

Faith Pulpit

Sound Exegesis— Sound Living

Shaky Exegesis— Shaky Living

During the earthquake of modernism that shook and collapsed the orthodoxy of many churches and denominations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, another earthquake was also taking place off the shores of Christianity—the birth of modern secular psychology. This earthquake happened along similar fault lines as the earthquake of theological modernism. Its upheaval ultimately resulted in a tsunami—Christian integrationist psychology—that not only swept over many evangelical churches and parachurch organizations, but also swept into fundamentalism.

Most textbooks trace the birth of modern psychology to Germany and Wilhelm Wundt's 1879 establishing of the first scientific laboratory devoted to the study of the life of the mind. Historians credit William James with bringing the study of psychology to America, when as a Harvard professor he offered his first course in psychology and subsequently wrote a two-volume textbook on the topic published in 1890.¹

The tsunami created by this earthquake swept into the church in the mid-1900s. In their book, *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century*, published in 2000, William and Randy Peterson credit Clyde M. Narramore's *The Psychology of Counseling* with giving “evangelicals permission to consult modern psychology and psychiatry alongside the Bible for answers to their problems. And [it] showed a way to integrate Christian belief with this professional field.”²

Narramore and a host of Christian leaders like him have churned out bestselling books and highly attended conferences built on the premise that the ideas of secular psychology must be integrated with the Scriptures in order to address sufficiently the complexities of modern life.³

The effects of this earthquake and its resultant tsunami, along with the subsequent aftershocks, so shifted the cultural and ecclesiastical topography that this new discipline has become in the eyes of many the expert interpreter in the study of the person. Consider two examples. First, whenever a major tragedy strikes and the media seeks to make sense out of it, where do they turn? They turn to the psychologists or any one of the varieties of their offspring (legitimate or illegitimate). Second, where have the authors of the majority of recent bestselling Christian books on problems in living received their education? Most received their formal training in psychology rather than in the Scriptures. In both examples, the Bible's sufficient interpretation of life has been muted in the marketplace of ideas.

How should fundamentalists today respond to the tsunami of Christian integrationist psychology and its influence? By knowing, teaching, and living the truth of the Word. Coupled to our unwavering commitment to the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Scriptures, we must faithfully hold to and demonstrate the sufficiency of the Scriptures for defining and directing the very things that secular and Christian integrationist psychology propose to define and direct: What is the origin and constitution of the person? How does life work? What gives life meaning and purpose? How do we aid and influence others to live in light of that purpose?⁴

This commitment to sufficiency logically flows from our loyalty to the hermeneutic championed in the other articles published in the last year. We must express our dedicated ownership of this hermeneutic through accurate and precise exegesis and exposition of the Word in the pulpit, in the office, in the coffee shop, and in the living room. Finally, our sound exposition must then always include robust application that brings "together the richness of the Word of God with the intricacies of people's lives in such a way that God is glorified through producing disciples who live out the truth of the Word of God in the details of life."⁵

What follows here calls us to such commitments. Using a brief exposition and focused applications of Psalm 19, we will celebrate the sufficiency of the Scriptures and challenge ourselves with the responses that sufficiency calls us to make. We will conclude each section with a question that provokes us to consider our level of commitment to the sufficiency of the Word. Please take a moment now to read the Psalm before moving ahead.

Vv. 1–6: The Universal-but-Limited Scope and Purpose of General Revelation

Psalm 19 opens with David's declaration that the heavens pour forth with the glory of God. He continues by proclaiming that neither moments nor eons of time, the barriers of language, nor the limits of geography thwart the heavens from proclaiming God's glory, wisdom, and power.⁶

Next, David draws the reader's attention to the most visible of bodies in the heavens—the sun. First, he compares the sun to the joyful bridegroom who, after having prepared a home for his bride, proceeds through the village to bring his bride both to and from their wedding ceremony. David then likens the sun to a champion running his course with strength and joy—a warrior mustered to protect the city from attack.⁷ With these metaphors, David moves his readers both poetically and mentally from the universal-but-limited nature of general revelation to the life-giving, life-shaping revelation of God found in His Word.

Our only proper response to the glory of God revealed in the heavens—run to the Word of God, delight in it, study it, and strive to live it. God's glory in His creation should drive us to His Word to seek true life and sufficient direction to shape that life. We will give God's Word, rightly exegeted and accurately applied, the place of final authority in “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3), refusing to allow fallen people's interpretations of general revelation to cloud the light of God's Word in our lives.

Question to Provoke Reflection: Do the various interpretations of general revelation offered by fallen humanity seem to offer us necessary life-shaping explanations not provided in Scripture? Even worse, do these interpretations then lead us to marginalize our attention to God's Word? Note this: We should hold suspect any interpretation of general revelation whose inertia moves us away from, rather than toward, the Scriptures.⁸

Vv. 7–11: The Life-Giving, Life-Shaping Objectives of God's Word

God's Word progressively provides His peoples of all times with His faultless and complete instruction. This instruction brings life to the spiritually dead and turns back the wanderer. God has recorded His certain and trustworthy witness in His Word, moving His children from spiritual ignorance to spiritual maturity. His instruction reflects His righteousness and provokes joy of heart. God's Word sets forth His authoritative, morally pure, and benevolent decrees. These restore sight to the blind and constantly correct the drifting vision of His children. The flawless fear of the Lord endures without end. His upright, reliable judgments are fully and finally just.

Notice how David puts before his readers a logical progression of the effects of the Scriptures on believing people. God's Word gives life and calls the drifter home. With that life, the believer who learns and lives the Word moves from spiritual ignorance to a place of discernment. This path of discernment leads God's children to anchor not only their faith, but also their heart's rejoicing in the Lord. As the rising of the sun with its circuit across the sky directs people to the glory and power of God, this rising of the Word of God in believers' lives gives them His eyes to see and shapes within them His character.

These spiritually mature believers live with an upright fear of the Lord. They see God as involved in every detail of their lives and as the One who has provided His sufficient understanding of those details through His Word. Their fear of the Lord brings them to a wisdom that enlightens their eyes to live with faith in God and His interpretation of life as revealed in His Scriptures. Word-filled, Word-directed believers interpret and live life God's way because His Word has taught them His trustworthy and just judgments.

Our only proper response to the Word of God and the God of the Word is to delight in the Word. When the nation David led submitted to the sufficiency of their God and His Word, they feared and followed Him. When they believed Him to be insufficient, they turned their backs on Him and His Word and worshipped other gods—gods they hoped and believed would give them what they thought they needed and what they believed God was not providing for them. The same is true of believers today. When we fail to see God and His Word as sufficient, we fail to delight in Him and instead delight in someone or something else. When we do this, we then fail to allow God to define the need and direction for our lives and instead live for the panoply of desires that characterize the lives of unbelievers—desires that move us in the direction of confusion and hopelessness.⁹

Question to Provoke Reflection: Do we give ourselves to a careful exegesis and exposition of the Word whether in its public proclamation, in the back-and-forth of private conversations, or in our own lives lived as reflections of the character and work of God? The Spirit of God through the Word brings new life, shapes believers' interpretations of life (gives wisdom), and equips believers to live with the character of the Savior in every detail of life. As servant-ambassadors of the Lord, we must give ourselves to understanding the meaning of the Word and to relating that meaning to our lives and others', trusting the Spirit of God to work in all our hearts (2 Cor. 4:1–6).

Vv. 11–14: The Word-Driven, Life-Encompassing Definition of the Believers' Need and Reward Before God

Moving forward from his call to delight in the Word, David links delight in the Word to the nature of God to protect and reward those who live with the enlightenment that only the Word can give. He declares, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: And in keeping of them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11).

The believer supremely needs the warning that the Word of God provides. Why? Because in the midst of the blessings and burdens of life, believers cannot discern the straying of their own hearts. David cries out to God for cleansing from the unknown sins that spring from his sinful heart. He also begs God to restrain him from willful rebellion that could overtake and define his life. David desires maturity that leads to blameless living and is antithetical to enslaving rebellion.

After crying out to God for protection, David entreats the Lord to produce in him the promised reward of verse 11. David desires that the words flowing from his mouth and the thoughts ruminating in his heart would find pleasurable acceptance to his God.

David concludes the psalm in verse 14 with the declaration that he belongs to the Creator-God of the beginning of the psalm—the same God of the Word who in revealing Himself makes promises and keeps those promises in the same way He makes them. This God is David's strength. He is David's Redeemer.

Our response—we must allow the Word of God to define our central need: protection from sin—and define for us God's purpose and reward for living: meditations and words that delight God. We need our Redeemer God. We need His strength and stability. Failure to delight in God and His Word led the nation of Israel down the path of enslaving rebellion. In this rebellion, they failed to see the definition and direction God laid out for their lives and, as a result, created for themselves all sorts of false felt needs that they tragically believed would give direction to their lives.

As God's children in the church, we must delight in His all-sufficient Word. He has brought us into a right relationship with Himself by faith. He has defined the need and direction for our lives. He has provided for us all that we need to grow in spiritual maturity by giving us His Word and placing His Spirit within us. When we fail to delight in His Word, we heap to ourselves all types of pseudo-needs that distract us from living with faith in Him. When we delight in God's Word, He delights in the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts. When the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts bring delight to Him, we live in submission to His wonderful plan of conforming us to the image of His Son and find both Him and His Word sufficient to accomplish that plan in every detail of our lives.

Question to Provoke Reflection: When do God and His Word seem silent to us? Sometimes this silence signals God's desire for us to wait with patient obedience for His work in our lives (Pss. 27, 37, 40, etc.). At other times the Scriptures seem silent to us when we have not wisely and accurately exegeted them, properly applied them to our present circumstances, and surrendered to God's purpose for our lives. He purposes to strengthen our faith and reward us with a greater ability to glorify Him by reflecting His character back to Him and to those around us. We must resist the temptation to fill the times of waiting in our lives with some other self-created need and self-defined reward. Otherwise, we will forsake His sufficient interpretation of life for one of the multiplied false interpretations that, in the end, never deliver what they promise.

Let us end our consideration of the sufficiency of the Scriptures with words from one of the original articles in *The Fundamentals*.

We go to this Book to find what is in our own hearts and minds. To one who reads it with ever so little spiritual intelligence, there comes a perception of the fact that this Book understands and knows all about him. It lays bare the deepest secrets of his heart, and brings to the surface of his consciousness, out of the unfathomable depths and unexplorable recesses of his own being, “thoughts and intents” whose existence was unsuspected. It reveals man to himself in a way difficult to describe, and absolutely peculiar to itself. It is a faithful mirror which reflects us exactly as we are. It detects our motives, discerns our needs; and having truthfully discovered to us our true selves, it counsels, reproves, exhorts, guides, refreshes, strengthens, and illuminates.

Such is the power of the living truth to impart life; and herein lies the difference between the truth which God has revealed in His Word, and truth which may be found elsewhere. For there is much truth which is not living truth. The multiplication table is truth; but it is not living truth. It has no quickening power. The theorems of geometry are truth; but they are not living truth. Never yet has any man been heard to testify that he had been the wretched and hopeless slave of sin, and had continued in spiritual darkness, fast bound in misery and vice until his eyes were opened by the great truth that two and two make four, or that three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; and that thereby his life had been transformed, his soul delivered from bondage, and his heart filled with joy and peace in believing.

Works Cited

1. Two examples of general psychology textbooks: Richard J. Gerrig, *Psychology and Life*, 20th ed. (Pearson, 2012); Saul Kassin, *Psychology*, 4th ed. (Prentice Hall, 2003).
2. William J. Petersen and Randy Petersen, *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century* (Revell, 2000), 129–30. The Petersens recognize that others wrote on the topic of integration before Narramore, but assert that Narramore’s work was the most influential.
3. For more on the history of integration, as well as some brief discussion on the dangers and value of psychology for believers, consider reading (with all the customary caveats, as applies to all resources listed in these endnotes) David Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, No. 3, Spring 1993 11 (1993).
4. For the opportunity to give greater consideration to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture than is possible in this article, consider consulting Bob Kelleman and R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Jeff Forrey (Zondervan, 2014).
5. Jeff Newman, “Discipleship in the Details,” *Faith Pulpit*, October 2009, <https://www.faith.edu/faith-news/discipleship-in-the-details/>
6. Please note that the exposition here is brief and targeted. For further study consider starting with C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Crossway Books, 1993).
7. For a more complete look at general revelation and counseling, consult Doug Bookman’s chapter entitled “The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling” in John F. MacArthur Jr., Wayne A. Mack, and Master’s College Faculty, *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Nelson Reference & Electronic Pub., 1994).
8. For more explanation and an example, consult this recording: Edward T. Welch, “Personality Tests,” *Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation*, April 14, 2016, <https://www.ccef.org/podcast/personality-tests/>.
9. For a brief but thought-provoking look at the Bible’s teaching on human motivation, consider consulting Edward T. Welch, *Motives: Why Do I Do the Things I Do?* (P & R Publishing, 2003).
10. Philip Mauro, “Chapter VII: Life in the Word,” *The Fundamentals*, vol. 2, eds. R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, and others (Logos Bible Software, 2005—originally published by BIOLA, 1917), 189–190.

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