

**Position Paper #2**

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Question 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” The Garden of Eden was a place where Adam and Eve were in the presence of God. God created mankind with a purpose to rule and have dominion on the earth. God commanded them not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man’s disobedience resulted in spiritual death. “The manifestation of death was emotional, spiritual, relational, environmental, and ultimately physical.” (The Human Spirit, 2021) As a result of their disobedience, sin entered the world, humanity entered a fallen state, and Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden. From that point on, the relationship between God and man became estranged.

In the Christian worldview, understanding that the world is broken as a result of the Fall gives insight into seeing sin, suffering, and weakness as types of psychopathologies. According to Eric Johnson, psychopathology is a disorder of the soul. Mr. Johnson explains that the word psychopathology is derived from the root ‘psyche’ in Greek, which refers to the soul. Man is made of spirit, soul, and body. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Christian Standard Bible*, 1 Thess. 5.23). The spirit of man connects with God. The soul of man is where personality exists. With our soul, we think, and we reason. Our bodies contain our soul, and our soul contains our spirit. (The Human Spirit, 2021) According to Carter, “Each individual is born into a state of rebellion and alienation in their relationship to God prior to any particular action or behavior.” (Carter, 1994) The soul of man is a person’s character or personality. Our soul is where the spirit connects with God and can have a relationship with Him.

First, sin is a type of psychopathology because it is a relational disorder of the soul. Sin has severed our relationship with God today as it did in the Fall of creation. We are all born with original sin. We all inherit the sin of Adam. “For as in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15.22). Sin also comes with consequences, both spiritual and physical. The spiritual consequence of our sin is that we are separated from God and do not have peace with God. The physical consequences of the sins we commit can include physical and mental pain, such as an illness. For example, an individual that abuses substances can contract a blood-borne illness or even a mental illness because of this sin.

Second, suffering entered the world as a result of the curse of the Fall. The Lord told Adam that because of his disobedience, the ground was cursed, and he must suffer and painfully labor in order to eat and survive (Gen. 3.17). Suffering can include both physical pain and psychological pain. People in life may face tragedy that leads them to depression, and many individuals suffer from other mental illnesses. It may seem that they have done nothing to deserve this. One might ask, “If God is good, why would He allow this to happen?” The scriptures explain that God is not the cause of any evil or the creator of sin, but because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, sin, suffering, and death came into the world. Our world is broken and that is why tragedy occurs.

The Christian can be assured that God is in control and that God uses suffering and the negative situations in our lives to bring glory to His name. The fact that we are Christians does not mean that our lives will be free from tragedy or suffering. Some might think because we serve God, things should be perfect here on earth, but this is not the case. In fact, Jesus warned, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in the world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.” (John 16.33) As Christians, we know that

suffering is a certainty in life. But the beauty is that regardless of what we face here on Earth, Jesus rules over everything. If we have Him on our side, we have all we need to get through any difficult time here on Earth.

Even more so, God uses suffering to sanctify us and produce fruit in our lives. Paul says in Romans 5:3-5, “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” We will suffer, but we can actually have joy in the midst of suffering because God uses suffering to produce in us a living hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have hope that one day there will be no more suffering. Therefore, we can say with Paul, “We look forward to no more suffering, knowing that what we face here is momentary and does not compare to what God has in store for us. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Thirdly, we can view human weakness as a type of psychopathology as a result of living in a fallen world. Mr. Johnson explains, “Weakness, however, is a passive deformity where we find ourselves less than certain human ideals or even average human norms. It is a “given” condition; one which we do not produce.” (Johnson, 1987) He gives examples of different illnesses or situations individuals may face due to no fault of their own. For example, one may be born blind, or another may be born dyslexic. In John 9, Jesus saw a man who was blind from his birth, and the disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”. Jesus replied, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” ... “This came about so that God’s works might be displayed in him”. (John 9.1-3.) Sometimes individuals are born with illnesses that are not a result of their own sins.

Due to this weakness, life is more challenging for the individual with an impairment. Although life may be challenging for these individuals, it does not diminish their value as an image bearer of God. In fact, scripture refers to God being able to make us strong in our weakness. “For consider your calling brethren...God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things of the world and the despised, God has chosen the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are.” (1 Cor. 1:26-28)

In conclusion, sin, suffering, and weakness are all types of psychopathologies that are a result of the Fall in Genesis 3. So, what are we to do as counselors? As counselors, we “can wonder to what degree clients’ presenting problems are a form of decentering from God’s purposes.” (Holeman, 2012) If we suspect that our client’s problems are a result of their own sins, we can still help them get through these difficult times. “We can empathize with their struggles (haven’t we all justified poor behavior at one time or another?) and collaboratively develop plans to help them reach their goals.” (Holeman, 2012)

If our client is a Christian, we can explain to them that we experience suffering and weakness because we live in a fallen and broken world. We can explain this without making light of their present situation. We can also encourage them that their sufferings on earth will not be forever and have a purpose to give them hope in Jesus. Finally, we can remind them that we have a remedy for the psychopathology of our sin. “For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Cor. 15.22) Jesus Christ reverses the curse of the Fall by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3.13.) We can look to the cross of Jesus Christ and see that there he paid the price for our sins and has restored us into relationship with the Father. And we can rest and know that although our world is still broken because of sin, he is coming soon to make all things right.

## References

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