

Why Is The Integration Of Psychology With Christian Counseling Wrong?

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1986, (Rev 93)

Introduction: The trend among many of the so called "Christian counselors" for years has been to see where psychological approaches can be brought into one's system of Christian belief. The thought behind this "integration" of psychology with one's theology is that the error's within psychology can be stripped away leaving something that compliments and enhances our theology.

The motivation behind this "integration" of psychology with one's theology seems to stem from two factors: one, theology is viewed as a system that is not very practical for solving the real problems of life; and two, the desire for something new that will help people.

Theme: Is approach of "integration" in Christian counseling where theology and psychology are mixed together a good practice?

I. UNDERSTANDING INTEGRATION

A. Technical Understanding:

Integration as normally understood means "an act or process of integrating," and integrating means "to make into a whole by bringing all parts together; unify: to join with something else; to unite."¹

B. Integrationists Usage:

"This is what we mean by the term integration. Psychology is raising questions and providing data that bear on our theological understanding of the human being, and theology expresses divinely revealed truths that speak to psychology's developing view of humanity."²

"The word implies that things that don't naturally mix willfully be brought into connection, to be integrated."³

"For the Christian psychologist, integration involves... a desire to determine how both Scriptural truths and psychological data can enable us better to understand and help people."⁴

2. GOAL OF INTEGRATION

A. Integration is the search for a more "man centered" approach to Christian problems.

Integrationists seek a new approach which "... draws from secular psychology without betraying its Scriptural premise, one which realistically faces the deep (and not so deep) problems of people and honestly evaluates its success in dealing with them...."⁵

B. Integration is the process of equalizing "General Revelation" with Special Revelation.

Integrationists have sought to equalize all truth.

"...The new psychology gives rise to the problem of integration between psychology and theology. The proposed new foundation is built on the premise that God has revealed himself through a natural world, discoverable by science, and through the Bible... Presumably the findings of psychology and theology, if they are valid, should not be in contradiction since they are two perspectives on the same body of truth."⁶

C. Integration is the development of an alternative means of achieving "sanctification."

Integrationists have sought to find alternative ways to help Christians live a certain kind of lifestyle. "An authentic marriage of biblical theology and Christian psychology has enabled clergy, church officers, and members to live the adventure of the abundant life."⁷

3. JUSTIFYING INTEGRATION

A. It falsely thinks that "All truth is God's truth."

"...All truth is God's truth, no matter where one finds it."⁸

"Truth is assumed to come from God to man in two ways which theologians call general revelation and special revelation."⁹

"All truth is certainly God's truth."¹⁰

"...All truth is God's truth. Truth is truth, whether scientific truth or theological truth, whether found in the psychologist's laboratory or in the Bible student's library. To speak of biblical truth as somehow more authoritative than scientific truth is really absurd."¹¹

B. It falsely thinks that the "Bible is limited."

"The Bible is limited in its scope (i.e., Scripture doesn't cover everything). Thus it is not unfaithful to search out how to reasonably expand our understanding beyond what God chose to reveal in the Bible."¹² "Note that, while inspired ("God-breathed"), Scripture is not declared to be the only and all-sufficient source for every word ever needed anytime by anyone for any purpose related to human need; rather is it called useful."¹³

C. It falsely thinks that "psychology somehow works."

"Integration implies that God gave commands without providing all the necessary means of obedience until the advent of psychology."¹⁴

D. It falsely thinks "psychology gives wholeness."

"Pastoral care and counseling seek to utilize and integrate both psychology and theological insight regarding the human situation and the healing of persons. Pastoral care and counseling must be holistic, seeking to enable healing and growth in all dimensions of human wholeness."¹⁵

"But I would say that we also desperately need a vision of how we can be healthy in our whole beings, how spirituality and psychology can work together to make us more complete in Christ. This working together is what integration is all about...."¹⁶

E. It falsely thinks that there is a "practicality" of it.

"The reaction against theology. A sense of this interpretation is what may have led some psychologists to see in one or another form of psychotherapy the embodiment of living Christianity. Tired as most Christian psychologists are of overly cerebral religion, we find some of them reacting against propositional theology. By propositional they usually mean systematic or doctrinal."¹⁷

4. REASONS TO AVOID INTEGRATION

A. It does not naturally mix with the Bible.

Psychology is like a leavening agent that spreads and takes over one's thinking. Most integrative approaches are not truly integrative but lean almost exclusively on secular psychology.

B. It draws from exclusively from the “social sciences” and the “traditions of man.”

Psychology deals with observation and tries of format opinions based on the collected data.

C. It has little or no “theological” base.

Integrative approaches are built by men who for the most part are not theologians and have little if any theological understanding of the Bible. "The results of a study of 177 articles having to do with integration indicate that most Christians practicing psychology do not use theology as a filter to retain only that which is biblical."¹⁸ As a result doctrinal error is on checked.

D. It relies heavily on human reason or "general revelation."

Integrative approaches rely heavily on "General Revelation" which is tainted by sin, rather than "Special Revelation" which is God's truth about man and sin. They do not believe in the "sufficiency" of the Word of God.

E. It fails to see the value of “God's Word” for everyday living.

Integrative approaches do not see the value of theology to everyday life and do not see how theology relates to everyday life. This is why they rely on human reason and secular philosophy.

F. It relies almost exclusively on external “observation.”

Integrative approaches rely on "observation" (externals) to give a picture of what the problem is rather than "heart issues" (internals) that can only be exposed through God's Word, Hebrews 4:12.

G. It stresses the unknowable over the knowable.

When integrative approaches deal with "internals" they go to the "subconsciousness" for repressed problems rather than "thought" processes.

H. It is extremely “man-centered” in its viewpoints.

Integrative approaches tend to be "man centered" building on "esteem" and "worth" rather than the sufficiency of Christ who is our "image" and "worth".

I. It fails to give godly hope.

Integrative approaches do not give "hope" but only seek to control. They delude the grace of Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

J. It is too diverse of a system.

All integrationists pick and choose what they feel works. This actually makes integration such a diverse system that shows it only works because it camouflages or masks the real problem. The one using integration becomes the authority in choosing what they feel works.

K. It is always in a state of flux.

"Just as there is no ultimately definitive systematic theology but, rather, many profitable theologies of the Christian faith, there is and probably never will be a final psychological-theological integration."¹⁹

The reason for this, "Dr. Charles Tart, a prolific speaker and writer in the field of psychology, admits that the prevailing popular psychotherapeutic systems merely reflect the current culture."²⁰

Conclusion: "The process of integration is complicated in part because in many areas, and especially in psychology, adequate scholarship requires interacting with scientific theories and clinical models that are questionable from a Christian standpoint. We believe that the field of psychology in general, and psychotherapy in particular, can be a slippery path for Christians to walk."²¹ If this is true, and it is, why should the Christian be involved in a field that is so full of false presuppositions?

Churches, pastors, and Christian colleges, have compromised God's Word by both adopting integration and by supporting the integrationists approach. Colleges find teachers who hold to integration and perpetuate the integrationist approach. Pastors feed on the integrationist's material and also recommend integrationists for counseling. Churches and pastors use and encourage secular minded people within their church who have been trained in the integration approach. When will Christians believe and follow the sufficiency of Scripture and Christ? When will Christians take a stand for and teach the sufficiency of Scripture and Christ?

References:

¹The American Heritage Dictionary Of The English Language, by William Morris, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975, page 682.

²The Intergration Of Psychology And Theology, by John Carter and Bruce Narramore, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, page 20.

³Modern Psychotherapies, by Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, Downers Grove: IVP, 1991, page 19.

⁴Can You Trust Psychology?, by Gary R. Collins, Downers Grove: IVP, 1988, page 127.

⁵Basic Principles Of Biblical Counseling, by Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, page 18.

⁶The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration Of Psychology and Christianity, by Gary R. Collins, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1977, page 169.

- ⁷Lloyd John Ogilvie writing the preface in The Scandal Of Psychotherapy: A Guide To Resolving The Tensions Between Faith and Counseling, by Clinton W. McLemore, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1982, page 9.
- ⁸Meier, Minirth, Wichern, page 16.
- ⁹The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration Of Psychology and Christianity, by Gary R. Collins, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1977, page 121.
- ¹⁰Effective Biblical Counseling, Crabb, page 36.
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- ¹²Jones and Butman, page 21.
- ¹³Jones and Butman, page 26.
- ¹⁴Prophets of Psycholoheresy I, EastGate, 1988, page 112.
- ¹⁵Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling, By Howard Clinebell, Nashville: Abingdon, 1984, page 26.
- ¹⁶Me, Myself and I, by Archibald D. Hart, Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1992, page 31.
- ¹⁷McLemore, p. 38.
- ¹⁸Prophets of Psycholoheresy I, By Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Santa Barbara: EastGate, 1988, page 65.
- ¹⁹McLemore, p. 38.
- ²⁰Prophets of Psycholoheresy I, By Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Santa Barbara: EastGate, 1988, page 65.
- ²¹Jones and Butman, page 23.