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**How Does the Doctrine of Justification by Faith
Impact Christian Counseling?**

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Introduction

The main thrust of this article is to look at the “impact of the doctrine of justification by faith on Christian Counseling.” However, before we do so, we need to look at our understanding of the “doctrine of justification by faith” and an applied definition of “Christian Counseling” with a look at the history of our understanding of psychotherapy from a Christian perspective. In my approach to counseling, I espouse the belief that the basic understanding of counseling is rooted in God. God gives the law as an order of life and so counseling is a guide to healthy emotional living. To understand the need for Christian counseling, as one who has been justified by faith in Christ alone, I will approach the subject against the foundational teaching of psychology and the practice of psychotherapy. Just like one cannot understand the concept of justification apart from knowing God, one cannot truly comprehend Christian counseling and all that it is worth without understanding why God is known as the Great Counselor. What the doctrine of justification by faith is for the sinner, Christian counseling is the same for the psyche of humankind. Even though we are justified by faith, this process of justification does not eliminate our humanity or emotional distress. We continue to be tormented by life stressors; hence, the need for counseling.

I. Understanding the Doctrine of Justification

A. The Universality of Sin

The issue concerning the universality of sin is clearly articulated in the Bible. In the beginning, God created man to live in relationship with Him and with one another. He puts His image in us to facilitate this need (the need to be in relationship, Gen. 1; 26, 28-31). However, this image of God was distorted in man. This living being finds himself in a gulf of separation between himself and the image of which he was made. Since the image of God has been distorted in man, man had rendered no longer capable to realize his full potential in creation.

To be created in the image of God means also that man was a living being (Acts 17:28-29), with self-consciousness, rational, free, moral, and religious agent (Gen. 1:28) with ability to have fellowship with God. The Sin of Man brought with it some ramifications: the image of God has been marred but not erased in man by sin. Man's knowledge of righteousness and holiness is lost because of his sin. Since then the sin of man was imputed upon the rest of humanity. To impute means to attribute or ascribe something to someone. Adam is the representative of the human race. Adam's sin was not just charged to the human race, but has corrupted the human race in such a way that it brought condemnation and pollution to the entire nature of all. At birth, a person's nature and condition is polluted by sin (leading to personal sins) and is therefore unable to merit saving favor with God. David understood this well, when he says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me," Ps. 51:5. How did it happen that man was born sinners? God had put man to test as a means to shape his personality and thus to create in him, the desire to voluntarily choose to obey God. In came to pass that man has been consciously and deliberately oppositional and defiant to God. Man defies the will of God and thus rendered himself child of disobedience. The fall created a separation between God and his imaged creature. From now on, man will become secular instead of spiritual and will focus on the self instead of God, he will rest on the social system instead of the church, and he will ignore the fundamentals of the teachings of the word of God in favor of the philosophy of the world. Claiming to be wise, they minds were perverted. For because of the fall, the wisdom of the wise was distorted and the intelligence of the philosophers was frustrated. Since the disobedience of Adam, all men are sinners, therefore, mortal. This creates the very first crisis and need for intervention (see Gen. 3:9). Hence, man experiences a sense of lostness. He is lost with regard to God his relationship with his creator. He is lost with regard to self and others. He became misguided. In light of such experience, what shall be done before the threats caused by sin? Even with the best intention, no considerable amount of work is sufficient to rescue man from the isolation path he had chosen. He cannot rely on the support of the world for the world is desperately wicked and is in need of salvation. He cannot look into his community for his defines the community in

death of Christ (through His blood; cf. Eph. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:19), which completely satisfied God's justice (Rom. 3:24-25). This was accomplished in accordance with the riches of God's grace (cf. Eph. 1:6; 2:7). The cost of Christ's blood is the measure of the wealth of God's unmerited favor to every believer. It was accomplished not "out of" but "according to" (*kata*) the wealth of His grace (Phil.4:19. Eph. 1:8-10 explains that God's grace is given to enable believers to understand His will. God gives them wisdom (*sophia*; cf. v. 17; 3:10; Col. 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5), objective insight into the true nature of God's revelation, and understanding (□□□□□□□□□□) the subjective apprehension of it. This is accomplished because God made known to us the mystery of His will (cf. "will" in Eph.1:1, 5, and 11). "Mystery" is a previously hidden truth unveiled by God's revelation (cf. Rom. 16:25; see Matt. 13:11 for a list of "mysteries" in the NT). This mystery (unveiled truth) is God's good pleasure (cf. Eph. 1:5) to purpose in Christ to bring all things in heaven and on earth under His headship in the consummation of time. The words to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment are literally, "unto the dispensation of the fullness of the times." The "dispensation" (*oikonomia*) is an arrangement or administration. This dispensation is the millennial kingdom when "the times" in God's purposes will be completed (fulfilled), and all things both spiritual and material will be under Christ and His rule (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27; Col. 1:20). The words "bring all things . . . together under one Head" translate one Greek word (which occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Rom. 13:9), to speak of summing up all the commandments under love. In the Millennium, everything will be restored and brought together under Christ, the one Head. This does not suggest that everyone will be saved; instead, sin's disorder will be removed and universal peace will be established (Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10).

C. What Is Believing in Christ?

To believe is the act by which the sinner is enabled by the Holy Spirit to embrace the sacrificial work of Christ in his heart. To "believe in Christ" is to commit oneself wholeheartedly to HIM by faith. It is an act of obedience to God who calls every one of us, sinner to repentance; for He (God) has set a day whereby each one of us (sinner) will be called to judgment, Acts 17:31. Humankind was called by God to observe the law as a means for men to be in

relationship with Him. However, God has made evident with the Law is that the Law of God requires perfect observance, if justification is to come by it (Rom 3:10). However, the obedience needed to attain such blessing never reached by any living being. The Law shows humankind how sinful (Rom 7:13) they are. Consequently, it outlines their need for a savior. Since man could not meet the requirements of law to be juste before God, the life, work, and the atoning sacrifice of Christ was the most needed and cannot do without. According to the Scriptures, (1 Cor 15:3) Christ died for the sinners, (Rom 5:8), justified in His blood (Rom 5:9), hence, are saved from the wrath of God, (Rom 5:9). Jesus has done the propitiation (Rom 3:24, 25) and thus reconcile man with God. Hence is the reason Paul tells us that the Law was ("paidagogos") pedagogue or tutor to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24). Paul clearly states that man is justified by faith (Rom 3:28). This doctrine of justification by faith alone was the main thrust of the reformation era.

Since the early and Medieval Church Period, Martin Luther believed in the doctrine of Justification by faith alone. John Calvin called this doctrine the “hinge” of the Reformation. John Gerstner points out that the Reformers “defined and refined the doctrine (Justification by Faith Alone) in the fires of controversy.”² The Protestant reformers correctly argued that “men cannot be justified in the sight of God by their own strengths, merits, or works, but...they are justified freely on account of Christ through faith, when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are remitted on account of Christ who made satisfaction for sins on our behalf by his death.”³

² John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*, (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 69. Gerstner uses the shorthand phrase “solafideanism” to refer to justification-by-faith-aloneism Throughout his writings on the subject; summed up in the five “solas”: *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Solus Christus* (through Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Sola Scriptura* (under the Scriptures alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (to the glory of God alone).

³ For a good explanation on the issue of justification by faith “alone”, see Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), III.xi.19 and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xi.2, 38.

D. Elements of Justification - Primer.

Secular and General Religious Usage- [] is used Greek Ethics to refer to virtue. Both Josephus and Philo have used to refer to divine Justice and human virtue. In the LXX- [] he righteousness of God. In non-Pauline writings of the NT, [] judgment and rule of God, (Acts 17:31; Rev. 19:11; cf. Mk. 16). The same concept is found in Gen. 18:25, God is ‘the Judge of all the earth. He judges the earth and all must conduct themselves in conformity with His law, falling short of His expectation (cf. Ps. 7:11, rv; Is. 5:16; 10:22; Rom. 2:5; 3:5f.). 4

The Bible records 39 use of the verb “to justify” in the NT and 29 times of them is used Paul. We also note two occurrences of the corresponding noun, [] (Rom. 4:25; 5:18). Justification is not just a declaration, but has a historical core. For this reason Christ may be called our [] (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. Rom. 10:4). Faith in Christ says Paul, is the means whereby righteousness is received and justification bestowed. Sinners are justified ‘by’ or ‘through’ faith (Gk. []). It is not meritorious, (Rom. 4:5). The concept of justification is well expressed by the Greek words in the New Testament known as the [] groups. Etymologically, [] means, “to give direction,” “to indicate,” “to posit,” “to establish.” The word is used in Acts 25:15, and it occurs only three times in the NT to denote punishment and retributive justice, Acts 28:4, eternal judgment, 2 Th. 1:9 and Jude 7.

We also find the use of the word “Justify” (Heb. [] Gk. [LXX and NT], [] which is used in the sense of a

4 *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

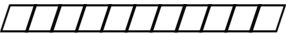
5 Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1979. divkh, h", hJ -1. *Penalty, punishment*; divkhn tivnein, *pay a penalty, suffer punishment, be punished ti; of or with something*, 2 Th 1:9. Also d. didovnai or (divk. didovnai of divine punishment). 2. *Justice personified as a goddess* Ac 28:4.

forensic term meaning, “to acquit,” “to declare righteous” or in the opposite sense “condemn,” as in (Dt. 25:1; Pr. 17:15; Rom. 8:33). Hence, from a legal standpoint, to “be justified” simply means, “to get a verdict,” (Is. 43:9, 26).


God is in his judgments (cf. Rev. 16:5; 1 Pet. 2:23; Jn. 17:25). His law is just (Rom. 7:12). When the word applied to Christ as the Messiah of God, it refers to His atoning work fulfilling for humankind, (Acts 3:13-14; 7:52). In this understanding, the is a doer of the law, (Rom. 2:13) only. There can be no righteousness by doing the law, Rom 3:10. Unless one becomes by receiving God’s one is still under the wrath of God, Hab. 2:4 (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). Only the will live by his faith.

III. Understanding the Act of Justification before God.

Justification is promised in Christ alone, Isa 45:25; 53:11. It is the act of God alone, Isa 50:8; Ro 8:33. In the Old Testament, under the law, justification requires perfect obedience, Le 18:5; Ro 10:5; 2:13; Jas 2:10. Humankind cannot attain justification, Job 9:2, 3, 20; 25:4; Ps 130:3; 143:2; Ro 3:20; 9:31, 32. In the New Testament, justification is not of works, Ac 13:39; Ro 8:3; Gal 2:16; 3:11. It is not of faith and works united, Ac 15:1-29; Ro 3:28; 11:6; Gal 2:14-21; 5:4. It is by faith alone in Christ alone, John 5:24; Ac 13:39; Ro 3:30; 5:1; Gal 2:16. It is the result of God’s grace and grace alone, Ro 3:24; 4:16; 5:17-21. Justification happens by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness upon the repentant sinner, Isa 61:10; Jer 23:6; Ro 3:22; 5:18; 1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21; through the blood of Christ, Ro 5:9. The resurrection of Christ completes our justification of the believer in Christ, Ro 4:25; 1Co 15:17 and thus frees the believers from eternal condemnation, Isa 50:8, 9; 54:17; Ro 8:33, 34. Because of this justification, the believer is saving and secures in Christ for the eternal inheritance of God, Tit 3:7 and is ensured of the final glorification, Ro 8:30. Consequently, the non-believer in Christ shall not attain to justification because they have not exercise faith in Christ to justify them before God, Ex 23:7.

people in times of trouble (Gen. 5:29; cf. Prov. 31:6-7). *However, it was understood that there is no true comfort apart from God, (Ps 69:20; 77:2); Lamentations (1:2, 9, 16); and Ecclesiastes (4:1). The proper work of the Holy Spirit of God is to comfort, (Ps. 23:4) and the people (Is. 54:11ff.). He makes of ruins a  (51:3). As the Great Shepherd (Is. 40:11), as one having the compassion of a mother (66:13) he comfort the suffers and in Him they find consolation, (66:11-12).*

2. In the New Testament

We find the ordinary use of the word *parakleos* in (Acts, 8:31; 9:38; 16:39; 28:14, 20, etc.). Always in general use for comfort, as in Acts 20:12; 1 Th. 3:7; 2 Cor. 2:7. *Asking for Help in the Synoptics* is a common practice, Mt. 8:5; Lk. 7:4; Mk. 5:18; 6:56; 1:40; 8:22. Now when we look and understand the gifts of the Spirit of God to men, we understand that God has given us gifts for the perfecting of His church. In 2 Cor. 5:20 it talks about evangelistic activity as a means of offering help to people in need of salvation. To proclaim the gospel is also  in 1 Th. 2:3 (cf. Acts 9:31; 2:40; Lk. 3:18). In so doing, the hearers will move to action. The good news about the Thessalonian church also comforts him (1 Th. 3:7). The same applies to the good news from Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6). The Bible tells us to admonish one another- To admonish is to counsel, (Heb. 13:22; 1 Pet. 5:12; Jude 3; Phil. 2:1; Rom. 12:1, etc.). We admonish in the name of Christ, (cf. Phil. 2:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 10:1; Rom. 12:1). The Holy Spirit is at work in us when we proclaim His counsel to people (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3, 31; Acts 15:28, 31). Barnabas was one who was known as a pastoral counselor (Acts 11:24). In Heb. 6:18 and 12:5 the advice of Paul is understood as comfort to exhortation and encouragement given to people. Paul comforted the churches in their afflictions (cf. Col. 2:2; 4:8). He himself is comforted by Philemon (Phlm. 7). *Paul talked about an eternal comfort and good hope (2 Th. 2:16).*

V. Understanding the History of Counseling and Psychotherapy

Psychoanalysis

Based on a mechanistic understanding of human beings, Sigmund Freud⁷ coined the method known as “Psychoanalysis.” It is derived from two Greek words “Psyche” to make reference of the soul- a term that stresses what happen at the level of the emotion and the second word is “analysis” which implies the taking apart of something to examine it from a scientific viewpoint. Freud imagined that by examining what happen to one at the level of his soul, one can acquaint himself with those aspects and understand the role they play in his life. Psychoanalysis preoccupies itself with the understanding of the notion of the “self, identification, personality, the mind and soul, consciousness” and how they relate to the body.

Freud argues that humankind is not the captains of his soul the master of his fate. Man is driving by desires. He argues that man is tripartite: the “conscious” -part of the mind that holds what one is currently aware of; the preconscious- part of the mind that holds ordinary memory, the ability to recall earlier events in one’s life, and the unconscious- part of the mind that is not directly accessible to awareness. He correctly argues that man lives in a perpetual conflict from beginning to the end of his life. Hence, he gives rise to the structural model. The “Id” (German: es = “it”), which is the original component of personality, which functions entirely in the unconscious- it follows the “Pleasure Principle.” Then there is the “Ego” (German: Ich = “I”), which displays the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. Lastly, Freud talked about the “superego” (German: uberich =”over I”), which reflects the conscience and the prohibitions. To cope with the demands of life, man develops what he calls “Defense Mechanism” (Repression, denial, projection, rationalization, intellectualization, reaction Formation, displacement, sublimation, and religious use of defenses). In so doing he introduce the “talking cure.”⁸

There after a quest to disprove the Freudian model began. Behaviorism (Ivan Pavlov and other) focuses on what are observable,

⁷ Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was a Jewish Austrian neurologist.

⁸ Meissner, W. W. Psychoanalytic Psychology, Vol 26 (2), Apr 2009, 210-233.

uninterested in mental processes and more focus on action-oriented, classical conditioning or conditional stimulus. It denied that one's action or behavior has anything to do with his thought process or feelings. Then, arrived person-Centered and Humanistic psychotherapy (Carl Rogers, Maslow and others) which seeks ways to help people to increase their level of actualization. The focus is on free will, spontaneity, and creativity.

In general, counseling highlight three major aspects: exploration, insight and action. All three aspects help the therapist to focus on listening: listening for (and reflect) the manifest content; listen for (and reflect) the latent content; listen for (and reflect) the story; listen for (and reflect) the feelings; listen for spiritual significance; listen for your own inner response and listen for the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Justification versus Christian Counseling

Now the question, having been justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, should the Christian be in counseling. In other word is being justified by faith and the need to be counseled are they an oxymoron? We know that the human personality is shaped and affected by the interaction between what is biological in predispositions and the environment in which one is living. If one can carefully follow each interaction, then one could predict the outcomes of his behavior. However, one does not follow carefully each interaction of his life; therefore, the things that affect his environment often affect one. Hence, the reason the believer must learn to respond to various environmental stimuli that affect his life, either negatively or positively. This is where the need for therapeutic intervention becomes a necessity.

In Christian counseling, intervention focuses on the “Psycho Spiritual Integration.” One is first preoccupied with the questions, when the Christian is struck by the natural, the just what then shall he do?

The stressors of life have affected many in the Christian community. Hence, the church has struggled for decades to define and categorize psychological and/or psychiatric conditions that may lead to distress. Using many diagnostic categories, psychologists and psychiatrists have attempted to isolate and classify different

discovered mental illnesses in order that they may design an intervention to healing the sick.⁹

Depends on the expert's discipline of training, the medical doctors treat mental disturbance as *organic*. The Behaviorists understand mental illness as a dysfunction. The Psychoanalysts understand mental illness as originated from *parental failures, disappointments, and frustration of psychosexual development*. The Family Therapists view emotional disturbance as a consequence of *unhealthy family structure*. It is evident that Christians suffer and struggle with many issues that cause psychological maladies like depression, phobias, anxiety, addiction, attention deficit disorder, etc...

One must be cleared that none of these maladies befall the Christian because of his sin, but sin in the life of the believer may lead to these psychological distress. "*For what I am doing I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do (Romans 7:15)*". In this text, the apostle is saying to us that the human being is living his life in a constant struggle even though he is a believer in Christ. He continues to state that even at his best *human attempts*; he is still unable to overcome the struggles of life. Paul says, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that Dwells in me*" (Romans 7:18-20).

In this text, it is clear that Paul sees sin in the life of the believer as serious *problem*. He refers to the source of our sin as one's own *flesh, mind, and heart*. It is clear, to note that Paul did not say that one's mental illness is cause by one's sin. But it is clear that sin may lead to mental illness as we read in (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), as the *cause* of his

Unwanted behavior, even the trauma (2 Corinthians 11:25) and mistreatment one is endured as *reason or explanation* for his unsettling conduct.

⁹ Brandt, H. and Skinner, K. (1998). *The Heart of the Problem Workbook*, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Justification by faith helps us to understand our shortcomings in life. However, it does not stop the believer from enduring the ills of life. This all to say that Christian believers are not immune from suffering. In fact, sometimes it seems that sincere Christian believers suffer more than others do! We are familiar with the statement “why do bad things happen to God’s people?” “Where is God when it hurts?” God has promised us many things, but He has not promised us immunity from suffering in this life. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." (Psalm 34:19). "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12). Suffering is a reality in the life of the believer.

Analyzing Biblical passages, stories, or persons from a psychological viewpoint has been a very popular approach to the integration of psychology and the Bible. There are a number of psychology-related facts, which are pertinent to the everyday life of a Christian. We know that **in cognitive processes, mind** distortions can cause problems for our clients.

Jesus explained that some psychological illness may be caused by one’s sin, (Mark 7:20-22), since they are the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), acts of unrighteousness (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), and the nature of a debased mind (Romans 1:28-31). We also know that certain life economic condition may lead a family to abuse, poverty, and even to traumatic experiences. Some of the Christian experiences may be translated as lack of forgiveness/empathy, grace, acceptance, freedom, guilt and shame.

Christian counseling is a dynamic process of communication, which involves many facets. It attempts to raise awareness of the needs of the counselee to rediscover the glory of God in the paradise lost as it is realized in Christ. Christian counseling emphasizes forgiveness for guilt committed both intentionally and unintentionally. From separation it leads to reconciliation, from hurt it leads to ultimate justice, from feeling of worthlessness it leads to an immeasurable quality of relationship with God and ultimately with self and others. It begins with the same sentiment that was in God, to meet the individual where he or she is in the despair of life. The goal of Christian counseling is to achieve healing through the talking cure. The Greek word is “therapeuo, which simply means therapy, care,

healing or restore. The biblical expression of therapeuo is found first and foremost in God's intervention to Adam, then we continue to see intervention and plans for intervention through a series of multiple dimensions of the use of words like: healing the land and the nations, 2 Chron 7:14; Prov. 1; 18; emotional healing, Ps. 147:3, etc... even though that one is save by grace faith and justified by faith in Christ, one may still be affected by mental distress. At this point, there must be an intervention that is Christian to remedy to the needs of the spiritual person.

The question how does the doctrine of justification by faith impact Christian counseling gives rise to the current debate with regard to approaches of Christian counseling and should it be Nouthetic. Christian counseling is biblical in nature. However, it takes psychology and integrates it with theology to address pathology. If the pathology is sin, then a biblical approach is needed to address the problem of sin. If the pathology is mental illness, then a psychological approach is needed to address the problem. The human personality is affected by a series of thing which God has intended to be addressed not through Bible study, counseling. Since the human being is affected by everyday living situation, such as retardation, AIDS and other issues related to ills that may affect the human, it is psychology that will address these. However, the only complete intervention to the talking cure is Christian counseling. For only Christian counseling addresses the needs of humankind from an ethnosociocultural approach.¹⁰

Having been justified by faith we have peace with God. Hence, Christian counseling is the gift of God to the church.

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¹⁰ Carlot D. Celestin. (2008). *A Historical Overview of Marriage and Family in the Haitian Milieu: A Practical Application of Theologically Integrated Systemic Counseling Method*. A doctoral thesis presented to the faculty of Gordon-Conwell theological Seminary. This model uses an ethno-sociocultural model provide an integrated counseling for those who are in emotional distress.

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