

The Kindness of Counselling

Introduction to the Course

Study One:

Kindness Needed in a Broken and Confused World

INTRODUCTION: THE RESOURCES OF WISDOM AVAILABLE TO THE CHRISTIAN COUNSELLOR

Counselling is really the practical giving of helpful advice from the wisdom one possesses. If the counsellee were wiser than the counsellor then he—or she—would have all the wisdom needed. The wisdom of the Christian worker lies in the Godhead for (i) Christ is (a) the ‘Wonderful Counsellor’ (Isaiah 9:6) in addition to being ‘Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’, and (b) the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:30; Col.1:3); (ii) the Holy Spirit is the ‘Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might’ (Isaiah 11:2); and (iii) the Father is the giver of wisdom (James 1:5; 3:15).

Since—for us—the wisdom of God is what He has done in Christ ‘according to the counsel of His will’ (Eph. 1:11; 3:10–11), then these resources for counselling are vast and powerful. The Christian worker should see what is contained in ‘the fullness of the blessing [of the gospel of Christ]’ (Rom. 15:29). The worker already possesses these resources (‘every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus’, Eph. 1:3). They are:

(i) the gifts as set out in Rom. 9:4, which are, ‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the law, the worship, the promises, and the Messiah’.

(ii) the gifts given to the whole church as set out in I Corinthians 12:4ff; Romans 12:3ff; I Peter 4:10–11.

(iii) the dynamic gifts of salvation which are repentance, faith, the forgiveness of sins, the purification of one’s sins, justification, sanctification, new birth (regeneration), sonship, love, baptism into the body (the church) of Christ, the weapons, the gift of the Spirit.

These resources are all of grace, but if we have not entered into them by faith, then we cannot use them in helping others. Our understanding (and so our appropriation) of the resources set out above comes from the Scriptures, which are themselves our inexhaustible supply.

Using the Given Resources

Secular resources for counselling are different from Christian ones. They come from studying the phenomenology of man, and the application of certain techniques relating to helping man. Generally they scarcely recognize man as a soul, and rarely as a spirit, hence their study of phenomena is deficient. Even so they have often been very helpful, just as medical healing has been of great benefit. They do not, however, get to the basic cause of personal disturbed states which have a moral-spiritual aetiology, hence the healing they seek to bring is not always sufficient.

The Christian worker cannot help a person further than his own appropriation in life of the resources given him by God. In one sense the counsellor is a witness to what is so, and what can be obtained for the counsellee who will place his faith in God, taking hold of the gifts of grace. We should note that salvation by grace (Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7; Rom. 3:24; 5:17) is, (a) deliverance from the powers which once held him (Satan, the world, the world powers, sin, the flesh, death, the law, God's wrath, the conscience, the idols, etc.); (b) the healing of the person from the effects of the past; and (c) deliverance into the freedom of the new life in Christ with hope for the future, i.e. eternal life, resurrection, inheritance, glorification and the eternal priestly and kingly vocation.

Let us emphasize again, that if the Christian worker does not know these resources, has not appropriated them, and does not live in them, then he has no basis from which to work, and so lacks the practical handling and use of the resources otherwise available. We must stress that one does not have to have technical theological understanding of them, but simple personal experience, which then makes counselling more a witness of their reality, and a pointing to their availability and power to meet and heal the condition of the counsellee.

The Overall Situation of the Counsellee

The Scriptures give us a full picture of man in the following states: (i) as created; (ii) as fallen; (iii) as redeemed; (iv) as redeemed seeking to live a holy life in the face of present evil and the flesh; (v) as man in hope, looking to ultimate redemption of the body, and the gifts of inheritance; and (vi) man as he will be, what he now hopes to be. Understanding a human being, checking out his particular state, and knowing the resources available to aid the counsellee, is the responsibility of the counsellor. Of course the Christian worker will be depending upon the help of God, and the wisdom he only can give at a needed point of time and counselling.

A Sketch of the Practice of Biblical Counselling

Things go this way, namely knowing human beings are sinners, have a conscience, have guilt, are under attack of accusation from evil powers, and lack the resources to (i) analyse and recognize the problem; (ii) to deal with the problem. The counsellor then shares (i) his understanding of the present problem, and (ii) points to the solution by the use of the resources God's grace supplies, i.e. to God's being with the counsellee, ready to deliver and heal him.

The main problem a counsellee faces is (i) estrangement from God and unease in His creation; (ii) guilt for sins committed and for failure to be truly perfect and complete as a human; (iii) living in broken relationships with God, others, and himself; (iv) the effects of all these things along with the universal problem of 'predeterminism' or 'fate',

by which the blame is laid on 4 things for the condition (trouble) he is in, namely, (a) parental upbringing, (b) heredity, (c) environment, and (d) circumstances. In fact the blame is laid on God by most, if not all!

The Counsellor must show that God is sovereign, God is love (i.e. both as Creator and Redeemer) and that the solution lies in the grace and power of the Atonement, particularly as the Holy Spirit applies it—and its powers—to the repentant person. See ‘Resources’ (above).

Suggested Steps to Biblical Counselling

- (i) Relate to the counsellee as one person to another, unprofessionally, without patronage, condescension or giving the impression of being ‘Mr. Fixit’. (One does not have to be ‘Mr. Fixit’).
- (ii) Let the counsellee speak at length, listening patiently and thoughtfully, noting the details which will help to ‘place’ the person and the problem.
- (iii) At the appropriate point draw the person’s narrative to a conclusion, and quietly let him know that you understand what has been said, and how it has helped you to know the problem.
- (iv) In the light of Sections 3 and 4 above, let the person know what are some of the elements of the problems. These will be to do with the confusion and state that all humans come to one way or another in living apart from God and His redemption, or not understanding the full resources of God and that redemption, i.e. not really believing that God is love, and that He heals. Almost always anger will be at the bottom of everything, and anger against man (another person) is anger against God, and His failing to properly handle the 4 elements mentioned in Section 4 (above).
- (v) Seek to show that God is love by revealing what happened on the Cross and how it happened, how relevant it was, and is and so what are the practical effects of that happening.
- (vi) Seek to draw the counsellee into appropriation of the Atonement, or to being wrought upon or constrained by it, remembering that we cannot force anyone’s will, do not have to do so, and we do not have to solve anyone’s problems, however much we may wish we could.
- (vii) Where thought advisable, give reading matter to the person, and try to arrange an opportunity for further contact, if considered necessary or helpful.

Helpful New Creation Materials: Books: *Practical Christian Counselling, A Biblical Way of Counselling, Direct Biblical Counselling, Counselling For Our Comfort* (notes and cassettes only) *Oh, Father! Our Father!, Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind, The Cleansing of the Memories, If We Say We Have No Sin, The Heavenly Vision, God’s Glory Man’s Sexuality, The Wounding & The Healing, Discovering your Identity, Where I Love I Live, Man of Dust. Man of Glory, I The Man.*

Cassettes are available on most of the books. Video Cassettes are also available for many of them.

II. THE MATTER OF KINDNESS IN A WORLD WHICH IS BROKEN AND CONFUSED

The Nature of Kindness

What is kindness? What do we mean by ‘a world broken and confused’? These are matters we must pursue. Kindness is something we recognize. In English it conjures up the image of gentleness, geniality and even of affection, but it also suggests a spontaneous benevolence, a concern for the other person, a desire to help. On the divine level God is sweet, mild, full of graciousness, and one may live serenely in that knowledge. Yet mildness is sorely tested when its object is perverse, uncaring, obstinate and rebellious. In this case God is ‘slow to anger’, i.e. ‘long-suffering’. In Romans 2:4–5 long-suffering and kindness are twin qualities. In Exodus 34:6–7 ‘loving kindness’ (Heb. *chesed*) is linked with the mercy, grace and faithfulness of God, but also with ‘not clearing the guilty’, i.e. God is Holy and demands repentance. Kindness then is not mere amiability or mindless benevolence. Being in the context of mercy and grace, kindness is that act of God which assists man in his difficulties, and which operates unsolicited by the object of its goodness. Kindness is always a matter of surprise, especially on the human level—given in man’s slowness to think about other human beings. We are all delighted when people are kind to us, or we see kindness given to others.

The uses of *chesed* i.e. ‘loving kindness’ in the Old Testament are innumerable. We cannot here examine them all, but the fact that they are all translated ‘steadfast love’ which means that no matter how much men and women of the covenant fail God, He will continue in His love for them. Paul said ‘love is kind.’ This tells us so much about kindness. In the New Testament the word for kindness is *chrestotes* and Paul uses it in Titus 3:4 where he couples it with God’s love to man, literally—‘But when the kindness and love to man of God our Saviour appeared.’ Kindness, then, has been exercised towards us by God both in the Old and New Testaments. The famous statement of Romans 11:22, ‘Note then the kindness and severity of God: severity towards those who have failed, but God’s kindness to you provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you will be cut off,’ was spoken to Gentiles, and this is remarkable because God’s loving kindness was shown primarily to the covenant people of Israel. That is why Paul rebukes the Jews in Romans 2:4, ‘Do you presume upon his kindness.....?’ In Ephesians 2:7 he tells all—both Jewish and Gentile Christians—that in the coming ages God will show ‘the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness’ towards them. He later exhorts them to be kind one to another (4:32). Kindness is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). From these and other scriptures we begin to see what a glorious thing is God’s kindness. We have, then, a wonderful basis on which to approach people, especially people who find it hard to cope with life in a confused and broken world.

The Meaning of ‘A Confused and Broken World’

When we use the words ‘confused’ and ‘broken’ we are assuming there is a world which is not confused and broken, i.e. a true world. This is correct. It should not be difficult for a normal human being to cope with a normal world—if such there were. What is normal we may call ontological. We will then be driven to ask ourselves what is a normal world, and why is our world not normal. The answer must lie in God the Creator.

It is at this point the Christian counsellor must have a truly biblical theology of God, man, and the creation. Such can be followed in some good manual of theology, or in one of my own books, e.g. *The Things We Firmly Believe* (NCPI, 2nd Ed 1986), *Practical Christian Counselling* (NCPI, 1984, pp.17–44) and *Wonderful Counsellor* (NCPI, 1987, pp. 1–7). A fuller theology for counselling would be found in the short bibliography set out above at the end of our first section of this study.

Biblically, we must understand that God created the world in wisdom, and that when it was created it was ‘very good’, i.e. functionally good (cf. Gen. 1:31; Eccles. 3:11). For this reason the world must always be essentially good, although the rebellion against God by angelic and human creatures has brought elements of dissonance, dislocation and awryness to it. When creatures do not obey the functional principles of creation, and when they oppose the purposes God has for His creation, then this dislocation must result. Rebellion against God means a rejection of the wisdom, function and nature of creation by the rebellious creature which in turn brings the creature into personal existential guilt for not being a true existent in a functional world. This guilt (cf. Rom. 3:23) is the basis of human confusion and the mainspring of human acts of sinning, and these sinful acts compound guilt and so lead to further acts of sin. Failure to conform with the ontological nature of God, creation and the creature itself brings a confusion of the deepest kind. Man is lost in his world, coming to an experience of alienation from God, creation and himself. He is forced to re-rationalize all things—God, creation and humanity—and to develop a so-called ontology of all things.

Unless we have a theology of God and Satan we cannot have a true theology of fallen humanity. Unless we realize the struggle which goes on between two systems—(i) the Kingdom of God under God and His loyal forces; and (ii) the kingdom of Satan under his conscripted forces—then we will not know the conflicts which obtain in the universe, in which all creatures are participants. What compounds confusion is the human inability to understand God’s plans and purposes—which include redemption of fallen humanity, judgement of all evil creatures, and the ultimate reconciliation and glorification of all things. Fallen humanity tries to rationalize what it calls ‘good and evil’ in terms of dualism or monism. These rationalizations are often philosophical and/or religious, and they add to the confusion of human persons.

In this study we cannot properly describe the confusion men and women experience in a world, which to them is broken and seemingly irrational. If we see that man is created by God for Himself, that man should relate to creation in the way of true functionality, and that the way of God’s love, righteousness, holiness, goodness and truth, constitute the true way of man and all other creatures, then we can understand why there is so much confusion in life, and so much brokenness in the creation. Two important chapters regarding the matter are Genesis 3 and Romans 1. They give us the key to the human dilemma, i.e. man created in the image of God rebelling against God, and failing to have peace with himself, the creation and God. Here is the root cause of man’s confusion and the explanation of why his world seems so broken.

In our future studies we will look at man’s dilemma more closely and seek to see the divine solution for his ills. It is in this context that we will see the richness and power of God’s kindness.

Study Two

The Source and Flow of Kindness—Loving Fatherhood

I. GOD—THE FOUNTAIN OF ALL GOODNESS

In Jeremiah 2:13 and 17:13 God is described as ‘the fountain of living waters, and ‘the fountain of living water’. Psalm 36:9 stated, ‘For with thee is the fountain of life’, and these figures indicate that God is the eternal source of all life or ‘the issues of life’ (Prov.4:23). Hence He is called ‘the God of all grace’, of ‘all joy’, ‘of all peace’—and so on. Everything arises from Him, and the pictures of vast rivers and waters (e.g. Ezek. 47:1–12; Ps. 46:4–5; 87:7; John 4:10; 7:37–39; Rev. 22:1–2) signify that God is the source of everything that is good. Outside of Him there is nothing. It is in Him that man lives and moves and has his being (Acts 17:28). Kindness—no less than any other attribute, is an element of God, and it is indispensable to man.

Kindness an Important Element of God and Man

This Study Series is based on the fact that kindness is an important element in helping man—especially disturbed man. We will see that kindness is indeed indispensable to healing relationships where they have gone wrong. Whilst we need to expand our understanding of the kindness of God and man, two scriptures show us the importance of the element of kindness. The first is that of Romans 11:13–24 in which the very being of the Jews and the Gentiles depends wholly upon ‘the kindness and severity of God’, and Luke 6:37 which says that the Most High is ‘kind to the grateful and the selfish’. If the acceptance of the Jews and Gentiles for salvation and future depends upon God’s kindness then that kindness is universally important. If God is kind both to the ungrateful and the selfish, then kindness is enormously important for man’s relationships with God and with his fellow human-beings. If man—by the Fall—cuts himself off from God’s kindness, then he also cuts himself off from the source of being kind to others.

Man Not Man Without God

Man lives and moves and has his being in God. He is told, ‘Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life.’ The term ‘springs of life’ (Prov. 4:23 RSV), or ‘issues of life’ (AV) or ‘wellsprings’ (JB) indicates that all man’s motions come from his heart. In his pristine state of innocence, doubtless only pure things flowed from his heart such as we call elements given out of the attributes of God, namely holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and righteousness. Rightly understood these things issued from God and flowed through man, but man willed them to flow, and was in the action of them, since God had given him self-will. Because man’s will was aligned with God’s will they were one in will and so the heart was pure and strong as is indicated by Titus 1:15—‘To the pure in heart all things are pure’.

The Hebrew understood the word ‘heart’ to mean the seat of the affections, the will and the intellect (mind).

When—through the ‘Fall’ described in Genesis 3:1–6—man fell from his created state of obedience to God and sought to live autonomously, i.e. derive all his actions from himself and not from God, then he became a contradiction in terms of living. Since man must ‘live and move and have his being’ in God, he cannot live without God. God is the source of his being, yet man wills this not to be so. In this way his life is a constant form of contradiction. God has given him the breath of life. God has ‘put eternity in his heart’ (Eccl. 3:11) and man of himself must eventually return to dust, and the ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’ of him go back to God. This is why we say that man lives in contradiction of himself, but the experience of such living is most painful to him. Because of this—as we indicated in our last study—man is confused, and he lives in what appears to be a broken world.

We have to conclude that although man seeks to live from himself, yet God graciously continues his life and being, allowing him to sin, to go his own way, and even to oppose Him until the day when man must be judged because he is accountable for all things he has done—whether they be good or bad. In this sense God does not withdraw the gifts of creation from man, but permits him to use them. One way of saying this is that in the Fall man died relationally to God, and came alive relationally to himself and for himself. Another way of saying it is that the image of God in man was reversed, i.e. all the ‘wellsprings’ of man became man-centred (self-centred) and not God-centred. The gifts of holiness, righteousness, truth, good and love man uses for himself and not for God. Love then becomes self-love, self-righteousness—and so on. This perverse use of the gifts is what has deluded man into thinking the gifts arise within himself and that they are not derived from God.

The Pain of Responsibility

Because man thinks he is autonomous he knows he must make his own decisions, i.e. must make them apart from God. Such decision-making has problems. One needs to have great knowledge and wisdom in order to make correct decisions. One is also in competition with other decision-makers. Decision-makers conflict with other decision makers. Rivalry can be dangerous. Man realizes in his depths that he needs help. He also needs the assurance of a power beyond himself. His so-called autonomy always leaves him vulnerable emotionally, relationally and functionally. His conscience tells him that his decisions and his acts are significant. P.T. Forsyth said that conscience makes man man, makes him one, and makes him eternal. So man is faced with the fact that he is responsible for all his actions. This is why man blames fate for what happens to him. His fate—so-called—lies in heredity, parental upbringing, circumstances and environment. Man discovers powers too strong for him to handle. One part of him dreads the judgement his conscience tells him must come. Because he has rejected God as the source of his life, he must find aid in something else. Because of all this, gods are born.

Man the Idolater

Man has to have idols. The reason for this lies in the fact and reality of God. Man proceeded from God. Man cannot be man without God. God is the source of his being. Biblically God is Creator, is King over all things, and is Father. Man correspondingly must be creature, subject and son. Man is a contingent person: he cannot exist and have

his dynamics of being apart from God. So he must relate to God. Since he refuses to relate to God-as-He-is then he must have a god who will be as he—man—wishes him to be. His god will have all the virtues of relating to his devotee, but yet not make the moral demands that God makes of His creature-subject-son. The matters of mind, will and emotions must be as the man-devotee desires. So a god is born.

The history of human god-making is an ancient one. Man's problem lies in the fact that (i) the god of his making does not fully supply the relational and emotional fulfilment that man would have were he to have worshipped and served the true God; (ii) the god—or idol—cannot really help him in proper decision-making, for idols are dumb, having been born of the mind and skill of man; (iii) the idols are not left alone in history to pursue their dumb way. The Adversary of God—known as Satan—desires the worship of all creatures, including man. He therefore takes over all idols, and uses them in his anti-God system. Idols become dynamic in evil, In fact, as Paul said, they become infested with demonic powers (I Cor. 10:14–22). This leads us to point (iv) of man's problem, namely that man becomes the slave of his gods or idols. In rejecting God he does not really become autonomous. He becomes the member of a vast system of evil headed up by Satan, and he is caught into the slavery of sin Eph. 2:1–3; John 8:34; Prov. 5:22–23).

Conclusion: Man is Outside Kindness

In our first Study we saw that man is confused in a broken world because he has lost his link with God. Whilst human beings are never fully outside God, and never fully lose the image of God, yet the true attributes of God have been perverted. Man finds a sort of love outside of God, and with it a sort of kindness, but in the ultimate it is missing, i.e. when it comes to the pinch. We conclude then, that man must come back to God in order to find love, kindness and the like. Romans 3:11 (cf. Ps. 42:1–2) tells us that no one seeks after God, and no one understands Him. The initiation for reconciliation must come from God. This brings us to the fact of God's Fatherhood, and that Fatherhood as the source from which healing kindness flows. If we put together all the elements in these two Studies which describe man without God and man without kindness, then man is in a terrible predicament. It is this state which has been the subject of fact and fiction, and it is to this that counselling help has long been directed.

II. GOD—THE FATHER OF HIS CHILDREN

The Fatherhood of God

It is not possible in this short study to give a whole theology of God's Fatherhood. What we must observe is:

- (i) God is eternally Father, since the Son is eternally Son.
- (ii) God is not like a father, but is Father. His Fatherhood is not figurative (metaphorical) but direct. He is firstly the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so is 'our Father'. (See Ephesians 1:3; 1:2.) He is 'heavenly Father' (Matt. 23:9).

(iii) Believing man becomes a son of God when he puts his faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26; 4:4–6) and is baptized, for when he puts on Christ he also puts on Christ's Sonship and participates in that Sonship. This participation is made emotionally real by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:6).

(iv) It can be theologically argued that man was never a son of God by creation, but it is better argued that he was (Luke 3:38; Acts 17:28), that he abdicated sonship in the Fall as he also abdicated creaturehood and servanthood. This makes him a 'prodigal' son, returning to God just as he returns to creaturehood properly as 'a new creature', and becomes a servant of God, i.e. the subject of the King of the Kingdom.

The Healing Power of Fatherhood, Sonship and Familyhood

The importance in counselling of these three elements cannot be exaggerated. Man, created as a son and losing sonship through sin of the Fall, lives in anguish and dislocation that is more spiritual and emotional. He cannot be at peace until he returns to the Father. When he cries 'Abba! Father!' then he is at peace. The vocative voice places him in direct relationship with God. He cannot cry to a figurative father, but to one who is real—the Father! Firstly, much of man's pain lies in being deprived of the Father-son relationship, of the security it brings, and of the vocational emptiness he experiences when he is not doing the Father's will. These are important.

Secondly, the counsellee is deprived of true familial relationships where he is absent from the Father. The vocative 'Abba! Father!' brings him to oneness with all the family since God is primarily not my Father but our Father. He is 'the God and Father of us all' and is addressed as 'our Father!'. This is important for man is healed in the community of the Family.

Thirdly, man is brought to vocational understanding and action. Vocation is the most important thing a person can have, and it must flow from knowing God's will for it amounts to doing God's will. In fact this is what man is all about—doing God's will and so filling out history as God's plan, and so giving him the sense that he is moving to his goal and the elect of God.

The Things Which Lead to Sonship of God

Man cannot be a son until he finds God as Father. This he cannot do, of himself. Christ came to show the way to the Father. Here I suggest the reader or listener should read one or other of my books on Fatherhood, as we cannot set out the biblical matter of it in this Study. Christ the Son reveals the Father (John 1:14, 18; 5:17ff.; 14:1–10; John 17:1–5; cf. Matt. 11:27). The counsellor himself must have come to God as Father, otherwise his ministry will be in vain. Each counsellee must see himself as the prodigal, come to repentance, and come to the Father, addressing Him as such. Then healing will come.

Coming to the Kindness of the Father

We saw in Luke 6:37 that God—as Father—is kind to the ungrateful and selfish, i.e. to prodigals! But all the references to kindness in salvation such as Romans 2:4–5; Ephesians 2:7; Titus 3:54 and I Peter 2:3, show us the immense kindness of God in rescuing us from judgement and death. Then the kindness of God in bringing us to sonship,

giving us familial relationships, and establishing us in vocation are wonderful. Forgiveness, purification from sin's pollution and power, as also justification and sanctification are His kindness. We are now free from our pasts, can walk guiltless in life, and know the dynamics of our new vocation. The old anger at being deprived of true Fatherhood has vanished. Human fatherhood can now be seen without prejudice and so can be accepted. This is healing from the kindly Father, Who nevertheless will be server in discipline that is needed (Heb. 12:3–11).

It is now most important to understand this last paragraph for it is the heart of our whole Study. In the first part of our Study we dealt with man's rejection of authority. The father-mother (parental) authority are what the child objects to, for the image of God is taken from the father-mother entity since these two together represent God's image (Gen. 1:26; 5:2). It is this distorted view of God that the child carries throughout life since both parents and child are born in original sin. Anger at Father-deprivation, and refusal to recognize God, truly drive the sinner to surrogate fathers—the idols. Here love so-called—is given to and received from the idols, but proves unsatisfying. The revelation of the Father's love in the work of the Cross—which the Son effects—turns the person to the Father. The wrong image of God is exchanged for the true. God is Father! Life is now rich and wonderful. God is truly seen as love. This is the great healing.

Study Three:

Kindness For Birds With Broken Wings

I. BIRDS WITH BROKEN WINGS

What do we mean by ‘birds with broken wings’. We know that in nature birds sometimes suffer maiming, as indeed do animals. Such creatures suffer for they are vulnerable. They need to hide themselves in order to survive. Creatures of the same species will often destroy them. Among human beings we can generally find three kinds of maimed people, the first being those who seem incapable of facing up to life through innate weakness and lack of astuteness. Sometimes they are born with certain handicaps of mind or body or both, but generally handicapped people are astute and learn to cope with life even though they have impediments. The first kind of ‘birds with broken wings’ never seem to know how to handle life, but for the most part they are not evil in intent, bitter and cynical, but for the most part are gentle and honest, but lack the power to be self-helpful and to be competent to handle life. Some of them simply seem to remain poor, are dominated by others, or are without guile and lack competitiveness.

The second kind are people who seem morally sick. They could—if they would—reason out their situations, for they have the ability to live and make their way in life. However, they have lost the zest to do so. They seem always to be doing things which are wrong and awkward, and yet excuse themselves as though they are not to blame for what happens—as though they did not set out to do the acts which are wrong.

The third class of persons are those who seem to be apathetic, who feel inferior, who are easily depressed, and who seem to find life difficult to handle. They appear to be pessimistic, easily discouraged, difficult to encourage and almost seem to resent being urged or encouraged out of their pathetic states of mind.

What is common to the three groups is their inability to emerge from their states. It is as though they fatalistically believe they are set in such states for ever, and even as though they do not wish to be made whole. For the most part they do not emerge, and the question is whether we should persist with them or give up on them after a reasonable period of time. Such a question is not easily answered. We need to have enough kindness to persist until we know the answer, and then we have to consider the relationship between ‘the kindness and the severity of God’. Is severity as much required as kindness?

GETTING TO THE CAUSES OF SUCH MAIMED STATES OF BEING

It seems there are various causes for such states. Since we find these three states in the Scriptures, we can be helped by studying them. The three classes are not always distinct one from other. Sometimes elements of the three are found in one person, and this is understandable since the causes can be various.

The First Group of Persons Who Meet Troubles

There are some whom we cannot type. They just seem incapable of helping themselves, and we must persist with them. However, there are those who have been crushed by life, have been numbed to the point where they are almost insensible. They are the mental parallel to those who are physically helpless. We must seek to help them, by just bearing with them, sympathizing, and doing what good we can for them. Then there are those who are always poor, never able to rise above their circumstances, but are not indolent, angry, depressed or cunning. Jesus said, 'The poor you always have with you.' Whilst it is sometimes true that in the Scriptures poverty is a judgement of God, it is not always so. In Israel the poor were catered for in covenant fashion, i.e. the community took it upon itself to care for the poor, the indigent, the weak, the stranger—and so on. See Leviticus 18 and 25 where gleaning and other provisions are made for the poor, and the jubilee—every 50 years—gave back land to be indebted.

There are warnings against oppressing the poor (cf. Prov. 14:31). Even so, one can be poor and wise (cf. Eccl. 9:13–16). One can be poor and be greatly blessed.

The group that concerns us most is of those met in Romans 14:1–15:6, and I Corinthians 8—people who have weak faith and weak consciences. This appears to be because they do not see justification in its strong outlines. They still believe they can be caught in judgement if they do not desist from certain practices, such as eating meat offered to idols. The warnings given to the people of strong faith and conscience is that they should have their faith before God and not before man, i.e. that they constantly have in mind the weaker brother who may be stumbled by some 'strong' act. It is love which cares for the brother, i.e. the love that is kind. Helping the weak requires constant kindness.

The Second Group of Persons Who Meet Troubles

The second group is the most strongly defined. It is difficult to place them as birds with broken wings so much as those who have self-inflicted wounds! There are those in this group who do dreadful things, and so much so that some Christians say they are sick, i.e. morally sick, which means they cannot help doing what they do. Unless this group is diagnosed we may give to them the same helpful consideration and treatment we give to the above group, and that would be fateful, for this is not the kind of treatment which is necessary.

In Isaiah 1:2–4 God tells Judah that she is evil and corrupt. In verses 5–6 God says the nation is utterly sick and that this is because of its evil and corruption. The same principle is stated in Isaiah 24. Verses 1–3 describe the state of the nation and verses 4–6 show the sickness of the nation, and even of the land. People who are morally sick have first been morally sinful. To minister to them sympathetically will not be true kindness, but will prevent them seeing God's solution. In Deuteronomy Israel was warned that its sinfulness would cause God to visit it with physical illnesses (e.g. chs 27–28). The warnings are dire and strong. In respect to these things God says, 'I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.' In the New Testament we have the examples of Ananias and Sapphira who die because they have lied, and those in I Corinthians 11 who become sick and/or die

because they ‘do not discern the Lord’s body’. That is they live in wrong relationship to Christ and his people.

These, then, are people who have crippled themselves. They are under the judgement of God. We would not do well to sympathize with them, but to sense the action of God’s judgements and not interfere. We may be called upon to deliver words of exhortation, calls to repentance, and this kind of severity can lead them to healing, and so prove to be kindness. Generally people in this category lack repentance, and refuse to take responsibility for their actions, making God or others accountable.

The Third Group of Persons Who Meet Troubles

This the group which most needs our help. Again, it has a variety of people in it. We dealt with it in our last year’s series under the title *Helping the Troubled and Discomforted*. A note from that study is here appended to introduce the matter:

Note: Down through Christian history the troubles of believers have been attended by others who seek to ‘bear one another’s burdens’. There has been sympathy and aid. Prominent have been the Puritans—mainly of the 17th Century, but continuing even to today—who studied the Scriptures closely and deeply, and came up with solutions to man’s grief and sorrows. We should not ignore their great biblical insights. Of great help is William Bridges *A Lifting Up For The Downcast*. Men like Sibbes, Adams, Charnock and Goodwin—amongst others—wrote essays on such subjects as ‘The Soul’s Sickness’, ‘Physic From Heaven’, ‘The Bruised and Smoking Flax’, ‘The Returning Backslider’, ‘A Discourse of Affliction’, ‘A Discourse Proving Weak Grace Victorious’, ‘The Art of Contentment’, ‘Spiritual Mourning’. One such discourse—‘The Saint’s Comfort’ by Richard Sibbes has such headings as, ‘The children of God fall into extremity of misery and affliction’, ‘God upholdeth his [own] from sinking into trouble’, ‘Affliction stirs up devotion’. Of particular usefulness is Archibald Alexander’s work, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. Alexander was born in 1777 and died in 1851 after being President of Princeton Seminary for forty years. His book tackles the matter of the Christian’s troubles.

In the last 3 decades we have had a spate of books pouring out on the troubles of man. The comparatively new disciplines of psychology, psychotherapy and psychiatry have researched the troubled mind widely. Christian writings regarding the troubled person are quite profuse. How much of it is really useful time will eventually tell us. The fact is that probably very little that is new faces the person of today, i.e. that has not faced man down through his long history. It is to be hoped that the persons researching biblical anthropology will not spare themselves, but dig deeply into the mines of information which are at their disposal, and not opt for quick-fire methods which as Jeremiah said so long ago, ‘They have healed the wound of my people lightly’—i.e. ‘as though it were a scratch’ (Jer. 6:14).

The thinking of folk in these states can be diagnosed:

(i) The thinking and attitude is generally morbid, i.e. unrelieved by joy, humour and laughter because the person is preoccupied with himself/herself. There is a sense of foreboding as though the worst is about to happen, although there is no outward indication of coming trouble.

(ii) There is little self-esteem, or good self-image, yet the person demands attention at every point as though this were a right. At the same time the person withdraws, hiding himself, seeking to be self-effacing. There is little social interchange.

(iii) There is gloom, depression, and a deep sense of anxiety, along with apprehension of what might happen. With some this brings fear of overt action, nervousness, and even trembling and shaking.

(iv) Often such persons feel they have failed God, others, and themselves, and worry as to whether they have committed ‘the unpardonable sin’. They feel themselves to be apostate.

These kinds of feeling would today be called ‘neurotic’. We would expect Christian people to be free of such mind-states, especially as they are living under the grace of the new covenant, but obviously there are causes we cannot reach. Some of these may be physical and organic, affecting the mental state, or they may be moral, the mind being affected by what Paul calls ‘rejecting conscience’ which makes ‘shipwreck of their faith’ (I Tim. 1:19). Doubtless this is the case of many who are in the second grouping of troubled persons.

When we read the Psalms closely we find persons in different emotional states of mind, sometimes fluctuating from joy to fear, from delight to gloomy apprehensiveness. Most of these Psalms point to actual happenings, such as persecution by enemies, numerous difficulties and local circumstances, and events that bring stress. Job’s case is one in point. He was healthy enough in his mind, but was puzzled as to why trouble had come upon him. Other Psalms recognize God’s judgements and accept them, but the person suffers meanwhile. Even so, the states of mind are not morbid. They are part of what happens to people under pressure. We would not call such people ‘birds with broken wings’.

William Bridges’ *A Lifting Up For The Downcast*, and Archibald Alexander’s work, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* are both most helpful books because they face the fact that Christians can—and do—get into states of dryness, puzzlement, doubt and even morbidity. Alexander observes that it is often many years before certain persons emerge from these states, never to be caught in them again. It may well be that some sin is the cause of dryness and barrenness in the spirit of a person, but we cannot be sure. The Puritan’s warning—‘Never meddle with a man’s heart’, tells us a lot. We observe afresh that no human heart can—of itself—minister to another human heart, not, anyway, by way of correcting it. One heart is too complicated a thing to deal with. McBeth asked the court doctor,

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas’d,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

To which the physician replied,

Therein the patient must minister to himself.

Psalm 88 is an example of a man going down into deep sorrow, and there seem to be no light whatever for him. Yet the beautiful fact of the Psalm lies in the first verse, ‘O Lord, my God!’, i.e. the Psalmist addresses God. The vocative voice shows that he relates directly to God. The Psalm itself seems to show no anger or venom, only puzzlement and pain. The good thing about it is that the man is talking with God. God has His own time for bringing joy and peace to His servant.

Some Elements to Take Into Consideration When Using Kindness Towards ‘Birds With Broken Wings’

Whilst God is always the Healer (Exod. 15:26), and we can heal no one of ourselves, yet the kindness of God can flow through us to others. If we are aware of elements which affect persons in troubled states then we can better understand them, and even be able to help them. Things we should keep in mind are:

- (i) Perfectionism is a demoralizing element. It is linked with guilt, the dread of failure, the desire to achieve perfection, and the image of God as a demander of perfection. Guilt follows guilt—at failure—and compounds the problem. Some people will never attempt to do things lest they fail in them. This produces a deadly passivity. The answer is to know grace in healing of the past, and grace in restoring from failure in the present. A love-view of God will dispel perfectionism, even though that may have to be a gradual liberation.
- (ii) Anger is often—if not mostly—the problem in troubled states of mind. Anger at persons is generally anger at God, though concealed. We will be dealing with this more in Study Six, but anger generally rises from feeling God has been unfair. A sense of injustice makes us feel we are right and God is wrong. This attitude cuts us off from rich fellowship and communion with God, and with others. Some will never give up their anger. When anger is recognized as being sin, and is confessed as such, then it loses its power and the subject can be free to live afresh.
- (iii) We have seen that stress often affects people. So-called stress has always existed. It brings the thought that more than one can cope with has been demanded of us. The very thought that we are asked to do more than we can—or are not allowed to do what we wish to do—creates the idea of stress. It brings anger, and passivity—the opposition to action.
- (iv) Some people become parasitic on those who exercise kindness towards them. They refuse to bear their own burdens which life demands of them. Galatians 6:2 asks that in love (kindness) we bear burdens of others that are too heavy for them, but then that every man shall bear his own burden, i.e. that which is his own burden. It is not kindness to bear that special burden.
- (v) Some people do not wish to be healed. Jesus once asked a man if he wished to be healed (John 5:6) and the man did not give him a direct answer. Even when healed by Jesus he seemed to have something unattractive about him. Some people desire to be ill or weak, and indeed use their illnesses to dominate others or have their constant help.

Finally we can say that God knows the hearts of men and women. He knows where their lives are at any point in time. He is the Healer and can heal the heart. He calls upon us to share with our fellow-creatures, and to suffer where suffering is required, and to rejoice where that is required. Human beings with troubled minds are often that way because of their views of God and their resistance to His loving aid. Of course—as in the case of the Second Grouping—where repentance, conversion, faith and obedience are required, it will not be kindness to sustain persons in their obstinate states of mind.

In the case of the First and Third Groupings we will need to show kindness as we are led by the Spirit of God. Loving patience and patient loving can certainly help to effect healing. As we have said in previous Studies it is the revelation of God as love that brings conclusive healing to the human spirit.

General Note:

We should recognize that there are no special techniques in helping ‘birds with broken wings’, i.e. those who are seemingly incurable. There must be a desire on the part of each person to wish to be healed (see John 5:6). Yet it may be any kind of teaching or special action which will meet a need. God’s word reaches the heart when the thing spoken may seem quite irrelevant. Thus, one will respond to the word of the Cross, others to the word love, or of Fatherhood—indeed of anything! We must be aware of this, and not confine ourselves to some stereotype we have developed.

Study Four

Kindness in Family Relationships

PART I: ALL RELATIONSHIPS SPRING FROM GOD AS FATHER-CREATOR

The Matter of Family Relationships

The whole of life consists of family and family relationships. Biblically all men and women belong to the family of Adam since God ‘made of one [blood, man, human being] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation’ (Acts 17:26; cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1–7). Romans 5:21–21 shows two families, (i) all mankind in Adam, and (ii) elect mankind in Christ (cf. I Cor. 15:21ff.). As one is only in Adam, and as one is wholly in Christ, will determine the manner of family relationships we have.

God’s Fatherhood—the Basis of True Family Relationships

Luke 3:38 and Acts 17:28 indicate all our life is in God, and His Fatherhood determines the manner of those relationships. Whilst Genesis 3:1–6 and Romans 1:18–32 show that the breaking of our relationship with God substantially destroys our relationships with one another in the family of Adam, yet other Scriptures show us believing man’s restoration to sonship with God the Father, and the recreation of the elect people into the family of God (John 1:12–13; Eph. 1:4–7; 2:11–22; Gal. 3:26–28; 4:4–6; Rom. 8:14–25; I John 3:1–3; I John 3:10–18). This restoration is the basis for relationships in kindness, the matter of healing broken relationships through love and grace.

We need to see that whereas the Devil is the father of all in his world-system (I John 3:10–11; John 8:44ff.; Eph. 2:1–3), yet the heavenly Father is the One through Whom all true relationships flow. We see (i) He is the Father of us all (Eph. 4:6), i.e. we have a corporate relationship with Him (note the ‘your’ and ‘our’ in Matt. 6:9; 23:9; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:2; Rom. 8:15) and this holds the family together, thus determining relationships; (ii) God being Father we are essentially brethren, and as we relate to the Father we relate to one another (I John 3:10, 14; 2:7ff.; 4:7:5–4; I Pet. 1:22). Note that from creation there has been the expectancy of true relationships, hence the relational demands from (i) man as a created community (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:18–24), and (ii) man as a covenant community (e.g. Exod. 20:1–18; Lev. 18, 19).

Our previous Study (2: The Source and Flow of Kindness—Loving Fatherhood) shows us the full flow of relationships with others from our relationship with the Father. We must equally see that to be children of the Devil brings terrible consequences in broken relationships.

Broken Relationships From Hardness of Heart

Matthew 19:8 (cf. I Pet. 3:7) shows us that the broken relationship of divorce is from 'your hardness of heart'. Without such hardness divorce would be unnecessary. I John 3:10–11 and I John 3:14 (cf. I Pet. 1:22) should be compared. Genesis 4:1–6, 23–24 should be studied. Unkindness such as hatred and envy came because of Abel's proper relationship with God, and Cain's defective relationships. This would be the case with others—Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, the prodigal son and his elder brother. So see I Timothy 1:8–11; Romans 1:28–30. This is spoken of in I John 2:9–11; 3:11, 12, 15; 4:20. It is also the subject of the Sermon on the Mount, especially in regard to anger (Matt. 5:21–26; 18:21–35).

The Basis and Origin of Family Lies in the Triune Godhead

We now have to go back to the basis of all relationships as we have observed them in the three previous studies. Since man is made in the image and glory of God (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ps. 8:3–8; I Cor. 11:7) then he reflects the entire Godhead, and not just one member of it. The Triune Godhead is true family, i.e. Father, Son and the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Noting that Man is constituted of 'male and female' as the image of God (Gen. 1:27; 5:2) we can see that the 'He' of the Godhead subsumes 'femininity' in its 'masculinity', and that fills out the family in accordance with Ephesians 3:14–5 and 4:6. The 'our-ness' of family springs from the source of 'your heavenly Father'. We will look more deeply into this in our next Study—'Kindness in Human Sexuality' which will speak extensively of the dynamics of male-female relationships.

What we need to see here is that husband-wife, father-mother, parents-children relationships form an ontological reflection and expression of the Triune Godhead. This means that even people separated from God will have an ontological thrust to reproduce true human nature and relationships. They may fight this thrust, but it will be there. We would expect to find things filial to be generally the same across the human race, even if some cultures have regularized what we might call 'aberrations', i.e. polyandry and polygamy. From time to time the true male-female entity which is unitive to society may succumb to homosexuality, yet the ontological thrust and conscience will be a powerful factor in reconstituting what is truly anthropological.

We now need to see that within the Triune Godhead the Persons are not ego-centric but 'other person centred', e.g. the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, the Spirit to the Father and the Son. This 'other-person-centredness' is not simply a paradigm for human relationships, but the very essence of such. Whilst true human vocation is to serve God and others, man in opposing God opposes this principle also. To be a god in his own right brings him into conflict with all other [human] gods. This is the competition which shatters human relationships, even within the family, and perhaps mostly within the family. This divisiveness simply compounds itself with the growth of guilt, accusation, counter-accusation, anger—and so on.

It stands to reason that no healing or reconciliation can take place apart from the Cross (Eph. 2:11–22; Col. 1:19–21; cf. II Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:10–11). Notice that reconciliation is by God to Himself as we see in Colossians 1:20, and such reconciliation is total, i.e. the basis of alienation of man from God is wholly healed by the Atonement. It is natural then for the counsellor to come to the point of showing this reconciliation. Man reconciled to God will be reconciled to all others. His vocation of serving God and man will be renewed and he will be 'other-person-centred' in his relationships (cf. Phil. 2:1–4).

What follows (below) can only be understood in the light of the renewal of man in the image and glory of God, and the renewal of the family from this basis. The ontological will have its way, even where there is opposition from the divisive powers of darkness, and of human fleshliness—human ego-centredness. Covenant cannot be understood apart from family, nor family apart from it. The God dwelling in the midst of His people, is the Father dwelling in the midst of His family. From Him flow all relations—as we have said. So then, we can only work within the biblical prescriptions, however much we may not understand their reasoning. We cannot hope to rationalize all these prescriptions. To regard them as God’s word, God’s guidance and God’s way is to receive and obey them. Out of them will come the sort of kindness we must exercise towards others and receive from them.

PART II: THE NEW AND HEALING RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD THE FATHER

Kindness in the Family of God

I Peter 1:22 shows that conversion is with a view to ‘a sincere love of the brethren’. This is seen in I John 3:14ff. The new order is the family (Eph. 2:18–22; I Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:1–7). The pattern for relationships is set out in I Timothy 5:1–4. Family relationships are described in Ephesians 5:21–6:4 (cf. Col. 3:18–22). Kindness is to be shown to the wife (I Pet. 3:7). Kindness in marriage will prevent divorce and the painful shattering of familial relationships which comes with it (Matt. 19:9).

God’s Kindness to Us

It is essential we see the causes of wrong familial relationships, and the healing of them through love. In our next Study we will be covering the gamut of Kindness in Human Sexuality and we will see that kindness is needed in every step of the way from conception to conceiving. Let us have a fresh look at God’s kindness with a view to having this kindness towards others. In looking at it we must first note that God’s ‘loving kindness’ (chesed: steadfast love) in the Old Testament was linked with other elements, i.e. grace, long-suffering, faithfulness and forgiveness. We must never think of kindness apart from these, and our acting in kindness will be acting in all these elements.

(i) God’s Kindness Is:

- (a) In leading to salvation (Rom. 2:4–5)
- (b) In giving salvation (I Pet. 2:2–3; Rom. 2:4–4; Titus 3:4)
- (c) In discipleship enablement (Matt. 11:30).
- (d) In restoration to covenant blessings and privileges (Rom. 11:22).
- (e) For ministry (II Cor. 6:6), and as a gift for holy living (Gal. 5:22).
- (f) Towards the selfish and ungrateful Luke 5:36–37).
- (g) For future—eschatological—blessing (Eph. 2:7).

(ii) Our Kindness Must Be:

- (a) Expressed in gracious action, long-suffering, steadfast love, faithfulness and forgiveness towards others.
- (b) In holy living (Gal. 5:22) and patient ministry (II Cor. 6:6).
- (c) Along with compassion, lowliness, meekness, patience and forbearance, there must be forgiveness (Col. 3:12–14). This forgiveness must be attended with tender-heartedness (Eph. 4:32).

Counselling Relationships In and For Kindness

We have been careful to observe that without the revelation of God's kindness in the Cross, and without understanding that love, there can be little of value effected by counselling. The revelation of God as love is the way we have to work, always. This will involve the revelation of God as love through forgiveness, purification, justification and sanctification. It will involve really knowing God as Father through sonship (adoption), so that the truth of the family–brotherhood under the Elder Brother, and the Father–will now break through, and all life become truly relational. The healing of all relationships will come from the kindness which has flowed from the Father.

This new 'relationality' must express itself in truly forgiving others, in receiving the forgiveness of others, in exercising all the elements relating to kindness. For many counselees this will be too much. Generally if it is 'too much' that is because God's love and forgiveness have not properly been seen. Thus Matthew 6:21–26; 18:21ff; Colossians 3:12–14 and Ephesians 4:32 must be applied. Once applied, then kindness in the areas indicated under '(ii) Our Kindness Must Be' must be faced and dealt with. The areas of family relations under the heading 'Kindness In the Family of God' must then be applied. It is the application which tests out the willingness of the counsellee, and which, when acceded to, brings liberation.

Note: Counselees will often bring the old objections 'It is too much to forgive.' 'He/She must first repent, and make amends,'—and so on. This will not do. There must be no going over old tracks, no digging up the past. Biblical forgiveness must obtain. Love alone can heal broken relationships.

Study Five:

Kindness in Human Sexuality

SEXUALITY IS DYNAMIC

The very word 'sex' immediately evokes a response in most, if not all, of us. There is nothing more emotionally and relationally powerful than it. Doubtless this is because relational union is the most desirable of all things, and it is strongly sought. Sexuality also has the connotation of pleasure, emotional fulfilment, and since the fall Man has built a mystique around it. It is the one thing which is said to be 'the sweet mystery of life', and to have the answers for loneliness, lack of meaning to be being, emptiness—and so on. Sex is supposed to fill out all inadequacies, and give vitality in relationships. In short, all that is ontologically required in Man to be fulfilled is supposedly supplied by sex: hence, the whole build-up of human endeavour linked with sex. This view and practice of sex lays upon it a capacity and value which is foreign to it, and in fact is a distortion of it, and is a lustful and idolatrous expression of it. For many it purports to give what ontologically only God's love can supply, especially when it is worked out in Man's love to God and his neighbour.

The Meaning of Hardness and Kindness

By 'Kindness' we mean going about life and relationships in the way in which they are natural, i.e. the way in which they would have been had Man not fallen. Thus we mean 'the ontological way'. When human beings love, then they are kindly and not harsh. Of course Man has sinned, and relationships have become tangled. Anger and harshness is abroad. At the same time, God has changed the heart of fallen Man through the Atonement—the work of the Cross and the Resurrection—and so a new situation obtains. 'We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren' (I John 3:14). Gratitude to God for love and reconciliation, as well as the gifts of love and reconciliation, mean that now all relationships are conducted in kindness. By 'hardness' we mean the old sinful way of approaching others, i.e. we are ego-centred instead of 'other person-centred', and so we bring hardness and harshness into our relationships.

The Meaning of Sexuality

This is a hard definition to give, and particularly so because modern ideas of sexuality relate to biological sexual union, the relationships involved in such, as also the fruit of some biological union, namely children. Today those who copulate are called 'lovers', even if the union is illicit from a biblical point of view and would be called 'fornication', 'adultery' and 'immorality' in the Scriptures.

If we were to say, ‘There is no such thing as sexuality: there is only marriage,’ then we would be coming close to the idea of sexuality. Sexuality involves all human beings in one way or another. Sexuality is that faculty and capacity for social union with others of the human race, whether of the same gender or not. It manifests itself in the relationships of husband to wife, parents to children, children to children, all males to all females, all females to males, males to males and females to females. Sexuality in this sense covers the whole gamut of human relationships. Sexuality in a more particular sense is truly operative only within marriage. Some may think this full description too wide, but less than this is too narrow.

God and Sexuality

God is not sexual. Sexuality primarily relates to procreation—whatever anyone may say—and God does not procreate. He creates. Human beings do not create, but procreate. When, then, we speak of God—using the masculine pronoun—we do not think of God having gender as such. Our natural tendency is to compare God with what we know of human gender, so that certain scholars have arrived at feminist or masculist goals, i.e. ‘God is Mother’, ‘God is Father’, ‘God is Parent’. In the sense that they are stated, they are inadequate. Genesis 1:26–27 with 5:1–2 shows that Man (male-female) was created in the image of God, and God called ‘them’ (male-female) ‘Man’. The statement, ‘In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them,’ must mean that the male and female together constitute the image (reflection) of God. Therefore God as ‘He’ has male-female elements which can never be separated. However ‘male-female’ must not be understood by working back from human maleness and human femaleness, on the basis of ‘To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?’ (Isa. 40:18); ‘To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One’ (Isa. 40:25); ‘Who is like me?’ (Isa. 44:7). Jesus, when speaking of God as ‘Father’ said, ‘You have one Father, who is in heaven,’ meaning that we must never move up from human fatherhood to God’s unique heavenly Fatherhood and seek to parallel it with human fatherhood. Likewise the question of sexuality is out, so that maleness and femaleness as they pertain to God, cannot be arrived at by the human analogy. In this sense we must leave God as ‘wholly Other’. Since He is referred to as ‘He’ then both (so-called) maleness and femaleness of God—if those be the right terms—must be subsumed under the pronouns ‘He’ and ‘Him’. If in any sense we can talk about God’s ‘Motherness’, then it must be subsumed under His ‘Fatherhood’ so that there is no place for feminism or masculism as such.

Man and Sexuality

There are different methods of discovering the male and female elements of sexuality. Scientifically we can discover the behaviour of the two by physiological, psychological (anthropological and sociological) phenomenological enquiry. Biblically we can trace all elements in regard to Man relating to creation, his being the image of God, his relations with God and himself. We can gather the teaching regarding Man as a male-female entity, and examine the nature of human relationships as set out under God’s creation commands, and His covenantal prescriptions.

Even so we have two things to consider, (i) Man is fallen, and his average behaviour is not the true norm for human living, (ii) on any score Man is not yet fully Man since that is a matter of ultimate glorification. In this sense Man—especially Man as redeemed—is always a ‘becoming’ being, and Man as fallen and lost is always a ‘not-becoming’ being. What Man is as glorified we do not fully know—‘it does not yet appear what we shall be’—yet we know, generally, that he will be like Christ the Son, and be in the full image of God—whatever that will be!

How then do we discover what Man is, and what Man-male and Man-female really are? If we can discover these things then we will be closer to knowing what is true sexuality. In regard to Man as he is essentially, Jesus the Man is the true paradigm, the true revelation of proper humanity. As to Man-Male, Jesus is the true Bridegroom and Husband. As to the true Man-female, the church is the true Bride, the Wife and the Mother. We can discover an enormous amount about true sexual relationships from these Two, and action which is appropriate now and in this very world, for us. We will not attempt to do this at the moment, even though this is what Paul does in Ephesians 5:21–32—the full prescription for human husbands and wives.

Understanding Sexuality and Fallenness

The first two chapters of Genesis reveal Man as the image of God, and coupled with this, the creational mandate ‘to be fruitful and multiply’ as well as ‘fill up the earth and subdue it’. Only in the context of this vocation can we understand Man—the male-female entity. Without vocation we can never understand sexuality. The intimate and dynamic nature of marital unity can be discovered from 2:18–24. Whilst the male was created as Man, nevertheless he was not complete in himself in that his helpmeet had to be created out of him by God, and only then could the mandate of Genesis 1:28 become operative—i.e. the very reason for their humanity. The couple always transcend their relationships with the parents. They are ‘one-flesh’, i.e. a total and wholesome unity. They come together to commence a new unit of family, having moved out from the tutelage of the four parents, however much they may relate in the wider family sense.

This wholesome unity was fractured by the fall. The temptation to become ‘as God’ or ‘as gods (Elohim)’ broke the ‘one-flesh’ unity. The description of the woman as being ruled over by the husband, and at the same time desiring him (Gen. 3:17) shows a change in relationship since the man did not previously rule over her. They were wholly one in relationship and vocation. In the light of Genesis 4:7 ‘to desire’ may well mean ‘desire to rule’, and if that is the case, then the constant conflict between the fallen couple is explained. The man faces the curse in seeking to live from the soil. The rich prospect is that the woman will bring forth a Seed which will crush the serpent. We saw in our last study that the break of relationship between man and God brought forth a murderer in Cain, and yet grace brought forth a prophet and righteous man in Abel, i.e. Abel the man of faith (Heb. 11:4). The fall brought divided relationships right across the whole board of the human family. It is unrealistic to think that the curse for man and woman disappears with Christ. The curse remains but it can be transcended by true love (agape). Ephesians 5:21–32, Colossians 1:19–22; Galatians 3:26–29; I Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:9–10 indicate this.

The Dynamics of Human Sexuality: Hardness and Kindness

God is love. All love proceeds from Him. All things were created in love and constitute a love-ontology. Only the fall affected this. Man is to love God with his whole being, and his neighbour as himself—that is the ontological order. Only in this full context does sexuality have its true way. In the light of this creational ontology we can use the term ‘sexuality’ to cover all relationships. A child begins to learn life in the womb (cf. Ps. 139:13–18; cf. Gen. 25:21–26; Ps.58:3), and in the nest of familial security learns love and true relationships. It does not ‘cleave’ before it ‘leaves’, not having to use illicit sex to supply ‘love’—so-called, or to express anger against the parents with whom it is disaffected. We are saying that true love covers all relationships, but when hatred, self-centredness, and rivalry arise—as from the fall—then love for God turns to idolatry—known in the Scriptures as ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’—so that hardness and harshness become the order, as against the kindness of true sexuality. Let us quote the introductory paragraph to our Study:

The very word ‘sex’ immediately evokes a response in most, if not all, of us. There is nothing more emotionally and relationally powerful than it. Doubtless this is because relational union is the most desirable of all things, and it is strongly sought. Sexuality also has the connotation of pleasure, emotional fulfilment, and since the fall Man has built a mystique around it. It is the one thing which is said to be ‘the sweet mystery of life’, and to have the answers for loneliness, lack of meaning to be being, emptiness—and so on. Sex is supposed to fill out all inadequacies, and give vitality in relationships. In short, all that is ontologically required in Man to be fulfilled is supposedly supplied by sex: hence, the whole build-up of human endeavour linked with sex. This view and practice of sex lays upon it a capacity and value which is foreign to it, and in fact is a distortion of it, and is a lustful and idolatrous expression of it. For many it purports to give what ontologically only God’s love can supply, especially when it is worked out in Man’s love to God and his neighbour.

We see, then, that kindness in human sexuality has to come with salvation—redemption from the affects and effects of the fall. First let us look at hardness in sexuality.

Hardness in Sexuality

Hardness in sexuality may be defined as any use of sexuality that is only for oneself, and not for others. This may take many forms.

When our relationship with God is not true, and when a breach is made, then our essential sexuality becomes asymmetric. That is, when a child is out of relationship with one or both parents, it has a deficient relational situation and develops wrong images of father and mother, and so of male and female. These wrong images often develop aberrant and deviant forms of sexuality—approaches such as rape, incest, homosexuality, voyeurism, bisexuality and transvestite patterns. They can also produce frigidity and its opposite—over-sexuality (so-called)—in a relationship where one demands and the other is frozen into non-response. (*Counselling for our Comfort*, Study 7, 1988, NCTM).

These are some of the elements which go wrong, and there are many more. It should not be thought that deviant sexuality is irredeemable, but the actions of guilt in wrong sexuality should be understood. Illicit sexual actions bring intense guilt, which triggers off further action, compounding the sexual problem. Since chastity is the true order prior to marriage, and within marriage all pre-marital and extra-marital sex can only bring problems. The denial of total ‘one-flesh’ unity in marriage, and the ensuing

guilt is the greatest cause of division in relationships. Accusation and counter-accusation disturb what could be a reasonable and fruitful relationship. The unspoken war between men and women—husbands and wives—continues, and familial problems are many. The children should have love and security in which to work out their life-developments, but whilst there is an ego-use of sexuality there will never cease to be pain, unfulfilment, recourse to other centres of sexuality, and so family divisions, personal anger and cruelty—including crimes of homicide, patricide, matricide, parricide, and general restlessness in the community. Unfulfilled partners—whether married or not—will continue to make those demands which seem right and justified, but which by nature of the case cannot be fulfilled. This is the harshness of egotistic sexuality.

Kindness in Human Sexuality

Biblically, we have a wealth of material for kindly sexuality. The true nature of Man—the man-woman entity, the beautiful nature of marriage—being the one-flesh entity, and fulfilling life by obedience the creational mandate—all of these things constituting kindly sexuality. The prescriptions of the covenant for all relationships—from the cradle to the grave—make for rich and happy marriage and family relationships. Even the curse can be a blessing when accepted, for love can find a way. The sacrificial system in Israel gave constant freedom from the ravages of guilt and failure. With the coming of Christ we have freedom from the pressure to find fulness in sexuality as many have absolutized it. Normal family relationships are possible—and enabled—under grace.

Passages such as Ephesians 5:21–6:4; Colossians 3:18–21; I Timothy 5:1–4 and I Peter 3:1–7 are full of meaning and practical prescription. Most of all we now have the purity which makes every marriage possible, the love which enables all members of the family to have true relationships—if they will—and the true images of Bridegroom—Husband—Father—Son as also Bride—Wife—Mother—Sister. The sources of the Godhead can be drawn upon (Eph. 2:14–15; 4:6) for every relationship. Children growing up in security will not be driven to look upon ‘sex’ as the be-all and end-all for everything.

At the same time the power of vocation will be present, i.e. the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28, and the redemptional mandate of Matthew 28:19–20. The unity of the marital couple will be known richly and fully in filling the mandate together, and in calling their children to share in the same. All of this is living in kindly sexuality.

Counselling Sexuality in Kindness

Sexual relationality knows no rationality. The drive for human sexual union is the most powerful we know because of its elements of intimacy, union, pleasure, sociality, relationality—and so on. Because sexuality is ontological, human beings seek their fulfilment in and by it. Anything may damage the relationship, such as fallenness, the curse, failure to find fulfilment, disloyalty, lust, anger—and many more. Healing such relationships is impossible through human intervention. Deep and dangerous anger, cavernous fissures and splits, alienation and bitterness are found in sexuality more than in any other area—if indeed there is another area!

Behind all this is the failure first to be loved by God, and to love Him, thus loving others. Again the counsellor will have to give the revelation of God as love.

Christians—and others—sometimes have images of marriage which are not fulfilled by the partner. A legalistic demand cannot bring the partner into line, but rather increase the division. The same human selfishness we all have is disguised as ‘a right’. Only the sight of God’s overwhelming and healing love will liberate a partner. We must remember the sexuality streams run very deep and are hidden from our eyes. The drive for fulfilled sexuality is incredibly strong. There is no easy solution in this area.

Counselees will generally see the other person as wrong, as the defaulter and the trouble, and the counsellee must not be forced into taking sides. No healing will take place until at least one partner sees and receives the love and forgiveness of God, and so recognizes the problem, and is ready for its healing. The witness of this change may then dramatically change the other partner. It is getting to causes rather than dealing with symptoms which makes for helpful counselling.

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Study Six

Kindness to the Bitter, the Angry and the Confused

THE BITTER AND THE SWEET

‘Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.’ So wrote the author of Ecclesiastes. ‘Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity,’ sang the Psalmist (133). ‘And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31). ‘And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.....’ (Gen. 2:9). ‘Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected’ (I Tim. 4:4). ‘I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.....’ (Rom. 14:14). ‘.....God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy’ (I Tim. 6:17). ‘Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ (Gen. 18:25). ‘We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him’ (Rom. 8:28).

These references, along with many more, show that God’s world is pleasant, full of light and sweetness. This thought is expanded in one of our Studies in the 1988 Counselling series, ‘The Profitable Pursuit of Pleasure’. Because of the Fall and human sin, the world does not always present a pleasant prospect. An effect of sin is to produce a perverse view of God, creation, man and the future. So in Isaiah 5:20 the prophet says,

Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!

Psalm 18:25–26 has the same thought,

With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;
with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;
with the pure thou dost show thyself pure;
and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.

All of these things tell us God’s creation is good, and there is nothing about which to complain. Whilst sin may foul things up, and judgement must come upon wrong-doing, yet in all of this God is blameless. It is because we do not see this—or will not—then because of sin and guilt, men and women become bitter. There is no true basis for bitterness, In the Scriptures the fact of bitterness is recognized and stated.

Coming to Bitterness

'Bitterness' derives from Old English 'biter' so that we have 'biting words' from which 'bitterness' is born. Biblically man knows bitterness because he forsakes God and so lives in intense misery. His life of bondage to sin and evil is a bitter thing. Deprived of true joy he reacts critically to much of life's experiences. If poor, childless, persecuted and unfortunate he will give way to bitterness of spirit and to bitter tears, and more so when the wretchedness and misery reach intolerable dimensions. In Hebrews 12:15 the writer exhorts, 'See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled.' The term 'root of bitterness' is from Deuteronomy 29:18–19,

'Beware lest there be among you a man or a woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away this day from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'

Note the bitter root is not a principle but a person—'he'. A bitter person is one who refuses the grace of God, espouses worship of idols, and goes his own stubborn way. There are many such bitter persons such as Cain, Lamech, Ishmael, Esau, Saul, Shimei Simon Magus, the older brother of the prodigal, to some degree Jonah, Martha—and so on. When we look at these bitter persons we see they were bitter for varying reasons. Reasons for bitterness are often a sense of injustice, cruelty, harsh circumstances, parental failure and similar things. In the case of Cain it was his guilt before God and the anger against his brother. Lamech shows a terrible hardness in his bitterness. Ishmael was 'born of the flesh' and probably thought that Isaac's being heir was unfair. Esau is selected in Hebrews 12:16–17 as being 'immoral or irreligious', i.e. secular. In Genesis 27:34, on hearing how his brother had taken away the blessing Esau 'cried out with an exceeding great and bitter cry'. There was murder in his heart. Saul was bitter against David because he succeeded where Saul did not. Shimei had a bitter hatred in his heart for the same David. Jonah was bitter—'angry even unto death'—because God did not destroy Nineveh. Martha had bitterness because she was 'anxious and troubled about many things'. Simon Magus of all most closely approaches the 'bitter root' of Deuteronomy 29:19—a man who would have infected the church with occult.

Coming to Anger

Anger is a vast subject in the Scriptures: perhaps one of the primary ones. For an extensive study see my *Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?* (NCPI, 1984) and last year's Counselling Study Essay 'Goodbye to Anger!' There we saw that anger simply comes from one not having one's own way, since one has one's own plan, and when God or man come between it and us, we are angry. Since God has righteous anger and because we are made in His image then there may be occasions of 'righteous anger', but such anger has the habit of immediately passing over into self-righteous anger. Anger is always irrational and causes us to take steps and actions which are not objectively considered, thus adding to our guilt and so compounding our anger.

The strongest words against anger are Christ's in Matthew 5:21–22 and show us the dangerous character of anger,

You have heard that it was said to men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

The Way in Which Anger Works

The following Scriptures speak for themselves. Indeed a study of them helps us to understand the inner nature of wrong anger:

For jealousy makes a man furious,
and he will not spare when he takes revenge (Prov. 6:34).

A man of quick temper acts foolishly,
but a man of discretion is patient (Prov. 14:17).

He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,
but passion makes the bones rot (Prov. 14:29–30).

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger (Prov. 15:1).

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,
but he who is slow to anger quiets contention (Prov. 15:18).

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city (Prov. 16:32).

Good sense makes a man slow to anger,
and it is his glory to overlook an offence (Prov. 19:11).

The north wind brings forth rain;
and a backbiting tongue, angry looks. (Prov. 25:23).

Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming;
but who can stand before jealousy? (Prov. 27:4).

Scoffers set a city aflame,
but wise men turn away wrath (Prov. 29:8).

A man of wrath stirs up strife,
and a man given to anger causes much transgression (Prov. 29:22).

For pressing milk produces curds,
pressing the nose produces blood,
and pressing anger produces strife (Prov. 30:33).

Coming to Human Confusion

Confusion is a word often used today. It is also a biblical word. By confusion we understand that state of mind and life where it is difficult to have clear thinking, make definite choices, and understand matters that count. We often speak of 'being phased' by something. We cannot concentrate and 'get out act together'. Confusion is a most disconcerting state of mind and experience. We generally associate it with tiredness, conflict and stress. In many cases it does link up with anger and bitterness—a mind that is restless. In the Scriptures the words for confusion are synonymous with shame, humiliation, disgrace, dishonour, discomfort, being confounded and knowing enforced silence. They indicate lack of security, serenity and steady assurance.

We know that at Babel there was a confusion of tongues, but then it was also an ethnic confusion. Often there was confusion in battle, especially when God confused the enemy (I Sam. 7:10). Sometimes the Psalmist would call down confusion from God upon his enemies (Ps. 35:4, 26; 40:14; 44:7) so that confusion is looked upon as a terrible state. Often God Himself brought down that state of confusion to a nation (Isa. 19:14; 34:11; cf. 22:5). Idol makers also knew confusion (Isa. 45:16, 'All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together'). In Jeremiah chapter 7, Israel is accused by God of going after Baal and the other gods foreign to Israel, and He asks (verse 19) the question, 'Is it I whom they provoke? says the Lord. Is it not themselves, to their own confusion?' In Micah 7 'there is none upright among men' for 'the godly man has perished from the earth' so that the day of evil man has come, the day of punishment and 'now their confusion is at hand'. Daniel's famous prayer of the 9th chapter acknowledges the national sin of Israel. He says (verses 7–8, 'To thee, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us confusion of face, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to all Israel.....To us, O Lord, belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.'

One might say that confusion comes when we do not understand the sovereignty of God—'Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!' It is when we ignore the goodness of His creation, the goodness of His plan for creation and man, and when we seek egotistically—and therefore politically—to understand the motions and trends of history, that we come to confusion. In this state of confusion we compound our guilt and sin, lose an understanding of the truth and so increasingly fail to walk the Way, i.e. in the word and plan of God.

Bitterness, Anger and Confusion Are Really One

Whilst we must agree that many elements of victimization happen to human beings in history, yet at core man is a responsible accountable creature, not only responsible for his choices, but also for his reactions and responses to adverse elements which come upon him. Bitterness, anger and confusion are at their worst in man where there is self-pity and rage against such elements as parental upbringing, heredity, environment and circumstances.

Kindly Counselling For Bitterness, Anger and Confusion

Proverbs 14: 29–30 says,

He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,
but passion makes the bones rot.

The word ‘passion’ here, catches up many ideas such as zeal, jealousy, envy passion and bitterness—all elements of an intense and hasty person. The statement, ‘passion makes the bones rot’ is a thought often repeated in Hebrew thinking of the Old Testament. Psalm 31:10 has it,

For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
My strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.

In Psalm 32 the writer simply calls his problem ‘sin’,

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

When we put together all the tempestuous, angry, embittered and confused persons we have mentioned above, then we can see that this intensity of feeling, life and experience does not come from the source of love, joy and peace. Given that it is difficult to live in a world that has fallen creatures and a vast system of evil, yet the man and woman of God can keep their integrity in it by reliance upon Him, upon His grace and His love. Kindly living is simply living according to the law-of-love principle set out in both Old and New Testaments—in creation, and in the ‘old’ and ‘new’ Covenants.

To those who do not know and pursue kindly living, there must be the ministry of kindly counselling. Bitterness must be exchanged for sweetness, darkness for light, love for anger, simplicity of understanding and life for confusion. It may seem easy to say this, but there is a way to effect these changes.

The Cross—the Place of True Healing and Transformation

As in other cases we cannot escape from the only way of healing. The wounds and sins of man are very deep. We must not try to heal them ‘as though they were a scratch’ (Jer. 7:14). In Deuteronomy chapters 28 and 29 God tells of the punishment He will bring upon Israel for their sin, especially where there is no repentance: ‘The Lord will send upon you, curses, confusion and frustration in all that you undertake to do.....The Lord will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness.....’ Israel had to return to God in order to be healed for God had promised, ‘I am the Lord, your healer’ (Exod. 18:25).

Christ came to heal all afflictions, whether they arose from the sin of man, the cruelty of man, or the works of evil powers. He personally brought men and women out of bitterness, anger and confusion as he ministered in Palestine, but the healing for all was effected through the Cross. In dealing with men's sin he set them free to live wholesome lives. In I Peter 2:24 the writer directs us to Isaiah 53 with its wealth of healing and transforming teaching.

The counsellor must be able to show

- (i) that God is love through what He has done on the Cross, and that He is not a vengeful deity reflecting the human elements of bitterness, anger and confusion, but One who dispels them through His grace of the Atonement,
- (ii) that Christ has borne all our griefs and sorrows as well as our sins and our guilts, and so we do not have to live with our hurts and angers,
- (iii) that our bitteresses, angers and confusion were all borne by him to extinction, and they are no more. We can deal with anger because it has been dealt with; we need have no bitterness because the bitterness has been destroyed, and the confusion that comes from bitterness, anger and guilt is no more. It has been dissipated in his death and resurrection.

This is the heart of kindly counselling, and he who has not already seen his own bitterness, anger, confusion and guilt dealt with at the Cross can be of no help to anyone on this most wonderful of all levels. If he understands the teaching of being crucified with Christ, then he understands the liberation of the human spirit in the forgiveness, love, cleansing and justification of God.

Study Seven:

The Kindness That Heals Us All–All-in-All

HUMAN STATES OF ILLNESS

There are many forms of illness in the human race. Some are organic, including those which come from disease, or are diseases. Then there are those classified as psychosomatic, i.e. manifestations of illness from a conflict or interaction of mind and body. Finally there are illnesses of mind or soul (psyche) or spirit (pneuma), often known as mental breakdown, neuroses and psychoses. There are mysterious maladies which cannot be categorized, as they evade the classifications given in this paragraph. In our present study we are concerned to discover how we can help people in trouble of any kind, such as we have discussed in previous studies. First we must discover the aetiology of sickness and states of malady, and proceed from there. However, we should recognize that there are limitations to our understanding in this area, and certainly limits upon our ability to heal. Behind it all stands Exodus 15:26, 'I the Lord am your healer'.

Some Causes of Sickness

Sin is not, itself, sickness, but a sickness in man results from sin and its guilt, as we shall see. To call certain states of human experience 'sickness' is to give the idea that man becomes infected, or certain afflictions come upon him, when, in fact, he is responsible for them. In such cases healing cannot take place because man sees these things as visitations and not as arising from his wrong-doing. A fair example is seen in Isaiah 1:4–5. In verse 4 God says,

'Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
sons who have dealt corruptly!
They have forsaken the Lord,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
they are utterly estranged.'

Note that Israel is simply evil, doing wickedness. In verses 5–6 we see the outcome of this attitude and action, i.e. sickness,

Why will you still be smitten,
that you continue to rebel?
The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even to the head,
 there is no soundness in it,
 but bruises and sores,
 and bleeding wounds;
 they are not pressed out, or bound up,
 or softened with oil.

The same principle is found many times in the Psalms. The classic example is in Psalm 32. In verses 1–5 David says, in essence, ‘Look! The most blessed state of a man is forgiveness and justification—from God. I had terrible guilt, but would not acknowledge (i.e. confess) the fact, and so illness gripped me. It was terrible. When I confessed—following repentance—then I was forgiven, and so my illness departed.’ Look in verses 3–4 at the nature of the sickness which resulted from encapsulating sin within himself,

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away
 through my groaning all day long.
 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me;
 my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Now look at the healing: Verse 5 says,

I acknowledged my sin to thee,
 and I did not hide my iniquity;
 I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’;
 then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

Note that sin is not forgiven—as such, but ‘the guilt of my sin’. Guilt is a dynamic factor in human experience. Psalm 103:3 supports this fact that sickness comes from sin, and healing from forgiveness, i.e. the removal of guilt when it says, in verse 3 ‘who forgives all your iniquity, and heals all your diseases’. First there is forgiveness and then healing.

This principle is seen in the N.T. when Christ heals the man who was a paralytic (Matt.9:1–8, Mark 2:1–12, Luke 5:17–26). When he says, ‘Son, take heart, your sins are forgiven,’ the listeners (mostly Pharisees and teachers of the law) take umbrage. They say, ‘This is blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins.’ Jesus then tests them, saying in effect, ‘You believe with me that this sickness comes from sin. The test that this man is effectively forgiven his sins is that the sickness will now disappear, and he will become whole. Very good, watch me, for I say to the man, “Rise up, take up your bed and go home.”’ This group of critics was powerfully convinced that the man was healed because forgiven, for they ‘glorified God who had given such authority to men’ i.e. ‘to forgive their sins and to heal their diseases’. See Matt. 9:8, Mark 2:12, Luke 5:26.

We need now to verify the claim that sicknesses can come from sin, and that forgiveness can heal. Before we do this we must note that we are not saying ‘All sickness come from sin, and so all sicknesses can be healed by forgiveness.’ All sicknesses are not from sin as is seen in John 9:3.

God is the God Who Wounds and Heals

Some Christians believe all sicknesses come from Satan, and that God never visits human beings with sickness. It is clear that in some cases Satan is permitted to visit people with sicknesses, and with spirits, but then only under the sovereign control of God. It is God's world, not Satan's. Deuteronomy 32:39 says, 'I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.' Hannah says, 'The Lord kills and brings to life' (I Sam. 2:6), and the king of Syria asks, 'Am I God to kill and make alive?' (II Kings 5:7) In regard to infirmities God asks Moses, 'Who makes him [a man] dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind?' (Exod. 4:11). Amos asks the people, 'Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it?' (Amos 3:6). God claims, 'I form light and create darkness, I make weal and I create woe' (Isaiah 45:7). Isaiah 31:2 records, 'He is wise and brings disaster.'

These examples could be greatly multiplied. God seeks to kill Moses over the matter of circumcision (Exod.4:24–26), He permanently damages Jacob's thigh, destroys Uzzah when he seeks to steady the Ark, afflicts Pharaoh's house with plagues, because he takes Sarai, Abram's wife. In the Exodus era God brings plagues upon Egypt, even to killing firstborn sons. Miriam is made leprous as a judgement, and King Uzziah also for sacrificing at the altar. Many of Israel are destroyed at Baal-Peor because of their terrible sin. In I Kings 13:4ff. the prophet of God is destroyed because he will not obey the Lord implicitly. These are just a few of the affliction God brings because of human evil.

In Deuteronomy 4:15ff. Moses warns Israel against idolatry, lest God destroy the people. In 7:15 he says God will not lay upon them the diseases they had known in Egypt if they will obey Him. In 28:25ff. there are some fearsome warnings. If disobedient Israel will receive, 'curses, confusion, and frustration'. 'The Lord will smite you with fever, and with consumption, inflammation, fiery heat, and with drought and blasting and mildew.' 'The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt, and with the ulcers, and the scurvy and the itch, of which you cannot be healed,.....madness, blindness, and confusion of mind.'

We may think the situation is different in the N.T. but in it Ananias and Sapphira perish at God's hand. Elymas is blinded. Herod is smitten with mortal sickness. Those who do not 'discern the body' are judged so that 'some of you are weak and ill, and some have died' (I Cor. 11:29–30). The book of the Revelation is filled with accounts of horrific plagues, famines, earthquakes and the like which have come to man from God's hand.

God, The One Who Heals.

God is the true Healer, yet His healing and His smiting are together. In Exodus 15:26 God says,

'If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord your Healer.'

Many take this statement, 'I am the Lord your Healer' out of its context. He is not only Healer, but also 'Giver of sickness'. We now quote some Scriptures which relate to healing, namely Exodus 23:25; II Kings 20:3ff.; Psalms 6:2, 9; 30:2; 41:4; 103:2; 107:17–20; 147:3; Jeremiah 33:6–9 (cf. Jer. 8:22; 30:12–17; 46:11), Isaiah 57:18–19; 58:6–9; Ezekiel 37:1–14; 47:12; Revelation 22:1–3.

The healings by prophets (such as Elijah and Elisha), and by Christ, his disciples, and the early church, are all included in God's work as Healer.

We conclude this section, then, by summing up the principle of sickness and healing as generally found in Scripture. Much—though not all—illness is the result of sin and its guilt. Guilt lays the foundation for sickness. Repentance and confession can bring healing, but it is God who personally heals, and healing is not simply a process which takes place, of itself. Every sin is against God and He must forgive before healing can take place. The paradigm for this principle is found in Psalm 32:1–7 and Jeremiah 30:12–17. These two passages demand much thoughtful study.

What and How Christ Healed

The stories of the paralytic in Matthew 9:1–8, and the sick man in John 5:1–12, makes it clear that some who were sick were ill because of sin. Others were not (cf. John 9:13). Jesus healed all who came to him no matter what the cause of their sickness. He called his healing the power of the Kingdom coming upon them (Matt. 4:23f.; 12:28). He just healed them and gave no special command to prepare them for the healing that they might 'merit' it. In Matt. 8:16–17 we read,

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'

The context shows he had authority and power to do this, but in no sense then did he bear the guilt that was the cause of those sins. That came later, on the Cross, for in Isaiah 53: 4 we read, 'Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows', which can also be translated 'He bore our sicknesses and carried our pains'. However, the context shows that 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed,' i.e. the guilt which he took upon the Cross is what heals us now.

The Kindness of Healing

We have spent a lot of words showing that ultimately God is the Wounder and the Healer—a fact for which we ought to be grateful. Now we need to come to the areas where we may be able minister—more what we might call 'inner illnesses'. We ought to leave medical illnesses to the medicos, and mental illnesses to the doctors of the mind, but we know illnesses are never only of the body or the mind. The aetiology of illness we have used above ought to tell us that. Jeremiah the prophet saw the terrible illnesses and wounds of his people linked with their rebellion against God, and it may well be that different forms of illness, today, arise from similar causes. Passages to look at in Jeremiah are 6:13–15; 8:9–12; 8:18–9:1, and if these are linked with passages in the Psalms, such as 31:10; 32:1–5; 38:1–8; Proverbs 14:30–31 (and related passages on anger), the passages in Isaiah 1 and 24, as also Deuteronomy 4, 7, 28 in the O.T and Acts 5:1–11; I Corinthians 11:27–32 in the N.T., then we will know states of mind, soul and body can be healed when human guilt and rebellion are dealt with by God.

I am sure that if we go back to the problems dealt with in our former Studies—people in confusion, brokenness, in aberrated sexual and familial relationships, who are bitter, angry and confused, let alone caught up in horrible and heinous sin and crime—we will find the cause is much the same in most cases, i.e. separation from God, ego-living, and deep-seated guilt.

The Healing of the Cross

The deep healing that man needs lies in the Cross. The key lies in Isaiah 53:3–12. In verse 4 some translations have ‘He bore our sicknesses and carried our pains’. Matthew 8:17 translates, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’. Those who go to this passage directly for physical (organic) healing, forget that it deals with the basis of sickness—guilt—for it goes on to say,

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.

The cause, then, of our many states of illness or disintegration is moral-spiritual. All problems arising from guilt have been dealt with in the Cross. All wounds caused by our sins have been healed in his wounds. All angers, hurts, resentments, reactions caused by others—and not primarily by ourselves—have had their pain taken away in the suffering of Christ, so that we are freed from all things—if we will have it that way! Whilst—by nature of the case—the effects of belief in the Atonement may take some time to surface, the action will be immediate on belief and acceptance. How wonderful.

Impediments to Healing

There can be impediments. If we refuse to believe some of our illnesses come from our own sins, and if we do not apply to the Cross, then healing will not come. If we wish to retain our sense of injustice and the anger that goes with it—often against both God and man—then we will not be healed. ‘Go in peace, your faith has made you whole [has healed you]’, tells us there will be no peace or healing apart from faith in Christ’s Cross-work. We sometimes think the indignity done by others such as putting down our humanity, despising our persons, our social status, or racial origins, our gifts and our abilities are beyond (our) forgiving. We believe we are victimized, and so we burn for justice (vengeance) and this against the advice of Romans 12:18–21 and other passages quoted in our previous Study. Thus we refuse the way of peace—the way of love and forgiveness. God’s forgiveness dies on us because we refuse to forgive.

Some seek supernatural healing of bodily and mental sicknesses, and refuse the means God has put into the world through medicine and the Gospel. Some refuse to see that the ultimate age has not yet come—as in Revelation 21:1–3 where sickness, suffering and death are no more. They are even angry that this age has not become as the age-to-come. They will accept infirmity in this age, of any kind. They forget ‘the body is doomed to death because of sin’ and refuse the oncoming of frailty and death—probably because they are afraid of death (I John 4:18; Heb. 2:14–15).

The Ultimate Wholeness

We know that we can have the life of the new creation now, in this life (II Cor. 5:17), but we are also told suffering is part of the plan (Rom. 8:18–25; II Cor. 4:16–18). Whilst we cannot be sickness-proof, trouble-proof and death-proof we can say that we can now experience ‘the peace of God which passes all understanding’. In the new age all will be whole and complete, but the new age has not yet come in time, for it is to come at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Meanwhile we can share the kindness of the Lord with those whom we love and who love us, as also with ‘the ungrateful and selfish’ (Luke 6:35–36), for ‘Judgement is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgement,’ i.e. who are merciful need never fear judgement.

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