counsel, to console her in grief. She needs counsel to nourish good fruits already present: faith, buds of forgiveness and love. She needs counsel, to deal with her own sin struggles: bitterness, fear, unbelief. Most of all Helen needs God. She needs to know that God is present, powerful, listening, just, caring, and understanding. She needs God to do something. Psalm 10 is for Helen.<sup>26</sup>

Psalm 10, Powlison explains, teaches how to think properly about God and evil. He wrote, “Helen can be significantly aided by understanding the thought processes of wickedness. For example, a good dose of understanding the workings of evil helps keep her from doing the same. It keeps her relying on God rather than blaming God.”<sup>27</sup>

What if Helen doesn’t believe it right away? What if her pain is too great at the moment? What if she is being persuaded by her lifelong exposure to a world that tells her there is no God—“God is a crutch for the weak” or “There are so many religions, how can you say yours is the only one?” The four movements in Psalm 10 are progressive. It moves from despair in God’s apparent aloofness to steadfast assurance in his sovereign

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<sup>26</sup>David Powlison, “Predator, Prey, and Protector: Helping Victims Think and Act from Psalm 10,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 27-28.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

rule and personal care for the orphan and the oppressed. How does a counselor help Helen when she is stuck in the first movement—when the perspective of the wicked resonate within her spirit?

Why do You stand afar off, O LORD?  
Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?  
In pride the wicked hotly pursue the afflicted;  
Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.  
For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire,  
And the greedy man curses and spurns the LORD.  
The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him.  
All his thoughts are, "There is no God." (vv. 1-4)

The counselor will help Helen through her doubts and lead her to know the reality of Palm 10's fourth movement. He will help her defend the faith against her own unbelief and realize the good character of God:

The LORD is King forever and ever. . . .  
O LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble;  
You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear  
to vindicate the orphan and the oppressed,  
so that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror. (vv. 16-18)

### **The Hope of the Resurrection**

Biblical counseling emphasizes providing counselees with hope. Biblical hope is real hope. It is not a placebo, a psychological trick to get someone through his day while having no inherent, effectual ingredient. The Scripture's "active ingredient" of hope is the resurrection of Jesus. Paul consistently placed the resurrection at the heart of the gospel and the reason for the Christian's hope. He considered everything he achieved in this world to be rubbish compared with the greatest value of knowing Christ. He declared that he would accept hardship and the loss that comes from a life of faith and righteousness "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10). Paul explained,

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who

have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Cor 15:16-19)

In the modern world that sees science as the determiner for truth and error and dismisses miracles as fantasy, does today's Christian truly believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Does he purposefully, intentionally recognize the resurrection as his hope—longing to experience the power of the resurrection in his daily life? If the biblical counselor is committed to offering biblical hope, then he must point the counselee to the resurrection. He must then be prepared to defend it to a Christian who may limit it to a mere doctrinal line-item, but not embrace it.

The counselor should not take the counselee's agreement to the doctrine of the resurrection at face value. Rather, he must lead him to a clearer certainty that Jesus's resurrection was a historical event that has significance for him and his problems. He must assign homework that will challenge the counselee's mind and heart about the resurrection. For instance, the counselor may begin by discussing the counselee's conversion experience. If his testimony and life demonstrates a true conversion with an awareness of the essential elements of the gospel—a conviction of sin against a holy God, repentance toward God and faith in Christ, whose death was as an atoning sacrifice, was bodily resurrected from the dead, who lives now governing the affairs of the church and his personal life—then the counselor can point out that the counselee has had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. By the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, the counselee continues to have encounters with the resurrected Jesus in his daily state of communion with God. This spiritual reality gives him a completely different worldview than the non-Christian. He has a hopeful worldview.

Apologists amass various arguments and information to defend the faith. The apologist as Christian counselor presents those arguments and information to an accepting, believing soul whose faith is strengthened by them and whose worldview continues to be changed by them.

Lastly, the hope of resurrection provides the counselee with the proper scope of his trials in view of the span of his life and eternity. An oft-cited passage of encouragement to help counselees gain an eternal perspective is 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

However, as good biblical counselors know, verses must be taken in their context. Paul is elaborating on his gospel-preaching ministry and the personal afflictions that have resulted. As an apostle suffering for the cause of Christ, he is aware that his service is costing him his life; nevertheless, his so-called ministry of death is the means through which the Corinthians receive life. Paul is compelled to preach despite the perils because he is certain of the message, “knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you” (2 Cor 4: 14). Paul’s counsel of hope in times of difficulty is in the context of resurrection. Paul’s confidence went beyond hope of his own resurrection and included the Corinthians’ resurrection, “He . . . will present us with you.” Therefore, Paul is modeling for all Christians how to think and act in this reality, having God’s worldview—human life is short; suffering is comparatively brief; and the resurrection to eternal life is sure to come.

### **A Clash of Worldviews**

Another practical application of apologetic counseling is the myriad of specific cultural issues that can negatively affect Christians. The paradigm shift or break from the autonomous, humanistic worldview to the Christian worldview is not a clean one. The conflict between the two is real, and it causes problems. The presuppositional apologist-counselor guides the counselee to identify the residual pockets of a secular worldview and to discover and apply the biblical worldview. These cultural issues can include perspectives on family, marriage, parenting, extended-family pressures, gender identity,

gender roles (complementarianism vs. egalitarianism), politics, ethnicity, social justice, finances, work, priorities, entertainment, and so forth. In short, counselees present various problems with functioning at one or several of these daily-life circumstances, which may be due to their approaching life from a distorted, secular understanding.

Perhaps the counselee's models for living has been godless parents, siblings, friends, television sit-coms, dystopian movies, preachers in the form of musicians, and any number of faceless, "virtual" individuals encountered through social media. The internet provides exposure to myriads of unbridled comments, opinions, and perspectives covering the spectrum of humanity. Humanity is on display there at its worst to its best—from self-destructive debauchery or vain and mindless mediocrity to great achievements and acts of philanthropy. Most often the voices at each point along the spectrum are void of any positive mention of the true and living God. The collective influence of culture is extraordinary. The apologist-counselor interrupts these voices and tells the counselee, "Life does not have to be the way you have experienced it. There is another way, a better way, God's way, which is beautiful, good, and right. There is a path to peace and hope."

Though the American melting pot combines different ethnicities to form a new culture, like a stew, its ingredients of individual cultures retain their identifiable flavors. Modern American subcultures form around commonalities other than ethnic ones. Some are benign, and some are nefarious. These might be referred to as "social circles." There is an academic, Ivy League culture. There are political cultures, regional cultures, a drug culture, music culture, high-society, a biker culture, video game communities, snow-birds, queer culture, sports, Little League, truckers, church, and so forth. Within any given subculture are written and unwritten rules of behavior, common vocabulary, shared perspectives, an overall way of life. The question for the Christian, immersed in these subcultures, is "Where does your way of life conflict with God's way?" Furthermore, the Christian should ask himself, "Wherever my culture conflicts with God's, am I willing to

abandon it?” The apologist-biblical counselor will help the Christian see the areas where cultural norms have created blind spots that diverge from righteousness. For some, they may not realize that their bickering is a cultural norm. Others realize cultural influences, but dismiss them as “That’s just who I am.” For instance, a common excuse for an emotional outburst may be, “I can’t help it; I’m Italian” or “That sounds rude, but I’m a New Englander.” Cultural influences and antithetical worldviews can be deep and devastating.

The family dynamics of immigrant parents raising children who have known life only in America is an example of culture clash and how apologetics in counseling can help. One case-in-point involves a young woman in her late twenties. Her parents, siblings, and church family apply pressure for her to be married. She is told that not only should she marry soon, but the man must be from their circles, from one of their mono-ethnic churches and not from the majority culture.

Another situation involves a teenage boy at odds with his immigrant parents, who have one foot in their ethnically defined subculture and the other foot in the majority culture. The son sees his parents as being out of touch. He is embarrassed by his parents’ social awkwardness, accents, and odd ways. On the other hand, the parents see that they sacrificially left behind family, friends, and their way of life to pursue a better situation for their children in the United States. Dad works long hours building up his medical practice. Mom decides to homeschool this last of their three kids who came later in life. Both parents are at “the end of their rope,” quarreling daily with their son who is squandering his life away, “always” on his computer or phone instead of studying. To them, he has no ambition to make something of himself.

Certain ethnicities place an inordinately high value on loyalty to the family, with life revolving around pleasing—but usually in fact displeasing—the family. Fulfilling these expectations becomes an unhealthy, troublesome pursuit. Rather than

exploring only the trail of heart idols, the apologetics approach to counseling exposes the culturally driven worldviews and value systems opposed to God. During the data-gathering process, the counselor asks questions that will help him understand the intricacies of the counselee's primary culture. The counselor must also avoid oversimplifying his counselees' lives and jumping to conclusions about their sins.

In the case of the teenage boy mentioned above, an apologetics approach focusing on the doctrine of God combined with cultural sensitivities revealed much about his home life. The son's spiritual life and faith was obstructed by the dilemma of God's sovereignty and man's free will. The boy also expressed that he could not believe in a God who would send people to hell over such minor infractions. To him, God was unjust—God's punishment did not fit the crime.

The parents were ill equipped to defend the faith to their son. Their own understanding of the character of God and the gospel was lacking. Their church taught by asserting doctrines without reasoning through them. The son found the church to be shallow. His profession of faith at a youth event quickly withered like the seed planted in rocky ground. Mom and Dad struggled with parenting in large part because they clung to culturally driven perspectives of the roles of men and women, husband and wife, which clashed with sound, biblical teaching. On several fronts, the family's foreign culture clashed with American culture, and both clashed with God's truth. Dad was unable to lead the family and withdrew, frustrated. He emerged only in vain attempts to spend time with his son or to discipline him. He disciplined his son by taking away the only thing the son cared about, his smartphone, which inevitably caused more quarreling. Mom lost respect for her husband and felt shame from the judgmental eyes at church. The appearance of a successful, well-adjusted Christian family was crumbling. The son eventually stopped listening and respected no one in authority over him—Dad, Mom, and his pastor. He withdrew to his room, submerged himself in social media and computer



games. He isolated himself, having only a couple of nonchurch friends. The highly educated parents saw Christian psychology as a legitimate option, should biblical counseling fail to work. In this case, every sphere of apologetic counseling was applicable. The family was living as practical atheists. Unbelief and misbelief came from the world, the church, and from within.

### **Method**

The counselor intent on using apologetics in counseling must acquaint himself with the three main apologetic methodologies—presuppositionalism, evidentialism, and classical. Whereas Adams’s biblical counseling paradigm is inherently “presuppositional,” reflecting Van Til’s Reformed theology with its robust doctrine of God and the Bible, presuppositionalism as an apologetic method can be abstract and cumbersome at a practical level. Though the counselor benefits by struggling through presuppositionalism and learning how to use it practically, other apologetic schools of thought overlap and complement the theologically heavy system. A more eclectic approach is recommended.

Apologetics, like most disciplines, has its camps. Historically, these different camps have engaged in heated dialogue proving their system’s superiority and why it is the only way to do apologetics. The budding apologist will be confronted with the question, “Are you a presuppositionalist or an evidentialist?” Furthermore, these camps tend to divide along theological lines—presuppositional is Reformed, evidential is Arminian, classical is Catholic.<sup>28</sup> An unnecessary and unbiblical dichotomy between “party lines” was created. Each camp has a significant following among evangelical Christians. This observation supports the conclusion that each approach has a useful place in broadly serving the church. Each approach has biblical warrant and makes a helpful

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<sup>28</sup>While classical apologetics throughout this thesis has highlighted R. C. Sproul, a devout Reformed theologian, it is rooted historically in Roman Catholic natural theology.

contribution to the whole. The biblical counselor will encounter a variety of people with a variety of perspectives. Therefore, he will need to have a variety of approaches in his repertoire.

The apologetic approach to counseling suggested here builds upon Van Til's and Adams's theological foundation. Because biblical counseling's audience is primarily a Christian audience, the problems other apologetic camps have with presuppositionalism are irrelevant. Likewise, the problems presuppositionalists have with nonpresuppositionalists are irrelevant. The divisions revolve largely around Romans 1:18-23 and what it means that unregenerate man "suppresses the truth." The debates consider the practical implications of the noetic effects of sin and the warrant for proving the existence of God.

The presuppositionalist sees no value in the classicist or evidentialist using a two-step method of first proving theism before presenting the gospel, that Jesus is God. The classicist and evidentialist cannot accept the circular reasoning behind presuppositionalism. They argue that its logical circularity is an obstacle to the gospel. These controversies are all but moot in integrating apologetics with biblical counseling when the counselee is presumably a Christian already. He does not need to be persuaded about the existence of God or that Jesus is God.

The presuppositions about a *sensus divinitatis* are without question for a Christian because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Apologetics in counseling targets the counselee's inconsistencies with the truth of God and how he lives out that truth. The counselor shows the counselee where his former secular worldview conflicts with the biblical worldview. Therefore, apologetic counseling is fundamentally, but not exclusively, presuppositional. Adams rightly grounded his counseling paradigm on sound doctrine and theology. Likewise, presuppositionalism is an apologetic system determined to represent sound, biblical theology. An eclectic approach to apologetic

counseling is also grounded in the cardinal doctrines expressed in historic, orthodox Protestant Christianity—the Reformed faith.<sup>29</sup> The distinctive elements of classical and evidential apologetics are not in conflict with, but contribute to, the biblical worldview to which presuppositionalism aims.

The classical approach to apologetics helps the Christian by showing him how theologians of the past defended the faith against Western philosophy using reason and observing the world through natural theology. The classical approach has raised the ire of the presuppositionalist who accuses it of giving too much ground to fallen man because its starting point is with human reason rather than God.<sup>30</sup> In turn, the classicist argues that presuppositionalism is fideism<sup>31</sup>—presuppositionalism, like much of evangelicalism, does not offer a reasoned defense of the faith but makes assertions and calls people to a blind faith, “just believe.”<sup>32</sup> Though the authors of *Classical Apologetics* present a case against Van Til’s presuppositionalism, they do so within a Reformed framework. The authors argue that Calvin’s theology included a favorable use of theistic argumentation and the use of evidence.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, there is sufficient common ground to incorporate a classical approach without violating a theologically Reformed foundation.

Classicists and presuppositionalists agree that rational argumentation is insufficient to bring a person to a saving knowledge of Christ and that the Christian’s assurance comes from the internal witness of the Spirit. The classicist sees extrabiblical

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<sup>29</sup>This statement sets forth the same ideas Adams presented in nouthetic counseling. While one may argue which doctrines of the Reformed faith qualify to carry the name “Reformed,” that is a diversion from the point. The theology of counseling taught by Adams, Powlison, and Lambert suffice.

<sup>30</sup>R. C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), ch. 12.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 17, 184-88.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 198-207.

evidence and rational arguments as useful not only for the confirmation of faith but in preparation for it.<sup>34</sup> Because apologetic counseling targets the believer, the question of the preparatory use of reasoned arguments and evidence in one's evangelism can be disregarded. The counselor can therefore apply the classical arguments for theism and the use of evidence for confirming the counselee's faith, sidestepping the controversial issue of their preparatory role. Apologetic counseling happily avoids the quagmire of party loyalty while benefitting from the strengths of all the parties.

As classical apologists in the line of R. C. Sproul see no conflict with their historic apologetic method and their Reformed moorings, apologetic counselors can use evidentialism without theological compromise, if they remain astute. Evidentialist arguments move the classic cosmological and teleological arguments out of the classroom and into the laboratory. These methods support the historicity and reliability of Scripture. Evidential arguments present data from internal and external sources that offer overwhelming probabilities of the truth of the biblical record. Evidentialists venture into the minutiae of science to show the compatibility of Scripture and science. Perhaps it is in the science-and-Scripture arena that the apologist runs the greatest risk of violating Reformed doctrines. Science is fluid, whereas Scripture is fixed—and the Reformed interpretation of Scripture is practically fixed. Attempts to harmonize today's scientific theory with theology can unnecessarily bring doctrines into questions such as the historicity of Adam, creation, and the age of the earth. Resolving scientific theory and biblical hermeneutics challenges the faith of some Christians. Evidentialism can help the counselee toward a biblical worldview through research into intelligent design, the historical Jesus, Jesus' resurrection, the reliability and origins of the Bible, canonicity, and textual criticism. Therefore, the counselor must be careful to maintain sound doctrine

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<sup>34</sup>Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, 206.

and practice good hermeneutics when exploring history or resolving the philosophy of science with the Scriptures.

As the counselor combats unbelief and misbelief with a solid doctrine of God and doctrine of Scripture, supplementing his knowledge of the attributes of God with arguments from evidentialism and classical reasoning, he models an eclectic apologetic method to his counselee. This method increases the counselee's faith, providing confidence in God and his Word, and equips him for defending the faith to himself, to his family, to his neighbors, and to his coworkers. The counselee learns to take his focus off himself, to think more and more accurately about God, and to minister to others.

### **Conclusion**

The connections between apologetics and biblical counseling seem endless. Exemplars from both disciplines have commented about the obvious relationship; yet, none have set forth a formal appraisal. Perhaps the first obstacle to apologetic integration is reconciling the difference of audience. Apologetics is traditionally about defending the faith against those who are opposed to Christianity. It is a companion to evangelizing. Biblical counseling is about one Christian helping another with his life-struggles. However, the obstacle is removed upon broadening the definition of apologetics to defending the faith against unbelief, wherever it is found. Because Christians struggle with unbelief, apologetics can be applied in counseling. Integrating the principles and practices of apologetics with biblical counseling opens a sea of resources for the counselor to help the church.<sup>35</sup>

Albert Mohler expressed an observation about the present culture that likely resonates with many Christians, "We look out on the horizon around us and realize that our culture has been radically changed. In this case, the storm is a vast moral revolution,

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<sup>35</sup>See the appendix for a list of recommended resources.

and that revolution is not even close to its conclusion. In fact, there will likely be no conclusion to this moral revolution within our lifetimes, or the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren.”<sup>36</sup> He is referring to the sexual revolution that has brought with it normalizing promiscuity, homosexuality, and the redefinition of marriage. The fast pace of technology and the advent of social media has concomitantly contributed to the rapid cultural and moral changes that perpetuate antithetical worldviews. A culture that questions fundamental concepts of right and wrong will inevitably find its way into the church. Christians experience the pressures of this culture and need to know how to think and react to the barrage of antibiblical influences.

Thankfully, the church has risen to the occasion and apologetics ministries have flourished. Many Christians have recognized that the church must do a better job of thinking and engaging the culture in an intellectual, loving, and winsome manner. They see that God’s truth does indeed have good, right, and better answers to life’s questions. It therefore behooves biblical counselors to integrate apologetics into their counseling to address the myriad of cultural influences upon their counselees.

The nouthetic counseling system that Jay Adams pioneered emerged from Van Til’s presuppositional apologetic movement at its earliest stages. The two go together. While the apologetic counseling approach set forth in this thesis allows for an eclectic method, presuppositional apologetics suits as the predominate paradigm. The presuppositional apologetic method, like nouthetic counseling, is about personal confrontations with God’s truth. Presuppositionalism seeks to identify unbiblical thinking and present the biblical worldview as the only logical and obviously correct one. Similarly, biblical counseling helps counselees by discovering and applying the truths of God’s Word. The sanctification process is indeed a process. No Christian is completely

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<sup>36</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), xiii.

and immediately transformed into the likeness of Christ. Christians do not shed their former life with its antithetical worldview so quickly. The tension of two worldviews creates problems, and apologetics with biblical counseling is needed.

Setting forth apologetics as a useful and biblical methodology for counseling will inevitably encounter objections. Some may argue that introducing apologetics into counseling will create similar problems of integrating psychology, only now with philosophy. Perhaps that is a real threat. However, for all the pain and suffering that has transpired in defending biblical counseling against secular psychology, the process has refined the church's counseling on both sides of the debate. The difficulties force the movement to improve. The secular, humanistic, autonomous philosophies that could undermine biblical counseling are the very philosophies that seek to and do infiltrate the minds of God's people. The solution is not to avoid those philosophies but to understand them better and confront them with God's Word. That was the approach of Abraham Kuyper, the anti-apologetics Reformed apologist and statesman who started the Free University of Amsterdam. That was the approach of Cornelius Van Til in formulating a Reformed version of Kant's transcendental argument.<sup>37</sup> That was the approach of Jay Adams in exposing how Freud, Adler, and Rogers had hijacked pastoral ministry. That was the approach of the apostle Paul, quoting Epimenides and Arastus.

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<sup>37</sup>It may bear repeating that Frame makes this comparison. John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 45-46.

## APPENDIX

### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The following annotated bibliography presents a list of recommended resources to introduce the biblical counselor to the field of apologetics.

#### **Apologetic Methodology**

Boa, Kenneth, and Robert M Bowman. *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005. This reference work provides a historical perspective on Christian apologetics. It demonstrates that a more congenial apologetics community has emerged in the recent past. There are many applications for apologetic counseling in this book.

Cowan, Steven B., and William Lane Craig, eds. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. This resource provides an overview of five Christian apologetic schemes. It serves well as a quick-reference guide for comparing the major tenets of the various views.

Koukl, Gregory. *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. *Tactics* is a “how to” book on apologetics. It provides practical instruction for Christians to engage people on matters of faith in a winsome, yet challenging manner using the Socratic method (asking questions). The biblical counselor will also find this work to be a helpful tool for data-gathering.

Oliphint, K. Scott. *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. This work by a present professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary is a re-branding of presuppositional apologetics. The work is far more accessible to the layman than those of Van Til or Bahnsen.

Spencer, Ichabod S. *A Pastor's Sketches: Conversations with Anxious Souls Concerning the Way of Salvation*. Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2001. This 1800s book is a rich reservoir of pastoral wisdom for evangelism and apologetics.

Sproul, R. C. *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003. This work is Sproul's perspective of apologetics known as “Classical Apologetics.” Ligonier Ministries offers a video teaching series by Sproul that is highly recommended:  
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/defending-your-faith/>.



## Philosophy

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015. This work is essentially a textbook on western philosophy.

Oliphint, K. Scott. *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology*. Phillipsburg: P&R Pub., 2006. *Reasons for Faith* is an excellent treatment of the relationship between Reformed theology and philosophy. This work is more academic than *Covenantal Apologetics*.

Sproul, R. C. "The Consequences of Ideas" (video lectures). Ligonier Ministries. Accessed August 10, 2018. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/consequences-of-ideas/>. R. C. Sproul is the consummate teacher. This series is a superb introduction to western philosophy.

## The Resurrection of Jesus

Licona, Mike. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010. Not for the faint-of-heart, this is a massive work. Though academic, it is very helpful on several levels. It first explains how historians do history (historiography) which is then applied to the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Note the references to Gary Habermas, the leading historian on the resurrection. Habermas's work is available at <http://www.garyhabermas.com/>. Many of his lectures and debates can be found online, as can Licona's.

## Science and Faith

Cabal, Theodore J. *Controversy of the Ages: Why Christians Should Not Divide over the Age of the Earth*. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017. This book serves the counselor by demonstrating a patient but thorough way to deal with controversial issues among fellow Christians. In addition to explaining old earth creationism, it provides a helpful history of the origins of the science versus Scripture controversy.

Lennox, John C. *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Oxford: Lion, 2009. Lennox is a professor of mathematics at Oxford University and holds multiple degrees in science and philosophy. This work is an example of his explanation for the compatibility of science and the Christian faith. Lennox's treatment of the topic is surprisingly accessible to the layman. He offers an excellent example of clarity and winsomeness. He also has many video lectures and debates online, including his debate with atheist Richard Dawkins.

## Culture

Carson, D. A. *Christ and Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. Carson provides a challenge for Christians to shed their intellectual and practical complacency and engage the culture meaningfully and effectively.

Moore, Russell. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. Nashville: B&H, 2015. *Onward* seeks to realign American Christian thought to a Matthew 6:33 perspective. Russell Moore develops the arguments that it is an illusion to think the

Bible belt still represents most Americans and that Christianizing America with a view to “returning” it to an idyllic, mythical 1950’s culture is a wrong-headed goal for the church, and that the church’s future is not as bleak as some may think.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*. 4 vols. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1985. Schaeffer’s work is among the most influential evangelical treatises on Western culture. Schaeffer studied under Van Til; however, Schaeffer is not considered a Van Tillian presuppositionalist.

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## ABSTRACT

### INTEGRATING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF APOLOGETICS WITH BIBLICAL COUNSELING

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Jay Adams's system of biblical counseling coincided in time, place, and content with Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics. Adams clearly stated that his system was presuppositional. This thesis explores Van Til's theological and philosophical influences and argues that the discipline of apologetics is inherent to biblical counseling and should therefore be exploited for the church's benefit.

The primary link between the disciplines is captured in the nuanced definition of apologetics which is to defend the faith against unbelief wherever it is found—in the world, the church, or the individual Christian. These concentric spheres of experience provide the context in which the biblical counselor can use apologetic topics to combat doubt and buttress the counselee's faith. The biblical counselor is urged to pursue the study of apologetics to develop a clearer epistemology and be able to recognize the philosophical and cultural presuppositions that may be disrupting the counselee's sanctification.



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