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A Prescription for False Hope and Evil

How the Church Has Allowed Sin to Escape

by David M. Tyler

"[T]he medical model of human behavior, when carried to its logical conclusions, is both nonsensical and nonfunctional. It doesn't answer the questions which are asked of it, it doesn't provide good service, and it leads to a stream of absurdities worthy of a Roman circus," wrote E. Fuller Torrey, M.D., in *The Death of Psychiatry*.¹

Garth Wood, in *The Myth of Neurosis: Overcoming the Illness Excuse*, observed, "For far too long people have been led to believe that the person suffering from an excess of life's problems needs 'expert' medical and psychotherapeutic intervention, thus allowing the 'patient' to qualify for 'illness,' ... Such a view is dangerous nonsense. If we are not ill then we are well, although we may be unhappy."²

The Apostle Paul, in Romans 3:23, declared, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Words can be powerful. They can inspire and they can comfort. Words can move us to action. They can calm a raucous crowd and quiet a fright-



ened child. Words such as "*sola fide*" have shaped Christianity. A word such as "freedom" shapes our world.

The words, "That's one small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind" helped shape a generation.

Words affect thoughts and behavior. Changing a word's usage can have far-reaching consequences. Consider the word, "gay." Heard in conversation, its meaning 100 years ago was not the same as it is today. Often, the impact of words on a culture is silent and slow. Sometimes the impact is considered positive, sometimes negative.

In the mid-1960s, a remarkable event related to a word occurred in evangelicalism. The event would have a devastating effect on evangelism and the sanctification of believers. Yet, in spite of the destructive consequences, this event went unnoticed by many Christians.

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At that time, a major shift began in how evangelicals viewed and dealt with sin. The Church stopped calling sinful and deviant behavior "sin" and started calling it "sickness." The sexual sinner Paul wrote about (1 Corinthians 6:9) became the sex addict. The thief (1 Corinthians 6:10) became the kleptomaniac. The drunkard (1 Corinthians 6:10) became the alcoholic. The rebellious child (2 Timothy 3:2) became afflicted with "Oppositional Defiant Disorder." A family in which the husband will not work, the wife will not keep the home, and the children will not obey is no longer considered sinful; it is dysfunctional. The liar became a compulsive liar. The gambler became a compulsive gambler. The idolater became a person who suffers from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. The "deeds of the flesh, which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing" (Galatians 5:19-21) have all been redefined using psychopathological words.

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

the drunkard has a "disease" called alcoholism, he is no longer accountable for his behavior, rather, he is sick. It is not his fault. He has no need to repent; he needs 12 steps to recovery. Sick people need recovery. Sinners need Christ.

Pastors must realize that when they turn sin into sickness in the pulpit or in ministering to others, they are preaching "another gospel." Paul wrote:

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

WORLDLY WORDS VS. SPIRITUAL WORDS

The faculty of language and speech is one of the greatest abilities God gave to mankind. Of all the things man does, speaking is one of the most important. The uniqueness of language is highlighted in God's revelation to man through His Word. Jesus Christ Himself is the living Word. When God spoke and wrote, He raised language to a place of significance. Spoken and written language became the principal medium of truth. Through words, God revealed Himself. Through words, God reveals His plans and purposes. Through words, God defined, explained, and interpreted the world around Adam and Eve. God said to them:

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

and it was so" (Genesis 1:28-30, NAS).

God spoke, but Satan spoke also. God's authority was challenged and His words were contested. The devil had a dramatically different way of explaining and interpreting Adam and Eve's world:

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

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

It is not the facts, but the interpretation of those facts at the core of the issue. Many explanations of life and the world do not recognize the authority of God and are, therefore, incompatible with a biblical worldview. The right things are not said because the right things are not believed. Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and believed an interpretation that was contrary to God's truth. From that point forward, the war of words has been raging. Today, Christians are listening to sinful man's —

or the serpent's — interpretation of the facts, rather than God's.

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

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

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

The Church has always been involved in a defensive battle involving ideas and words. These battles can be found all through the New Testament and Church history. There were debates about Jesus' identity and nature (Matthew 16:13). There were disputes over Christ's bodily resurrection (Acts 17:18). There were arguments as to whether a person must keep the Law of Moses in addition to faith in order to be saved (Acts 15:5).

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he spoke of his concern about worldly philoso-

phies that were being taught at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). The battle of ideas and words continued throughout the centuries as one heretical idea arose after another. Conflicts of ideas and philosophies are what led the early Church to organize its statements of doctrinal beliefs, such as the deity of Christ, personage of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and so on. During the Middle Ages, perversion had crept into the Church, and a battle of ideas concerning the purity of the New Testament and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was fought by the Reformers.

In the 18th century, man became "enlightened" and optimistically believed his reasoning powers and scientific approaches would lead to a brighter future without God. In the 19th century, problems and challenges arose from Darwinism and Freudianism. Since the Church's inception, it has been in one skirmish after another with competing worldviews, ideas, and words.

A worldview is a set of beliefs that shapes the way a person views his world. It is the lens through which a person processes the events in his life. There is a biblical worldview, a naturalistic worldview, and so on. Every person has his or her own worldview. Thus, the correct worldview is very important in understanding words, ideas, events, and behaviors. Many disagreements among individuals stem from their differing worldviews. Atheists and Christians, Protestants and Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Arminians, and others have different worldviews. In each case, man has constructed a grid, as it were, that filters out certain ideas and arguments leading him to a belief or an interpreted fact. Those whose worldviews differ often consider those with other views to be in error. Confused? Know this: God's Word is absolute truth!

Christians need to start thinking of Christianity not as a collection of bits and pieces of ideas to be believed, but as a complete, conceptual system — a total worldview, as it was originally

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

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

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

Evangelicals have been habituated to think and speak psychologically. Biblical words — words taught by the

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

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

“Rather than according to Christ” is the pivotal phrase Paul used to describe the system of doctrine (world-view) that had found its way to Colossae. It was a philosophy setting up the wisdom of man in opposition to the wisdom of God. “Man’s wisdom,” over the centuries, has taken many different forms, including the present-day sin/sickness movement. It has varied with time and culture, but it has always been present in one guise or another, to displace Christ’s sufficient Word with man’s wisdom.

DECLARING PEOPLE SICK

In the early 1960s “illness” meant physical illness. The criterion for determining a disease was a change, alteration, or abnormality in the structure or function (anatomy or physiology) of the body as determined by invasive or non-invasive testing and/or a patient’s history and thorough physical examination. According to *Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary*, “disease” is defined as “Disturbed or

abnormal structure or physiological action in the living organism as a whole, or in any of its parts.”³ Abnormalities in these findings make it possible for a physician or pathologist to distinguish between the presence or absence of a disease. For example, a family physician takes a throat culture and discovers the presence of infectious streptococcus. A radiologist reads the result of an MRI indicating the presence of a brain tumor. A dermatologist takes a biopsy of a mole, sends it to the lab where a pathologist discovers no disease or abnormality. By using objective methods (throat culture, MRI, biopsy, etc.) for discovering physical abnormalities, physicians can make a diagnosis. Abnormal anatomy or physiology dictates the presence or absence of disease.

Dr. Thomas Szasz, a psychiatrist and well-known critic of psychiatry and author of hundreds of papers and books, says of disease:

“All too often the problem of defining disease is debated as if it were a question of science, medicine, or logic. By doing so, we ignore the fact that definitions are made by persons, that different persons have different interests, and hence that differing definitions of disease may simply reflect the divergent interest and needs of the definers.”⁴

Szasz goes on to say:

“...the decisive initial step I take is to *define illness as the pathologist defines it — as a structural or functional abnormality of cells, tissues, organs, or bodies*. If the phenomena called mental illnesses manifest themselves as such structural or functional abnormalities, then they are *diseases*; if they do not, they are *not*.”⁵

There are constraints on a physician when he seeks to determine the presence of disease. In the past, a physician was constrained, bound, and limited to the scientific method. Disease was discovered based on objective tests. Under the new criteria in

vogue today, instead of discovering disease by objective measures, a person can be declared sick based solely upon his complaint and the subjective opinion of the health care provider.

For example, one complains, “Doc, I’ve been having headaches for the past several weeks.” The doctor replies, “You have a brain tumor. I need to operate first thing in the morning.” You ask, “How do you know I have a brain tumor?” The doctor says, “You said you have headaches.” You reply, “But doctor! Couldn’t my headaches be caused by a sinus infection, low blood sugar, eye strain, stress, or lack of sleep?”

Surgery is risky business. Taking medication for a declared mental condition diagnosed by subjective means is also risky business. When sin is called sickness, the boundaries and limits of good sense are removed and people are subjectively declared sick.

Today’s diagnostic criteria say there does not have to be a change or abnormality in the structure of the body for a person to have a disease. If a person behaves badly, in a bizarre way, or fails to exercise self-control, he may be *declared* sick. After all, one who kills another has to be sick. Normal people do not kill or behave in wicked ways. At the core, there is good in every man, right? Wrong, see Jeremiah 17:9. The Bible says Cain murdered Abel and God called it sin. David murdered Uriah and God called that sin. Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:19, NAS). Every one of those sins has been now declared to be a sickness. Jesus did not say out of a sick heart, but out of an evil heart comes sin.

The mental health industry has transformed the common everyday difficulties and hardships of life into declared diseases. A rebellious child has a conduct disorder. A person who overeats has an eating disorder. A person who is anxious or depressed has a mood disorder. There is adjustment disorder for the man who can-

not seem to cope with his new job. The woman who is boastful and conceited has narcissistic personality disorder. The young man who repeatedly is arrested for destroying property, harassing others, or stealing is sick, too. He has antisocial personality disorder. Other conditions that may require clinical attention range from job dissatisfaction to religious issues such as questioning one's faith or values. People with common experiences of life are now damaged, wounded, abused, traumatized, and sick. They are by themselves incapable of dealing with their disease. It takes an "expert" trained to deduce psychological illnesses, to diagnose, categorize, and label the human experience.

We have allowed psychology to explain what we say, feel, and do. It interprets for us our words, moods, and actions, and what these really mean on an "unconscious" level. What one person says about an event of life and its effects are oftentimes interpreted by the psychologist into ideas which are very different from what is described. The psychologist then presents his diagnosis as fact, applies it to the person's situation, while transforming him into a victim and lifelong patient.

The progression of events resembles the following:

- 1) A theory of victimization is constructed by the psychologist;
- 2) The theory is applied, using the esoteric language of psychology, to the person's situation;
- 3) The theory converts the person's experience into a disorder or disease;
- 4) Only the psychologist knows how to help provide relief;
- 5) Thus, a need for the psychologist is created.

Psychologizing or pathologizing, as some call it, turns routine experiences and feelings into abnormal conditions. Anxiety, apprehension, fear, sadness, and doubt are typically part of life's experience. Some become anxious when they ride an elevator or fly in a

plane; others when they have to speak before a large group of people. Some may become fearful when driving in city traffic; others are fearful of the dark. While all of these may be annoying emotions and disturbing feelings and may disrupt life, they are, nevertheless, typical human experiences. However, to a psychologist, being anxious means something more. It means "having anxiety" or "having an anxiety disorder."

The mental health industry takes authentic victims of accidents, abuse, neglect, etc., and manipulates them into believing they are damaged and sick people. Traumatic life experience is turned into an ongoing emotional problem. The traumatic cause is often followed by a pathological effect. For example, the man, who after twenty-five years, is laid off from his job (the traumatic cause or experience) is later diagnosed with adjustment disorder (the pathological effect). A parent whose child dies (the traumatic cause or experience) is diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (the pathological effect). A person who was abused (the traumatic cause or experience) is diagnosed with Paranoid Personality Disorder (the pathological effect).

A TRAUMATIC CAUSE = A PATHOLOGICAL EFFECT

A traumatic cause leading to a pathological effect is accomplished by focusing on the negative and accentuating the trauma. The person now thinks of himself in terms of the distress or suffering he experienced. He is told that the experience has weakened him. To recover he must face the fact that the event was traumatic. He must then face it, confront it, and go through the psychological process which means changing himself from victim to survivor.

Real victims do not want to be victims at all. A woman who was raped would rather have not been raped. No one wants to be in a car crash. Pain, suffering, and loss are the consequences of being a genuine victim. No one wants to be assaulted and robbed. So why do people allow

themselves to be categorized as psychological victims? Quite simply, there is an advantage to being made a victim. The psychological victim is given permission to live a psychologized life. Once diagnosed, he may step into another world. Being recognized as a victim of some major life trauma is the starting point in the journey where the therapist is viewed as the shepherd who will lead the victim to the promised land of recovery. What makes the future brighter for the psychologized individual is his victim status. The undiagnosed have to live with their disappointments, failures, regrets, crimes, and sin. The psychological victim's world is free from guilt, shame, and responsibility. Whatever the matter may be, an external cause is found for the damaging effects. The disease has removed the accountability that has, in turn, removed the guilt. As a corollary, it has also removed the need for a Savior or for the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying the believer.

Because Christians have become so indoctrinated with the sickness model, they unconditionally accept the diagnosis. Persons who are lazy, irresponsible, bitter, full of self-pity, mean, or immoral are *declared* to be sick. AIDS was discovered to be a disease. Alcoholism was *declared* a disease. Cancer was discovered to be a disease. Social anxiety disorder and pedophilia are *declared* to be diseases. When sin is called sickness, behavior is labeled healthy or unhealthy as opposed to righteous or unrighteous. Drunkards are now in the same category as Alzheimer's patients. Rebellious children are in the same category as the man with heart disease. A murderer is in the same category as the cancer sufferer. And the man who gambles away his savings and loses his home to the mortgage company is in the same category as the little girl diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor.

It is not surprising that unbelievers would call sin sickness. The natural man does not accept the things of God, for they are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14). What is hard to

believe is that the things of God have become foolishness to Christians. The Church itself has become an accomplice with the world in helping men justify their sin. Men suppress the truth (Romans 1:18) when they call sin sickness. They exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25). As James teaches, they are carried away and enticed (James 1:14).

The whole idea of sin has always been hated by the world. Since Adam and Eve ran, hid, covered up, and shifted the blame in the Garden of Eden, man has been trying to justify himself. Calling sin sickness allows man to feel better. A healthy self-image is impossible if a man's heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV). Or, as Isaiah writes:

"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; ... All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless" (Isaiah 40:15, 17, NAS).

The solution to these "destructive" words is that man rebels against, overrules, and turns upside down the Word of God. Behavior is reduced to chemical imbalances, electrical impulses, diseases, or low self-esteem. Personal accountability for thoughts and behaviors is abdicated.

If there were such a thing as "corporate" multiple personality disorders, it would seem the Church has one. Out of one side of the Church's mouth, the Church says man is a sinner. Out of the other side of the Church's mouth, man is said to be sick. Is it possible to deny the doctrine of sin by calling sin sickness and still be preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Sermons, Bible study literature, and books by beloved Christian authors are filled with euphemisms for sin. A fornicator may be called to repentance, but if he is sick then he is no sinner. Instead, he is an addict.

NO SIN, NO GUILT

If man is not a sinner then he is a patient who is suffering. He is a

victim of the cruel and callous treatment of others. We are told that we must learn to be sensitive, tolerant, and compassionate, realizing the very behaviors we formerly labeled as sinful are now evidence of victimization or illness.

The culture we live in encourages all sorts of sinful attitudes and behaviors, but will not tolerate the guilt and other feelings that sin produces. Man does not exist in a vacuum. There are consequences to his actions. These consequences are part of the curse God put on man as a result of sin. Sinful behaviors and attitudes affect the way we think and feel. Sin can produce feelings of personal guilt, depression, anxiety, fear, and so on. For example, Cain's sinful behaviors led to depression (Genesis 4:5-7). David experienced depression, anxiety, and several physiologic symptoms as a result of his sinful relationship with Bathsheba (Psalm 38). However, to admit responsibility and guilt is unsuited and irreconcilable with today's concept of human dignity and self-esteem. Guilt is therefore viewed as a "neurosis." It is an abnormal fixation that must be eradicated. Despite the incessant voice of one's conscience, the sinful behavior that causes us to feel guilty must be denied.

Sin as sickness has gained such a foothold in our thinking there is no longer much thought of personal sin. We give a token recognition in sermons and conversations to what used to be a strong and ominous word, but for the most part, has disappeared along with the whole notion of offending God. Have we ceased sinning? No, we are just calling it something else. Man, since the Fall, has become an expert at covering up his sin. Today, however, we are better equipped with psychological euphemisms for sin. Something is terribly wrong. By claiming the status of a sick person or victim, an individual can escape the responsibility of everything from murder to sloth. All kinds of immoral, perverse, and wicked behavior are now considered to be symptoms of some psychological disease. No one is responsible for these

acts. People will admit they have vague feelings of personal guilt, anxiety, and depression, but no one has committed a sin. There are plenty of patients, but sinners are hard to find.

Christianity does not make sense without sin. The Church teaches, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NAS). On the other hand, the Church calls sin sickness. What's the truth? Is sin sin? If so, why does the Church sometimes call it sickness? If sin is sickness why does the Church sometimes call it sin? Is the Church really confused or just embarrassed to use the word sin? Has fear of man made us ashamed of the Gospel? Is the Church willing to trade biblical correctness for political correctness in order to be "seeker-sensitive" and build staggering attendance numbers? Paul wrote, "If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8, NKJV). There is definitely an uncertain sound coming from the pulpits of evangelism today. As a result, evangelism, discipleship, and sanctification all suffer.

The Apostle Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16). The reason he was eager to preach in Rome was because the Gospel was the way of salvation. The Gospel was not some new philosophy of life. It is not some new idea, which can be interesting and absorbing to discuss and debate. No, the Gospel is about deliverance from sin. Paul sets the Gospel over and against the Greek culture, which had come to Rome years before. The study of philosophy is interesting, but it tends to begin and end with ideas of men. It ultimately leaves men where they started. Philosophy does nothing about sin. It does not save man from the guilt, power, and pollution of sin. It does not reconcile man to God.

Paul's letter to the Romans deals with fundamentals. With respect to systematic theology, the book of Romans is the most important book in the Bible. It has played a more important and more crucial part in

the history of the Church than any other single book. Some of the Church's greatest leaders were converted while reading the Epistle to the Romans. For example, Augustine was saved while reading Romans 13. Augustine fought the Pelagian heresy and defeated it by expounding the book of Romans. While he was still a Roman Catholic and a teacher of theology at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther prepared a series of lectures on the book of Romans. In doing so, his teaching of the doctrine of justification by faith through Jesus Christ and apart from works became a reality. John Bunyan and John Wesley also were converted to Christianity by means of this remarkable book.

Paul declared that God provides a way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The question is why did God do that? Why did Jesus Christ leave heaven, die on a cross, and rise again? The reason may be summed up in the following verse:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18, NAS).

The most striking aspect of Paul's presentation of the Gospel is that he begins with the wrath of God. Wrath refers to God's hatred of sin. If one recognizes the love of God, he must also recognize the hatred of God. All that is opposed to God is hateful to God. Paul said that God's righteousness has been revealed (Romans 1:17), making the following verse, “For the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (v. 18), quite inevitable.

Therefore, Paul does not begin the Gospel presentation with man and his problems, but with God, who is angry having been offended by sinful men. He does not say he is ready to preach the Gospel to them because they are living defeated and troubled lives and the Gospel will lift them out of their depression. He does not say he is ready to preach the Gospel because

they are unhappy and the Gospel will make them happy again. He does not start with man's troubles and difficulties. He does not start by telling them that he has had a wonderful experience and wants them to have it, too. Paul starts by talking about the wrath of God against all men because of sin. The wrath of God against sinful man is the motive for evangelism.⁶

Mixing Christianity and psychology has created a climate in which the word “sin” has been diluted of its true meaning and has been rendered harmless. If an unbeliever has no consciousness of sin, he will not be able to see the point of Christianity. To him, Paul's statement concerning the wrath of God will not make sense. This is true not only of unbelievers, but also Christians. Many Christians have lost their consciousness of sin. It is considered harsh, insensitive, or even “un-Christian” to speak of problems as being the result of sinful behavior. No one wants to hear he is a sinner. There is great comfort in being told problems are caused by a disease, disorder, chemical imbalance, addiction, repressed memories, phobia, low self-esteem, or a painful past. To many, the problem is how to market the Church in a way that will bring it in line with the latest intellectual and cultural beliefs while not compromising biblical integrity. The goal is to bring more people under the preaching of the Gospel. Psychology, they thought, was one way to give Christianity a “scientific” relevance and make it more attractive. Proponents of psychology insist it actually improves Christianity. Sadly, biblical integrity and, therefore, the Gospel, have been enormously compromised. The Church's fear of irrelevance in the postmodern world has led to uncritically accepting man's wisdom and denying God's.

Meanwhile, the Church has become weakened and has experienced a dramatic decline in conversions over the past several decades. Church leaders are falling all over one another trying to do all they can to make the Church “relevant,” to give it purpose. Christian leaders speak of the “assured

results” of a seeker-friendly atmosphere, contemporary music, and so on. If one of the problems is calling sin sickness, then nothing short of a return to the language and intent of the Bible will rectify the problem. Sinful people need to repent and follow God's prescribed plan rather than relying on a prescription for a medication to treat their feelings.

The point of Christianity is that man sinned and Christ died to reconcile him before a righteous and holy God. Christians throughout history have been motivated to evangelize by their conviction that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true. It has created in them a sense of urgency to go tell others. Paul wrote:

“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (Romans 1:14-15, NAS).

And:

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, NAS).

It was the love of Christ in Paul, combined with the conviction that what Christ did was complete and necessary for the redemption of all men, that produced the urgency motivating him to ministry.

How do we begin the task of communicating the Gospel to a society believing sin is sickness? Tell them the big story. Begin with the creation and the first man and woman. Explain the first act of rebellion toward God and the curse that God placed on mankind as a result. Continue through the Old Testament with Cain, Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and so on. Step by step, establish in them a biblical worldview with the intent to introduce them to Jesus Christ. Effective evangelism has always been accomplished using key

passages and verses that deal with sin, grace, and faith. The point is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It does not matter whether one is preaching or teaching from the Law, the prophets, the historical books, the wisdom literature, the Gospels, or the Epistles, they all point to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins.

The landscape of evangelicalism today is very disturbing. Christians have jettisoned their commitment to God's sufficient Word. A psychological Tower of Babel has been erected. Biblical definitions and categories have changed and a new vocabulary has emerged within the Church. Behaviors and attitudes once regarded as sinful have undergone a dramatic change. They have been reappraised. Sin is called sickness. Confessing sin

has been replaced with recovering from sickness. The word "sin" has nearly disappeared from our vocabulary. As such, the impact of the Gospel to a non-believer is less pronounced and the need for progressive sanctification in the believer is minimized. Nevertheless, there is, in the back of our minds, the fact that sin is still with us — somewhere, everywhere. It is a vaguely uneasy feeling. Although we try to make ourselves feel better by calling sin by another name, it is always there. It never fully goes away.

Endnotes:

1. E. Fuller Torrey, M.D., *The Death of Psychiatry*. Radnor, Pa.: Chilton Book Co., 1974, pg. 24.
2. Garth Wood, *The Myth of Neurosis: Overcoming the Illness Excuse*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986, pg. 1.

3. A.H. Marckwardt, F.G. Cassidy, and J.B. McMillan (eds.), *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary International Edition*. Chicago: J.G. Ferguson Publishing Company, 1992, Vol. 1, "disease," pg. 365.

4. Thomas Szasz quoted in Janet Vice, *From Patients to Persons*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992, pg. 14.

5. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

6. Throughout the New Testament the starting point when declaring the Gospel is the wrath of God. For example, the first point John the Baptist made to the people who came to hear him was they should repent of their sins and "flee from the wrath to come" (Matthew 3:7). Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, preached concerning men's relationship to God. The sermon would affect them in such a way that they cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Paul's sermons throughout the book of Acts emphasize man's relationship to God and the judgment that will come because of sin. (See, for example, chapters 13, 14, 17, and 20.)

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see going on around me and holding back my disgust for those that I feel are responsible for the lies that my people so easily accept as truth. I see drug dealers, gang members and other criminals killing and being killed all the time with no sign of fear from these individuals. But we Christians that are promised life everlasting seem to stand back and let things get out of control because of our fear and because of the Judeo-Christian preachers and the government constantly telling us that these problems will be taken care of. But they never are. My hateful thoughts toward my enemies sometimes consume my logic. But I am always mindful of the mistake and great wrong it would be to take any kind of action out of hate or ignorance. As a messenger of Yahweh I am always praying that what I have expressed to my people will make them thirst for more knowledge. And that what I have told them will never escape their minds. As a Christian I don't need to see what will take place in the future because Yahweh has told me what will happen, therefore I know it will be. But knowing what the future holds doesn't make it any easier living in the present. So, when I'm asked, don't you get depressed or do you ever feel like giving up, my answer is 'yes.' But it is my faith that sustains me and I start out every morning with the thought that every new day means one more day of Satan's rule behind me and one day closer to the second coming

of Christ. My wife also reads Psalm 91 every morning, which I suggest that everyone should read for spiritual fortification."

On some level the words are challenging and would resonate with most Christians. The deception, however, is not the words, but the real *interpretation* given by the speaker. The one who spoke these words is Charles Lee, Grand Dragon, White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The quote is from *Soldiers of God* by Howard Bushart, John Craig, and Myra Barnes (pp. 171-172).

On the basis of Lee's words alone, most anyone would consider the speaker a dedicated Christian. However, a discernment ministry would pick up on all the baggage that so denies Christ as to nullify Lee's testimony. It would know about the "seed line" theory that gives the white supremacist the liberty to persecute Blacks and Jews. Remember: The Pharisees were fundamental and believed the Old Testament. However, the traditions they added made their religious system void in the eyes of God (Matthew 15:8-9). Whatever they had right was nullified by their endless traditions and additions. A religion may offer the name Christ and even have a correct Christology, but then offer a plan for salvation by works. A proper Christology does one no good if Christ is put out of reach by a defective doctrine of salvation. One correct doctrine is not enough if another totally ignores the pattern of the Apostles' teachings (Acts 2:42, 2 Timothy 1:13).

The above is almost a no-brainer, but there are others less obvious and more deceptive. The Word Faith movement may superficially speak of Christ, but their