

Sermon—March 6-7, 1999  
Rich Nathan  
Christ Confronts the Culture Series  
Mark 7:1-23

## Christ Confronts Counseling

This morning I am going to continue in my series called Christ Confronts the Culture. Today I am going to talk about Christ Confronting Counseling. As I have repeatedly said through this series, what I am attempting to do is assist you in understanding the grids, the basic worldviews, the basic thought processes and paradigms that Americans use as we enter the new millennium. And, frankly, there are few grids and paradigms that are more dominating in American life right now than the psychological grid or the psychological paradigm.

All one needs to do is to go into any bookstore in America and see the size of the Psychology Self-Help section and then walk over to the Religion section and note how many of the books in the Christian Religion section are actually just a thin veneer of Christian language, Christianese, over the basic particle board of psychological and counseling assumptions and premises.

Now as I begin today talking about Christ Confronting Counseling, I want to note three things at the front-end. First of all, the Bible affirms the place of counseling. All counseling from a biblical perspective is not bad. It is not unchristian. It is not opposed to Christ. The Bible repeatedly affirms our need for counseling and importance of counselors. And as you go through the Bible you will note that there

are lots of words that speak to various aspects of what goes on in the counseling relationship. For example, you will read the word “encourage” over and over again in the Bible – encouragement. It literally means to infuse someone with courage. The Bible recognizes that people need courage in a time of trial and that the weak need strengthening. The wavering need building up. That there is a role for someone to be used in another person’s life to give them heart, to give them strength and to give them courage to endure.

The Bible recognizes not only the need for encouragement; it recognizes the need for exhortation. Exhortation could be translated “admonishment, warnings.” In exhortation, what a person is doing is challenging another who is living in the wrong way to begin living the right way. A person who is walking away from God to turn around and walk toward God. A person who is living unfaithfully, to start living faithfully. A person who is neglecting their responsibilities and their duties to another, to their family, to their spouse, to their kids. Exhortation means to admonish them, to challenge them to start fulfilling their responsibilities to their kids or their spouse or their parents or their friends. And biblically, exhortation is not a hard thing. It doesn’t come at us with a club. The apostle Paul talks about admonishing with tears.

And we have the word “console” in the Bible, which is another basic aspect of counseling. During trial and tribulation people need comfort. They need someone to stand along side them. To be with them to help ease the pain.

The Bible speaks about rebuking. Communicating clearly disapproval for what a person is doing and censuring them. Judging another person's activities and saying that is wrong and that what they need to do is right.

Simply put, the Bible has a range of words to describe what we call counseling. And the Bible affirms this activity of exhorting, encouraging, comforting, consoling, challenging and rebuking and offers wisdom and insight. The Bible affirms that process so long as, as we shall see in a moment, the content of our activity is biblical. So long as we are drawing the content of our comfort or our exhortation or our insight from the scriptures.

The second thing I would like to note is, biblically, counseling is not the exclusive purview of some elite or professional group whose occupation it is to be a professional counselor or a pastoral counselor. Now, professional counselors or pastors or physicians may have some specialized training and experience in applying the scriptures to life. They may be uniquely gifted to help with certain problems, but counseling is not the exclusive purview of a few special people. But rather the New Testament speaks of a counseling church. A church that encourages and comforts and exhorts and consoles and rebukes. Over and over again we don't simply go to a professional counselor, but instead, we will call a friend for prayer. We hear a teaching in our small group that applies to something in our lives. We might talk to an older person over a cup of coffee regarding our work situation or career issues or marital problems. A single mom may need wisdom from an older woman concerning her teen-age son.

So, the confrontation of Christ with counseling is not a confrontation of Christ with professional counselors. But rather with the content of the kind of counseling, the kinds of exhortations and encouragements and statements that the church makes as we seek to assist another person. The bottom line – this message applies to each one of us, not just to the handful of people who have certificates on the wall.

The third point, by way of introduction, is this. I am so glad that I work in a church where there is real unity between the pulpit and the counseling staff. Friends, I will say this just by way of honest confession. I know in many churches there is real warfare that is going on between what is being taught in the pulpit and what is going on in the counseling room. There is a felt absence of support for one part of the church from the other. And one of the things that I have rejoiced in for years is the unity and the partnership that God has built into the very core of the church. Part of it is the result of my deep and long-term friendship with Danny Meyer who oversees our counseling and the core of values that we share. But the way that this has been translated down is that there is real harmony and a fundamental agreement regarding the way we approach people that every part of the body is serving. We want to sing off the same sheet of music in our small groups and our peer counseling and with our professional counseling and with what you hear on Sunday morning. The sheet of music is the sheet of music written by God in this book called the Bible. So you should be hearing the same basic counsel for living wherever you step down in this church.

I love that. Because to me that is so healthy. It is such a gift.

With that as a basic introduction, today I am going to talk about the explosion that exists when Christ Confronts Counseling. Let's pray.

If you have a Bible I would like you to turn with me to Mark 7 where we read:

"The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were 'unclean' – that is unwashed. The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing holding to the traditions of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, 'Why don't your disciples live according to the traditions of the elders instead of eating their food with unclean hands?'"

Back around four centuries before the time of Christ, Jewish rabbis sought to apply Old Testament law to changing times and changing situations. The people of Israel had been judged for disobedience to God's law and so this group of rabbis and Jewish scholars began to build what they called a fence around the Torah. A fence around the law of God.

What do we mean by a fence around the Torah? Well, Rabbis realized that God's judgment through the Babylonians was the result of the people repeatedly violating God's commandments. The Jews had been, in a sense, walking off the cliff and getting themselves killed by falling into the valley below. And the rabbis said, "You know what we need to do? We need to keep people from getting anywhere near the edge of the cliff. The problem is that people keep violating the Sabbath, for example,

by working on the Sabbath. Here is what we need to do. We need to move the line away from the edge of the cliff back 40-50 feet so that people won't get anywhere near the possibility of violating the Sabbath."

So they began to construct laws like not only are you not allowed to work on the Sabbath, but you are not allowed to carry anything heavy on the Sabbath. And they began to say, "Well, what does it mean to carry something heavy on the Sabbath? Is something heavy a load of wood? What about one piece of wood? What about a handkerchief?" And the rabbis said, "Better to avoid carrying anything, even as light as a handkerchief, and then you won't be doing work."

Some people said, "Well, what if you have to blow your nose? Are you allowed to carry a handkerchief then?" The rabbis said, "Well, if you are wearing the handkerchief, you are not really carrying it, so I guess the idea is if you have to blow your nose, you first tie the handkerchief around your neck so that you are wearing it like a scarf. Then you untie it and you can blow your nose and then, I suppose, wear it some other way so as not to carry it."

The point is that the Pharisees initially had a very good motive for all of their manmade traditions. They wanted to prevent people from violating God's law by keeping them far from that possibility. And one of the big concerns of the Pharisees had to do with washing. Now the Old Testament describes various washings for the priests, but the Pharisees began to say, "Well, the washing prescribed for the priests really ought to be applied to everybody, so that no one is unclean before God." And by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD, when all of these laws were written down in a series of volumes called The Mishna, which is part of the Jewish Talmud, the sections on

washing became one of the longest sections in the whole Mishna. There are 35 pages of Mishna devoted just to washing cups and plates.

Well, Jesus continually showed contempt for, a complete disregard for all of these old traditions of the rabbis. However well intentioned these traditions were, Jesus regularly saw them as being simply the traditions of men. And so he didn't care what the rabbis thought about him eating with so-called unclean people. He knew God was in favor of it, so he did it. And he didn't care what the Pharisees thought of him healing someone on the Sabbath and whether that fit into their definition of working. He knew that God was in favor of it, so he did it. And he didn't care what the Pharisees thought or said about washing various vessels and the ritual washing of hands. Jesus regularly ran through those fences of the Pharisees.

Now, I will tell you this. The Pharisees respond the way that people in the church respond when someone comes along and runs through their traditions even though their traditions are not part of God's Word. A number of years ago I used to go to a very conservative church that had a number of traditions. One of the traditions had to do with never raising your hands in worship. Well, a few friends one day, very innocently and not attempting to be rebellious, were in church and were worshipping God. They were lifting their hands in accordance with biblical commands to lift our hands to the Lord, and to worship God with our whole bodies. But this was offensive to some of the leaders of the church and they were spoken to by one of the elders who said that they were being disorderly. So they tried to gently argue their case with this elder and say that they weren't creating any kind of

scene and they weren't attempting to draw attention to themselves. But the elder was adamant and finally said, "If you continue with this disorderly worship, you will have to leave the church."

People get very angry when you challenge one of their traditions. And one of the traditions of men that people will get angriest about in challenging is the psychological traditions – the therapeutic explanations for why we are the way we are. And just as the Pharisees reacted very strongly, very angrily to Jesus' challenge, so do counselors today. But not only counselors, but counselees, will respond angrily when a psychological explanation for why they are the way they are is challenged from a biblical perspective. If you want to get yourself into a tussling match, talk with a therapeutized counselee who has bought all of the psychological explanations for their problems and you are attempting to offer biblical counsel.

Now, Jesus says the Bible's commands were precisely what the Pharisees were rejecting. He meets their confrontation. Listen to what Jesus says:

"He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.'"

One of the great problems that we face in the church today from the counseling community, and not just the secular counseling community, but the Christian counseling community is the problem of what we could call "Scripture Twisting." Letting go of the commands of God, the Word of God, and teaching instead the traditions of men.



An individual is looking for help and so they pick up a book that is advertised to be by a Christian counselor. They look on the back of the book and this Christian counselor has a Ph.D. in Counseling or in psychology. Now, what the individual may not know is that while the author has a Ph.D. in psychology, they may not have passed the third grade in Sunday School. And so what they find in the book often is extremely shallow, superficial, twisted interpretations of scripture, or no serious attempt to grapple with the scriptures at all, but rather just a substitution of the psychological traditions of men.

I remember listening to a Christian radio program one time and a Christian counselor was describing why husbands and wives often have problems with each other. He said the basic problem between husbands and wives is that there is a difference in their temperaments and using psychological theory, he popularized it and said that some people are bold, aggressive lions and others are playful otters and others are dutiful hard-working beavers and others are loyal, gentle golden retrievers. Now during the course of this show, there was no serious attempt to relate a biblical truth like the cross or the gospel to marriage problems. There was no serious attempt to grapple with Ephesians 5 and to call husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, relating the gospel to marriage. The Bible was left out. And I heard a half-hour of the traditions of man. I went home and said, "Marlene, I realize why we sometimes have problems. I am a lion-otter and you are a beaver-retriever. It is not that I am selfish, demanding, grasping and proud. I am a lion-otter. And you are a beaver-retriever."

And frankly, millions of Christians are more in touch with their need for radical boundaries and why it is they should say “no” to their mother who needs another ride to the pharmacy than they are with Jesus’ call to radical servanthood or carrying the cross.

Os Guinness, who is a very astute observer of the church and the culture, said that in many churches people pay more attention to what their 12-step group says than what the 12 apostles said. We are in favor of recovery groups so long as the recovery group draws the content of their program from the Bible and doesn’t twist the scripture to make it mean what it obviously doesn’t mean.

Do you want to see a place where individuals have let go of the Bible and teach instead the tradition of men? You see it in all of the discussion and promotion of self-esteem as the key to healthy living. Now, the Bible teaches that the key to healthy living is a right relationship with God. And the Bible teaches that you need to have a true view of yourself, neither higher nor lower than you ought to think. But the Word of God has been let go of and instead what has been taught as the key for healthy living is positive self-regard. Again, the Bible teaches the fundamental issue of men and women is a wrong relationship with God or, as the Bible says, the fundamental problem with people is that they worship the creature; they worship what is created, themselves, other people, their job, a substance, sex, money, accumulation. The problem with people is that they worship the creature rather than the Creator-God. No, we let go of that and we say the problem is that you suffer from low self-esteem.

And friends, this entirely secular viewpoint has worked its way into so many Christian counseling books and childraising books. The key to your child's success is giving them a healthy self-esteem. I know I sound like a heretic up here when I challenge that. But friends, the key to your child's success is orienting them rightly toward God. The key to your child's success is teaching them to obey God because when we obey God life goes well. And when we disobey God, we bring destruction on us and on those around us. The key to your child's success is not that they have this inflated view of themselves and we teach them to say, "I am good; I am good while I continue to do bad." The key to your child's success is to actually become good.

You know, it is an amazing thing to see how deeply the educational establishment has bought this self-esteem as the key to success, when all of the studies run exactly in the opposite direction. A few years ago there was a math test given internationally to the top 5% of math students around the world. Korean students ended up first. American students ended up dead last. But the testers did something interesting. They didn't only test the students' math abilities, they also tested their self-esteem, that is their subjective belief in how strong they were in math. And you guessed it, American students actually had the strongest self-esteem when it came to math. They believed themselves to be far better in math than they really were. And the Koreans, who ended up first, had the lowest self-esteem. And what the studies indicated is that how one regards oneself is often entirely unrelated to real accomplishment.

Two professors at Case Western Reserve University (my alma mater) did a study of prisoners. The self-esteem movement has spread beyond education to the way that we are to deal with criminals and prisoners. The theory was that criminals probably had very low self-esteem and they were aggressive and assaulted people and stole things because fundamentally they felt bad about themselves. And the key to their rehabilitation was to make them feel better about themselves, to raise their self-esteem. These two researchers decided to check out that assumption. Do you know what they discovered? That criminals actually as a class, had far higher senses of self-esteem than the general public did. The issue of criminals is not that they needed to build themselves up, the issue of criminals is that their sense of self is too big. It crowds out everyone else. Their sense of what they are owed, what life should provide for them, the way people should relate to them is exaggerated and needs to be taken down a few notches.

Now scripture twisting reaches its height when people not only let go of God's Word, but actually contradict it. Jesus said in v. 9, "And he said to them, 'You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions. For Moses said: Honor your father and your mother and anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother. Thus you nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down and you do many things like that.'"

Nullifying the Word of God. Contradicting it. What was Jesus speaking to? Well, the fifth Commandment teaches the requirement of honoring our father and our mother. And to honor your father and your mother includes the responsibility of taking care of them in some fashion as they age. But the Pharisees said that you could be relieved of your responsibilities of taking care of your father and mother if you simply declare that what you would have given to your father and mother is instead given to God. "You call it Corban." And simply saying that you are giving it to God, you don't actually have to give it to God. You can put it under the ban saying it is dedicated to God, and then you could keep using the property for yourself without having to share with your parents.

How do people nullify God's Word? How do they contradict it? One way they contradict God's Word is to suggest that full forgiveness demands that you forgive yourself. That it is not enough that God forgives you. You also need to forgive yourself. And you will often hear people say, "You know, my real problem is that I haven't forgiven myself for that adulterous relationship or that abortion or my neglect of my children. The real problem is that I haven't forgiven myself." Occasionally a counselor, even a Christian counselor will lead someone through this exercise of forgiving themselves.

Well, the counselee who says I can't forgive myself is suffering from a very real problem of guilt – a problem that shouldn't be made light of. Some of you probably still feel guilty about sins you have committed. But the answer is not to contradict the power of forgiveness as it is laid out in the Bible. The answer is to gently lead the counselee to an appreciation of what forgiveness in Jesus Christ means and how

it works. Because the truth is that many people fundamentally don't believe that after they have seriously sinned that God really forgives them. They haven't grasped the depths of God's forgiveness and his grace. Maybe they think of God as being very much like themselves. After the third time, the fifth or the ninth time they are sinned against they find it difficult to let go of an offense, and perhaps the counselee imagines that God is like them. They have a very small view of God. The answer is not forgive yourself, but rather truly to have an expanded view of God.

Perhaps the counselee who says, "I can't forgive myself" really had too high a view of themselves. Often I can't forgive myself means I can't believe that I did that. I just can't accept that I am an adulterer or someone who is capable of murdering my own baby by abortion. Or someone who is capable of giving away my virginity to my boyfriend or girlfriend. And the counselor, instead of saying you need to forgive yourself, friend, ought to be leading a person to a biblical understanding of who they are and what they are indeed capable of by showing them from the Bible the depth of their own depravity.

I can't believe that I was capable of doing that.

Why not? Do you not know who you are? Do you not know your own heart? Do you not know how incurably wicked your flesh is? Here is what the Bible says about you.

The person who can't forgive themselves contradicts God's Word because forgiveness means I am standing in the place of God as judge and I am going to convey on myself freedom and acquittal. Only God can release you. Will you put

your judgments of your sin in place of God's judgments where you say his forgiveness is not as important as my own forgiveness?

Sometimes people teach the heretical and actual blasphemous notion that full forgiveness requires us to forgive God. Well, because you were abused as a child, in order to find real healing you need to forgive God for allowing that. Or forgive God for allowing that traffic accident. Or forgive God for allowing you to get into that abusive marriage. What a horrible contradiction of scripture. May we never lead someone toward this so-called forgiving of God. To forgive God suggests that somehow our roles are reversed and that we are behind the judge's bench with robes on and a gavel in our hand. And God is down in the defendant's box with his head bowed waiting for our decision. And we have decided to let him off the hook.

A wise counselor who is presented with a counselee who is truly struggling with God's activity in their life will not point them toward this blasphemous notion of forgiving God. A wise counselor will help the person to see what God's purpose could be in suffering. A wise counselor will work with a person to gain a biblical perspective of God – that he is not unkind, or unfair or unjust. Here are some of the purposes of suffering, trials and difficulties. Here is the way we gain an eternal perspective of life and here is what we must remember about God's mercies.

Sometimes people contradict the Bible by saying, "You know, you can't really know God as your Father until your own relationship with your father or mother is completely healed; until the past stuff you have gone through thoroughly is dealt with, you can't enjoy a relational God as your Father."

Where does the Bible say that we have to have all of the problems with our own fathers or mothers healed until we can know God as our Father? Where is that ridiculous notion taught? People take psychological theory and contradict God's Word that tells us fortunately, most blessedly, that however deficient your father or my father was, God our Father is different. God our Father is not neglectful. God our Father is not unavailable. God our Father is not cold or aloof or abusive or constantly angry or brooding. And the way we get to know God our Father is not by fixing everything between us and our dads or being reparented by a sensitive counselor. Listen, you don't have to have a great relationship with a shepherd to know God as your shepherd or have a perfect relationship with a king to know the Lord as your king. You can delight in God as your Father however awful or absent your earthly father was.

A wise, sensitive counselor doesn't draw the counselee to themselves. A wise, sensitive counselor points the counselee toward God. Here, let's together find out what the Bible teaches about God our Father. Let's pray over these things and let the Holy Spirit apply God's Word to our heart with power. Confess your unbelief regarding what God's Word says about God and repent of it. Allow the Holy Spirit to bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God and you can cry out, "Abba, Father" whatever your father or mother was like.

Some of you would say, "Well, Rich, I have done one of these things or something else that may not exactly be taught in the Bible and I sure feel better. Gosh, I have been helped."



If the scripture has been twisted, friend, I say this with all affection, but you have been short-changed. I know that people are often helped by something that is less than the full truth, but the fact is the help can be so much deeper and longer lasting. Very often when people let go of God's Word and teach instead the traditions of men, the help that is received is only at the symptomatic level. People feel better for a little while, but then the symptoms return. Or one set of symptoms is replaced by another and, yeah, I am no longer depressed, but now I am proud or angry.

When God's Word is twisted and we are offered instead the traditions of men, you know, we may not end up being better oriented toward God. If the fundamental issue is that you are not rightly oriented toward God, you are substituting something else for God. You are worshipping the creature, other people, your needs, your sexuality, your demand for your father's approval – whatever it is, you are worshipping that rather than worshipping God. You are offered some scripture twist and you can end up as a happier sinner rather than a holier saint. See, when God's Word is let go of, what that often produces in the counselee's life is they become well-adjusted sinners.

As one wise psychologist William Kilpatrick put it – it is better to have a repressed psyche and enter the kingdom of God, than to have a psyche that is overflowing and brimming with self-esteem and end up in hell.

It is very possible that using some wrong method or false thing has made you feel better, but you don't know the depth of what you could have until God's Word penetrates you to your heart. See, the ultimate freedom is not freedom from various symptoms. The ultimate freedom is freedom of the heart. It is the heart set free.

When our motives, our intentions, our cravings, our desires are converted, not just when we feel better for a period of time.

And Jesus says, "I want to offer you not mere external rearrangement, I want to offer your heart internal change." V. 14:

"Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.' After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about his parable. 'Are you so dull,' he asked. 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean')."

What Jesus is saying is that the focus, God, is always on the internal not the external. The focus of biblical counseling is always on your heart and not on what goes on around you. And yes, we may need to talk about your past or how you were parented. Or the circumstances and abuse you suffered. We may need to talk about all those things, but we haven't completed the job of cleaning, of healing, until we come to the place of being able to address the issues in an individual's heart. So much of contemporary counseling does everything other than talk about the individual's heart. We spend all the time talking about their pasts and their victimization and the abuse suffered, communicating to the individual that their circumstances or their needs, their pain, or their compulsions drive them.

There was a recent cartoon that pictured an auditorium with a huge banner that announced the first annual convention of adult children of normal parents. There were two people sitting in a sea of empty chairs.

You see, part of sin is that we are always looking for someone else to blame for our problems other than ourselves, our own hearts. There is an old Calvin and Hobbs cartoon that I love. Calvin is taking a walk with the stuffed tiger, Hobbs. Calvin says, "Nothing I do is my fault. My family is dysfunctional. My parents won't empower me. Consequently, I am not self-actualized. My behavior is addictive, functioning in a diseased process of toxic co-dependency. I need holistic healing and wellness before I will accept any responsibility for my actions."

Hobbs gives Calvin this odd look and he comments, "One of us needs to stick his head in a bucket of ice water."

Calvin gushes on and he says, "I love the culture of victimhood."

Now, the tragedy of our culture of victimhood is that it discounts real, biblical victims by turning everyone into a victim of some neglect of nurturance. Real victims deserve real compassion. Charles Sykes wrote an editorial in the NY Times entitled "I Hear America Whining." He said, "It doesn't really matter who gets elected President [this was back in 1992] because whoever is President has to be a president over a population that doesn't want to take responsibility for itself. All it wants to do is whine. It wants to complain."

He gives some interesting examples in this article on America's victimhood. He mentions a fellow who was in a refrigerator race. I don't know if you know what a refrigerator race is, but it is a race in which guys strap a refrigerator on their backs

and run down the street with it racing each other. You can guess what happened to one guy. He hurt his back and this being America, what did he do? Of course, he sued. Who did he sue? The refrigerator manufacturer for not putting warning label on it saying that you aren't supposed to strap this thing to your back and run down the street, otherwise you will hurt yourself.

Fortunately, he lost his case. But a teacher didn't when she was fired from her job for showing up for work 30 minutes late every day. The teacher sued and her lawyer claimed that she suffered from chronic lateness syndrome. She was reinstated with back pay.

And the FBI agent who embezzled \$2000 from the government and went to Atlantic City and blew it all on a gambling spree. He was fired, but he not only sued successfully, he was reinstated with back pay because he was a gambling addict.

Over and over again in court cases you are seeing this kind of victimization language used to excuse people from horrendous things. The issue is not the heart in which we are morally responsible any longer. The issue is externals.

So in the case of Reginald Denny, that truck driver whose head was beaten in by some street thugs who danced around in him in the LA riots and took a cinder block and threw it on his skull. The jury acquitted the defendants, who were sitting in court laughing and smirking. The jury said they were victims of urban violence syndrome and mob psychology.

And the Menendez brothers, who in cold blood shot their parents to death, were said to be victims of abuse. And Tawana Brawley, who created a situation of riots in NY by carving a Nazi swastika on herself claiming she was raped by people of

another race. One writer said it didn't matter that this whole crime was the product of a hoax because Twanna Brailey was still a victim of an "unspeakable crime." And this is a direct quote. "No matter how she got there, no matter who did this to her, even if she did it to herself, that is even if Twanna Brailey injured herself, her condition clearly expresses a crime against herself – some tremendous violence, some violation. She was the victim of meta-rape – societal rape."

And so, friends, what do we do? We short-change real victims by making every one of us into a victim and the bottom line that Jesus is communicating here is, whether you are a real victim or not, you will never find true healing until you let God deal with your inside, with your heart. How you interpret your abuse. How you forgive your spouse. How you reflect on God. How you reorient your heart toward God. Real help comes by focusing on our internal state and not on our externals.

See, let me finish this point by saying this. You could have been raised in a perfect environment like Adam and Eve. They weren't raised in a dysfunctional family. They didn't have an absent, neglectful or abusive Father and they still sinned. See, the Bible applied with the gift of wisdom and knowledge cuts so much deeper than our environment or even our pasts. The Bible applied with spiritual gifts cuts all the way to the heart. And it is not wrong to explore the past. Don't hear me say that. It is not wrong to talk about the relationship you had with your dad or your mom or issues in your life. But ultimately, the focus of counseling ought to terminate on your heart, on the inside of you. It is not enough, marriage counselors, to talk about temperaments and communication and family systems. All of that is helpful, but at some point we are going to have to talk about the heart.

So we read in v. 20, “He went on: what comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All of these evils come from inside and make a man unclean.”

It is not what was done to you that makes you unclean. It is what arises from within you that makes you unclean. And note that what Jesus says is arising from us, what is bubbling up from the fountain is something called sin. And note that he uses very unpleasant words in describing what is going on in our hearts. He calls things greed, not simply that you are a connoisseur of finer things. You are greedy.

He used the word “malice,” not that you have strong boundaries, but there is malice. And he used the word “deceit,” not that you are passive/aggressive. He used the word “slander,” not honest sharing or you are a person who just lets people know what’s on your mind. He uses the word “folly,” not mid-life crisis, and “lewdness”, not exploring your sexuality.

It is really important that we use the correct biblical labels for problems in the heart. Labels help us to get a handle on what the problem is and then we can begin to do something about it. What we call things makes a difference. The model we use makes an enormous difference.

Let me give you one example. For about 50 years, the model for understanding who we are as human beings has been a needs model. And for anyone of you who has ever taken a psychology class, you have seen Maslow’s hierarchy of needs ending in self-actualization. Maslow’s hierarchy is found in business ethics textbooks. It is seen in marketing textbooks. It is in every single social science

discipline. Pretty soon it will be in calculus textbooks. But basically, we human beings are a collection of needs. And even Christians, if you read Christian counseling books, assume the rightness of Maslow's approach – that our fundamental issue is that we have needs that are going unfulfilled. The picture that will often be used is that we are like empty cups and the reason our cup is empty is because our need for love was never met by our mother or father. Our need for nurturance was never met. We have a need for significance. We have a need to make an impact. And so the portrait of humanity is you are an empty cup of needs.

Now, the Christian writers will spin this and say, "But God is the one who can meet your needs – your need for significance, your need for impact, for self-worth. Go to God and he will meet your needs."

You say, "Rich, what's wrong with that?"

Well, what's wrong with it is that the model is off and it leads to some very troubling conclusions like God exists primarily to meet my needs, so my needs are in the center of the universe and God revolves around me. God is not in the center of the universe with me revolving around him. My need for love and affirmation and all of that is what the consuming issue is. And lots of Christians with this needs philosophy, the needs model, end up being angry with God when God doesn't meet their needs. They say, "God is supposed to meet my needs for relationship and I don't feel like it is being met. Or my need for self-worth or my need for excitement, my need for impact – he's not doing a very good job of it right now, so I guess temporarily I am going to have to push God onto the back burner and meet my

needs some other way. After all, I am an empty cup and these needs have to be met.”

Well, instead of the empty cup/needs model, how about a very different picture of who you are. You are made in the image of God. Rather than being an empty cup, you are a mirror. That’s what you are. You are a mirror. And you reflect whatever it is that you focus your life upon. If you focus your life upon God, as a mirror you will reflect God. If you focus your life upon your lust, you will reflect that to the world. If you focus your life on ambition or upon money or sexuality or other people, that’s what you will reflect. You are a mirror and you are designed not to have all your needs met, you are designed to focus your heart and your attention on God. And when you do that, you will reflect to those around you what your God is like.

So dad who says, “I am really tired after work and I would really like to sit on this sofa and watch TV for two hours” but instead goes to the park and teaches his daughter how to play soccer or teaches his son how to ride a bicycle because of Jesus Christ, what he is doing is reflecting the availability of God our Father. He is saying, like God my Father who is always available to me, I am going to be available to my children.

And you are tired and you come home and there is a pile of dishes in the sink. And because of Jesus Christ you decide to do them for your wife, you are reflecting the servanthood of God. And when someone has hurt you and offended you and you choose to release them to God instead of continuing as their judge because of Jesus Christ, you are reflecting the forgiveness of God.



And then God becomes the center of the universe with God as a mirror rather than your needs as the controlling issue. Do you see that the labels and models we use push us in a radically different direction? Jesus, in speaking of the heart, uses moral labels – sin and righteousness labels. And this is such an encouragement over against calling you an “adult child of an alcoholic” and a “co-dependent” and a “victim of this or that” and a “product of a dysfunctional family” and just a simple collection of needs and unconscious urges and Oedipal influences and family pattern thinking. Jesus addresses us as moral agents, people who are responsible and can choose and resist temptation. He gives us so much dignity.

And because Jesus says the fundamental issue is the heart, and the fundamental problem of the heart is sin, then we can begin to understand the Bible’s solutions because the greatest problem is sin, your greatest need is salvation. Because the problem is the heart, your greatest need is a new heart. What the Bible calls regeneration – that your old heart of stone and disobedience and hardness gets taken out of you and God puts in you a new heart, a heart of flesh, a heart that wants to obey God. Because the problem is moral, your greatest need is discipleship and obedience to God, not becoming well adjusted or mentally healthy. And your greatest need is not more information or insight. Insight is good and information is helpful, but your heart needs to change through the process of repentance and faith in God.

See, the reason Jesus came into the world perfectly meets our heart problem. Jesus came into the world not to make us better adjusted or symptom free or

healthier, wealthier and wiser. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to reorient us away from idols and toward obedience to the living God.

Counselors, be biblical. Work out the true meaning of Bible texts.

Counselors, get past the discussion of externals and circumstances and the past to talk about the heart.

Counselors, see your job as being disciple makers, assisting people to get a bigger and truer view of God.

Let's pray.