Psychoanalytic Therapy:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

This approach sees human nature as being deterministic. In other words, the behavior of people is determined by irrational forces, unconscious motivations, biological and instinctual drives, and certain psychosexual events during the first six years of life determine who and what they are.

In psychoanalytic therapy the life instincts of the client (known as Eros) play a central role in analysis and treatment. The instincts of people serve to ensure their survival and that of the human race, and these instincts are oriented toward growth, development, and creativity. The libido includes sexual energy as well as all pleasurable acts.

People are said also to have death instincts (known as Thanatos), which is the source of the aggressive drive in people. Sometimes in their behavior people display an unconscious desire to die or to hurt themselves or others. The aggressive drive can conflict with the sexual drive of a person, and this can be a powerful determinant in the way one acts as he does.

Id, ego, and superego constitute the basis of personality structure. The id (the biological component) is completely unconscious and the source of psychic energy. Psychic energy is derived from instinctual needs and drives. The ego (the psychological component) serves as the conscious mediator between the person and reality, especially by functioning both in the perception and adaptation of reality. The superego (the social component) is only partly conscious. It represents the internalization of parental conscience and the rules of society. The superego functions to reward and punish through a system of moral attitudes, conscience, and a sense of guilt.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

The thoughts, feelings, and actions of human beings are basically determined by psychic energy and by early experiences. Unconscious motives and conflicts are central in present behavior. Irrational forces are strong, as seen in the person being driven by sexual and aggressive impulses. Early development is of critical importance, for later personality problems have their roots in repressed childhood conflicts.

This approach sees the goal of much of life as the obtaining of pleasure and the avoiding of pain. Difficulty arises because the sexual and aggressive drives in people come into conflict and influence the way they act. A person’s ineptness at managing his life and death instincts leads to unrest and anxiety.

The problem then is anxiety, and this is the result of the inner drives, eros and thanatos, conflicting with each other. The constant stress and strain between these two entities of the id propel people to achieve self-gratification. Because there is a conflict between the impulses of people and the world in which they live, anxiety is created.

There are three kinds of anxiety—namely, reality, neurotic, and moral. Reality anxiety is the fear of danger from the external world, and the level of such anxiety is proportionate to the degree of the real threat. Neurotic anxiety is the fear that the instincts will get out of hand and cause one to do something punishable by others. Moral anxiety is the fear of one’s own conscience.

Neurotic and moral anxiety is produced by threats to the “balance of power” within the person. They let the ego know that it could be overthrown, unless it takes appropriate measures. When the ego cannot control anxiety by rational and direct methods, it relies on unrealistic ones. These ego-defense mechanisms (for example, repression, denial, reaction formation, projection, and rationalization) help the individual cope with anxiety and prevent the ego from being overwhelmed.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

Humans are viewed as energy systems. Personality dynamics are determined by the way in which limited amounts of psychic energy is distributed between the id, ego, and superego. Problems arise when one system gains control over the available energy at the expense of the other two systems. The person’s behavior is thus determined by the conflict between personality systems over limited quantities of psychic energy.
People bear some responsibility for their problems. Society—which frustrates people—also is responsible for people’s anxiety problems. They must work together to help people better manage the interfacing between their life and death instincts and to better manage the distribution and sharing of psychic energy between the three systems of personality.

Normal personality development is based on the successful resolution and integration of psychosexual stages of development. Faulty personality development is the result of inadequate resolution of some specific stage. Anxiety is the result of repression of basic conflicts. Ego defenses are developed to control anxiety. Unconscious processes are centrally related to current behavior.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

Guilt is the result of the superego—with its socially imposed standards—suppressing the ego from experiencing what the id is driving it to express. Therefore people are guilty in the sense that their behavior violates the rules imposed by the superego.

This guilt, however, is not the same as the Christian conception. In the latter, guilt represents the transgression of God’s law and the penalty associated with that infraction. In psychoanalytic therapy, guilt represents an intra-psychic process. Guilt is a sense of inadequacy for imagined, not real, offenses. In this scheme of thinking, guilt is not objective and real, but subjective and illusory. It has nothing to do with the person-before-God, but only with the person-within-himself.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

The client must realize that his id is a cauldron of seething excitement, which cannot tolerate tension and which functions to discharge tension immediately. He must learn that his id is ruled by the desire to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. It is like a spoiled brat that is driven by the instinctual need for pleasure.

In this approach, treatment revolves around the conflicts between life and death instincts and dealing with the problem associated with the three systems of personality sharing limited amounts of psychic energy. The client learns to manage the intra-personal dynamics of the id, ego, and superego.

The problem—namely, anxiety—is treated by making the unconscious id conscious. The client’s anxiety-related problems are resolved by enabling him or her to experience self-gratifying behavior in a socially acceptable way. Clients are helped to explore their past and probe into their inner psyche. They investigate all the various conflicts that take place within the id as result of what took place within their childhood. Their unconscious conflicts are brought to the surface so that they can be resolved.

The aim of psychoanalytic therapy is to make the unconscious motives conscious, for only when one becomes conscious of motivations can one exercise choice. The cure for neurotic symptoms and behaviors is centered on uncovering the meaning of symptoms, the causes of behavior, and the repressed materials that interfere with healthy functioning.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

In this approach, the therapist strives to make the unconscious conscious and to strengthen the ego. The goal is make the client’s behavior based more on reality and less on instinctual cravings. If the therapist conducts his analysis successfully, he will have a greater chance of significantly modifying the client’s individual personality and character structure.

The counselor is an id-explorer, who attempts to reconstruct the basic personality of the client. The counselor assists the client in reliving earlier experiences, for it is assumed that later personality problems have their roots in repressed childhood conflicts. The counselor helps the client work through these repressed conflicts and establishes an intellectual awareness of the id within.

In the counseling process, the analyst remains anonymous, and clients develop projections toward him or her. The focus is on reducing the resistances that develop in working with transference and on establishing more rational control. Clients undergo long-term analysis, engage in free association to uncover conflicts, and gain insight by talking. The analyst makes interpretations to teach them the meaning of current behavior as related to the past.

The key techniques are interpretation, dream analysis, free association, analysis of resistance, and analysis of transference. All are designed to help clients gain access to their unconscious conflicts, which leads to insight and eventual assimilation of new material from the id by the ego. Diagnosis and testing are often used, and questions are employed to develop a case history.
A critique:

Psychoanalytic theory has provided a detailed and comprehensive description of personality structure and functioning. From a biblical perspective, however, this paradigm is subjective and unsubstantiated by the scientific data. It represents an arbitrary, man-centered view of the conscious and unconscious.

Psychoanalytic theory has brought into prominence factors such as the unconscious as a component of behavior and the role of trauma during the first six years of life. Psychoanalytic theory has developed several techniques for tapping the unconscious as well as learning more about how unconscious motives and conflicts influence present behavior.

From a biblical perspective, psychoanalytic theory is wrong to place all of its emphasis on the influence and role of the unconscious in human behavior. While one’s unconscious thoughts and impressions are worth considering, they are not the core problem. Thus it is fatally reductionistic and simplistic to direct all of one’s energies and efforts into learning how unconscious motives and traumas affect present behavior.

Psychoanalytic theory requires years of training for therapists and much time and expense for clients. The model does not teach adequate coping skills for dealing with pressing daily concerns. The approach also inordinately stresses biological and instinctual factors to the neglect of social, cultural, and interpersonal ones. Beyond all of these are the spiritual, moral, and ethical dimensions of one’s being, which are most important to consider and which are largely obfuscated by psychoanalytic theory.

Scripture would agree that people experience inner and outer conflicts, that they have basic needs and desires they seek to gratify, and that they worry about many things in life. The root cause of these problems, however, is not a conflict between the inner drives of eros and thanatos. Rather, it is humanity’s sinful bent and willful desire to rebel against God.

Scripture would agree that people are responsible for their actions. It is wrong, however, to think that guilt is the result of the superego tyrannizing the ego. Rather, guilt is the culpability people experience when they violate the commandments of God.

The treatment of humanity does not reside in giving them permission to experience self-gratifying behavior. Rather, it is in urging them to repent of their sin and turn to Christ in faith. In this regard, the counselor is not an explorer who probes into the inner psyche of the counselee. Rather, the counselor helps the counselee come to knowledge of divine truth. Through the work of the Spirit in conjunction with the Word, the counselor encourages the counselee to get saved and grow in Christlikeness.

Adlerian Therapy:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

This approach maintains that what a person becomes in adult life is largely influenced by the first six years of life. Both past events and a person’s perception of those events have continuing influence on an individual.

Adlerian therapy says that people are motivated more by social urges, rather than sexual urges. Likewise, behavior is purposeful and goal-directed. Further, the center of personality resides in the person’s conscious perceptions, not his unconscious ones. Moreover, this approach stresses choice and responsibility, meaning in life, and the striving for success or perfection.

A positive view of human nature is stressed. People are unique, good, and full of potential. Humans are motivated by social interest, by striving toward goals, and by dealing with the tasks of life. People are in control of their fate, not victims of it. Each person at an early stage creates a unique style of life, which tends to remain relatively constant throughout life.

Based on a growth model, this approach emphasizes the individual’s positive capacities to live in a society cooperatively. It also stresses the unity of personality, the need to view people from their subjective perspective, and the importance of life goals that give direction to behavior. People are motivated by social interest and by finding goals to strive for.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

This approach maintains that people have feelings of inferiority and that these can be the wellspring of creativity. Basic inferiority feelings motivate people to strive for mastery, superiority, and perfection, especially in
early life. For example, at around 6 years of age, life goals are formed. These goals, in turn, provide the source of human motivation and are expressed as strivings to achieve security and to overcome inferiority feelings.

According to Adlerian therapy, people strive for perfection and cope with inferiority by seeking to master their world. The moment a person experiences inferiority, he is pulled by the striving for superiority (namely, attaining a greater degree of one’s own potential). The goal of achieving personal success pulls an individual forward toward mastery and enables him to overcome obstacles.

One basic problem is that people have mistaken goals and faulty assumptions about themselves and life. This produces such things as mistrust, selfishness, unrealistic ambitions, and lack of confidence. The aims and objectives of people are somewhat socially counterproductive and harmful. Not only is their motivation faulty, but also people often do not feel equal to others. Another basic problem is that people lack an awareness of their full potential and how to achieve it.

Many of the problems people experience are related to the fear of not being accepted by the groups they value. If a person’s sense of belonging is not fulfilled, anxiety is the result. It is only when a person has a sense of belonging that he is able to act with courage in facing and dealing with his problems.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

People are responsible for their problems. For example, they are responsible for not recognizing and achieving their full potential. They are obligated to recognize their positive capacity to live in society cooperatively. They must work with the therapist to examine their premises and goals, to develop socially useful and productive aims and objectives, and to feel more equal to others.

This approach believes people are not merely determined by heredity and environment. Rather, they have the capacity to interpret, influence, and create events. What people are born with is not as crucial as what they do with what the abilities they possess. While biological and environmental conditions limit a person’s capacity to choose and to create, they still are able to achieve significant goals in life.

Adlerian therapy maintains that people are able to cope with feelings of helplessness by striving for competence, mastery, and perfection. For example, people can seek to change a weakness into strength or they can excel in one area of concentration to compensate for defects in other areas.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

A basic premise of Adlerian therapy is that personality can be understood as an indivisible whole. People are social, creative, decision-making beings who have a unified purpose. The life goal is the unifying factor. One’s thoughts, feelings, beliefs, convictions, attitudes, character, and actions are expressions of his uniqueness. All of these reflect a plan of life that allows for the movement toward a self-selected life goal.

The concept of guilt might be conceived as bad feelings for not achieving one’s full potential. Guilt also might be labeled as feeling inadequate or embarrassed over having aims and objectives that are socially counterproductive and harmful. People furthermore have a poor self-image over not feeling equal to others.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

In this approach treatment is a matter of providing encouragement and assisting clients in changing their cognitive perspective. The intent is to challenge clients’ basic premises and goals. The therapist offers encouragement so they can develop socially useful goals. The therapist seeks to change faulty motivation and help clients feel equal to others. If clients want to rid themselves of bad feelings (that is, guilt), they strive to change their self-image and empower themselves to reach their full potentials.

In this approach it is maintained that if clients want to begin to feel better and to act better, they must learn better ways of thinking. Through the therapeutic process, they will learn that they have resources and options to draw on in dealing with significant life issues and life tasks.

In striving for the goal of superiority, some people will develop their intellect, others will develop their artistic talent, and others will develop their athletic talents. These styles of life consist of people’s views about themselves, their world, and their distinctive behaviors and habits as they pursue their personal goals.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:
The counselor is a facilitator who helps clients to discover their own full potential and how to personally achieve it. The therapist emphasizes joint responsibility, mutually determining goals, establishing mutual trust and respect, and emphasizing equality. A cooperative relationship is manifested by a therapeutic contract. The therapist concentrates on examining the clients’ lifestyle, which is expressed by the clients’ every action.

In this approach, the therapist helps the client to become more aware of his relationship to the human community and of his responsibility to deal sensibly with his personal goals and attitudes. The client is encouraged, as a member of a larger social community, to strive for a better future for humanity. He is taught that the extent to which he successfully shares with others and is concerned with others underscores the degree of his mental health.

As the therapist helps the client develop his social interests, his feelings of inferiority and alienation will diminish. This is because one’s happiness and success are largely related to his social connectedness with others. The client learns that because he is part of a society, he cannot understand himself apart from the social context. As he seeks a place in his family and in society, he will begin to feel secure, accepted, and worthwhile.

* A critique:

Adlerian therapy is correct to note that social interests do motivate people, that they can be goal oriented, and that accomplishing tasks are important to them. Adlerian therapy also is correct in observing that each person tends to develop a unique style of living. Furthermore, this approach rightly stresses the unity of human personality and the interrelationship between life goals and human behavior.

Adlerian therapy, however, attempts to frame the entire of human existence from the vantage point of a growth model. Thus, it tends to be too reductionistic and simplistic. Not all aspects of life can either be neatly explained or contained with this paradigm.

The Bible would reject the notion that people are innately good and thus full of commendable potential. Instead, Scripture teaches that people are born in sin and bent on doing evil. Apart from God, their potential for vice is great. Only in union with Christ can there be any potential for accomplishing something of eternal good.

God’s Word would reject the notion that people are in control of their fate. While they must not see themselves simply as victims, they also must not deceive themselves into thinking they can manipulate the future. Instead, people must recognize the lordship of Christ, submit to His will, and give control of their lives and destinies to Him.

Adlerian therapy’s stress on living in society cooperatively is commendable. However, this cannot be achieved through greater self-awareness and positive thinking. Harmony and cooperation only can be achieved through the power of God and the wisdom of His Word.

It is good for people to find goals to achieve in life. But which goals are most appropriate and why? Adlerian therapy would leave that decision largely up to the client. However, such an alternative is unacceptable to Scripture, for people are prone to adopt sinful, selfish goals. The Bible teaches that one’s life goals should be in agreement with what is revealed in God’s Word.

Scripture would disagree with Adlerian therapy in its assessment of the basic problem facing people. The Bible says that humanity’s fundamental problem is not a lack of self-awareness about their innate goodness and potential. Rather, it is an innate desire to live wantonly. The solution therefore is not achieving a greater self-awareness concerning one’s potential for greatness. Rather, it is to confess one’s sins and turn to Christ in humble faith.

From a biblical perspective, humanity’s greatest responsibility is not to recognize and achieve their perceived full potential. It also is not to become more self-aware and try to feel more equal to others. Rather, it is to repent of sin and grow in Christlikeness. Apart from these two essential aims, all other objectives and endeavors are eternally meaningless.

Thus from a biblical perspective, guilt is not simply bad feelings for not achieving one’s full potential. Also, guilt is not simply feeling inadequate or embarrassed over having aims and objectives that are socially counterproductive and harmful. Such distorted notions serve only to mask the true nature of guilt. Scripture teaches that guilt is the natural and unavoidable consequence of living in rebellion against God. The solution therefore is not to try harder to reach one’s supposed full potential or to develop a better self-image. Rather, it is to renounce one’s sin and get saved.

There is a time and place for providing encouragement and assisting clients in changing the way they think about themselves. But what cognitive perspective will we encourage them to have? What basic premises and goals will we challenge them to adopt? Subjective human opinion cannot be the standard for making such a decision. Only Scripture can absolutely define the parameters around which to shape our thinking and formulate our goals. God’s Word is the norm by which personal aims and objectives are determined to be socially useful.

Ultimately, people cannot look within themselves to solve their moral and spiritual problems. Likewise, simply getting rid of bad feelings, changing one’s self-image, or adopting a positive mental attitude does not address the
fundamental problem facing humanity. The real solution is for people to recognize that the human race is alienated from God because of sin and that Christ alone can rescue the lost from their plight.

Contrary to Adlerian therapy, the counselor is not merely a facilitator who helps the counselee discover his full potential and how to achieve it. Rather, the counselor admonishes the counselee to get right with God. The counselor urges him to repent and get saved. Only then can he experience his full God-given potential (namely, to be holy).

Apart from faith in Christ, all noble-sounding human ideals are empty of eternal relevance. Establishing joint responsibility, mutually determining goals, establishing mutual trust and respect, and stressing equality only take on eternal value in conjunction with faith in Christ. His lordship over a person’s life and lifestyle makes all the difference.

**Existential Therapy:**

* Presuppositions about humankind:

  Existentialists maintain that people are absurd. In other words, people make no sense and life has no real meaning. This view, of course, is the logical result of denying the existence of God, as the book of Ecclesiastes makes clear.

  In this approach, the central focus is on the nature of the human condition. This includes the capacity for self-awareness, freedom of choice to decide one’s fate, responsibility, anxiety as a basic element, the search for a unique meaning in a meaningless world, being alone and being in relation with others, and finiteness and death.

  Existential therapy essentially is an approach to counseling and therapy, rather than a firm theoretical model. It stresses core human conditions--for example, that personality development normally is based on the uniqueness of each individual. Existential therapy teaches that a sense of self develops from infancy.

  In this counseling model, self-determination and an innate tendency toward growth are central ideas. The focus is on the present and on what one is becoming. In other words, existential therapy has a future orientation, and stresses self-awareness before action. It is fundamentally an experiential therapy.

  The existential view of human nature is represented by the notion that the significance of human existence is never fixed. Instead, people continually recreate themselves through their endeavors. People are in a constant state of transition, emerging, evolving, and becoming. Part of being a person includes discovering and making sense of one’s existence.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

  This approach asserts that people experience common dilemmas in life--namely, isolation, alienation, and meaninglessness. Although the modern person has the will to live, he often has no meaning to live for. In other words, the malady of our time is meaninglessness, or an “existential vacuum.”

  This situation exists when people do not busy themselves with routine and with work. Existential therapy maintains that people have passively accepted their dire circumstances and surrendered their control to these situations. Most people in adolescence are awakened into real life by a terrible uneasiness that existence is one contingency after another, with no guarantees beyond the certainty of death.

  Existentialists assert that angst, or dread and anxiety, over death are a major life problem. In other words, people are filled with uncertainty and apprehension about what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, why it is going to happen, and what difference it makes if and when it does happen.

  The presence of anxiety creates uncertainty in the client with respect to the value of his individuality, his freedom, his autonomy, and his self-realization. Emphasizing these things in turn often creates conflict with cultural values of collectivism, respect for tradition, deference to authority, and interdependence.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

  Existentialists maintain that people and their environment both are responsible for the problems facing humankind. In other words, there is an inter-play between people and society.

  In this approach, it is asserted that people are the author, or architect, of their lives. Therefore, they are always more than the victim of circumstances. The client is taught that he has choices in every situation. Even in the most horrible of circumstances people remain free to choose what attitudes they will cultivate and display. They also have the freedom to choose the course in life they want to follow. They are encouraged to survey the terrain of their existence and choose the way in life that is best for them.
The essence of being human is centered in searching for an individual sense of meaning and purpose. A person discovers his individualized reason for existence by reflecting on his actions and deeds, by experiencing a value (for example, love, or achievements through work), and by the pain of suffering. The main goal is wrestling with true nature of one’s existence, not with trying to solve problems associated with one’s existence.

As the client learns to deal with the true nature of his existence, he comes to grips with issues such as sex and intimacy, growing old, and facing death. The real challenge is for people to be able to live in a world where they are alone and where they will eventually have to face death. Assuming responsibility is a basic condition for change. Clients who refuse to accept responsibility will not profit from therapy.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

   Existentialists maintain that the notion of guilt is an absurd explanation for the anxiety plaguing people. Basically if people and their world are absurd, then the notion of guilt is absurd. Likewise, to feel guilt is absurd.

   Rather than talk about the biblical concept of guilt, existentialists deliberate over the notion of evading a commitment to choose among alternatives. Error occurs when one allows others to define him or to make choices for him. In essence, the person has chosen not to live authentically.

   In this paradigm, the basic dimensions of human existence include the following: a capacity for self-awareness; freedom to choose among alternatives; full responsibility for directing one’s life; creating one’s personal identity; establishing meaningful relationships with others; searching for meaning, purpose, values, and goals in life; anxiety as a condition for living; and an awareness of the inevitability of death and nonexistence.

   Existential therapists focus on the concept of love. It is maintained that love is the highest goal to which humans can aspire and that their salvation is through love. When love is the underpinning of existence, one can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom and independence of mind even in the darkest of circumstances.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

   Existentialists maintain that the client should be challenged to find meaning and purpose through, among other things, suffering, work, and love. The client is taught how to project a notion of reality and then live his life in harmony with that reality. For example, if you want life to have meaning, project a notion of reality that is meaningful to you and then live in conformity to that sentiment.

   The goal is to help people see that they are free and become aware of their possibilities. In the treatment, clients are challenged to recognize that they are responsible for events that they formerly thought were happening to them. Treatment also includes identifying factors that block freedom. Clients are challenged to recognize their range of alternatives and to choose from them. Once they do, they are better able to start on a path of consciously shaping their own lives.

   Few techniques are espoused in this approach, for it stresses self-awareness and self-understanding first and technique second. Of course, the therapist may borrow techniques from other approaches and incorporate them into an existential framework. Nevertheless, diagnosis, testing, and external measurements are not deemed important. The approach can be very confrontational.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

   The therapist enters into the client’s subjective world without presuppositions that could get in the way of fostering an experiential understanding. Rather than superimpose his view as a therapist on the client’s experience and behavior, the counselor functions as an enabler. He tries to help the counselee establish a sense of hope and also to project personally meaningful and tangible goals. The counselee then tries to establish and achieve these goals.

   The therapist’s main tasks are to grasp accurately the clients’ being in the world and to establish a personal and authentic encounter with them. The relationship is seen as critically important. Clients discover their own uniqueness in the relationship with the therapist. The human-to-human encounter, the presence of the client/therapist relationship, and the authenticity of the here-and-now encounter are stressed. Both the client and the therapist can be changed by the encounter.

   In existential therapy clients are urged to take seriously their own subjective experience of their world. They are challenged to take responsibility for how they now choose to be in their world. Clients are expected to go out into the world and decide how they will live differently. Further, they must be active in the therapeutic process. During the sessions they must decide what fears, anxieties or guilt they will explore.
In this approach, the therapist tries to help the client to find ways to contribute to the betterment of the society in which he lives. The therapist helps the client to address the aspirations of the human race, including those values that make life worth living. By helping the client strive for these higher values, the therapist furthers the cause of social and cultural betterment.

* A critique:

The existentialist view about the absurdity of life is true if one leaves God out of the discussion. However, the fact of God’s existence makes the existentialist view untenable and irrational. Apart from God life has no true meaning. However, through faith in Christ life takes on real meaning and purpose.

Existentialists adopt too high a view of man and the nature of his condition. People do have a measure of self-awareness, but not with respect to their true sinful nature. In a sense, people have a measure of freedom—that is, freedom to sin. However, they have no ability to conform themselves to God’s infinite moral standards. They also are powerless to determine their destiny and bring eternal relevance to their existence, especially when they ignore God.

Existentialists have recognized a plight of humankind—namely, that existence is finite and life is cut short by death. This model also has correctly noted that loneliness and ill-functioning relationships are real problems needing to be resolved. The existentialist solution, however, is skewed. The solution is not to focus on developing self-awareness and self-determination. Rather, it is to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In spiritual union with Him, one no longer is alone, has the ability to establish eternally meaningful relationships, and can become the victor over death.

Existentialists are correct in their observation that each individual has a unique personality and that a sense of self-awareness begins to develop in people from infancy. These observations, however, are insufficient to explain the nature of the human condition and the way to resolve humanity’s plight. Only the biblical doctrines of sin, redemption, justification, and sanctification provide eternally relevant and satisfying answers.

Existentialism places too much emphasis on self-determination and self-initiated growth. Apart from faith in Christ, people are powerless to become godlier and to grow spiritually. The almost exclusively future-oriented mindset of existentialist therapy projects a distorted picture of reality. The past and the present, as well as the future, must all considered.

Existentialism is correct to note the importance of the human experience. However, this is only part of the picture. What one propositionally thinks also is important. Eternally relevant truth only can be found in Scripture, and it alone reveals how one can have a truly profound relationship with God and His people.

Existentialists are correct to note that anxiety is a problem gripping many people. However, it is neither the defining problem nor the root cause of other problems. Rather, the problem is the unholy disposition of people. While people are impacted by their environments, the foremost reason for their plight is their desire to live independently of God.

In the biblical way of thinking, overemphasizing autonomy and self-realization represents a worship of self. Scripture teaches that God is to be the object of our worship. The Bible also reveals that we exist as a community of people. Thus, respect for authority and the value of mutual interdependence are important to maintain and stress.

Despite what existentialists might think, guilt is real, resulting from humanity’s transgressions of divine law. The solution is not to project a fictitious notion of reality. Rather, it is to admit the presence of sin in one’s life and go to Christ in faith for forgiveness.

The goal of therapy is not to give people a false sense of freedom and an unfounded belief in their own human potential. Rather, it is to inform them of their need for forgiveness and relationship with God through faith in Christ. It is good to stress the client’s personal responsibility for his actions. Nevertheless, this does not take away from the truth of God’s sovereignty over the affairs of man.

Many of the basic concepts in existential therapy are fuzzy and ill-defined, which tends to make its general framework abstract at times. This approach also lacks a systematic statement of principles and practices of therapy. It unnecessarily devalues such things as sufficient data gathering and objectively diagnosing the problem.

While existential therapy rightly stresses the importance of being confrontational, the approach’s goal is biblically unsound. The therapist should be encouraging the sinner to repent and surrender to the lordship of Christ, not adopt a fictitious belief that he is autonomous and able to control his destiny.

It is true that the counselor tries to give hope to the counselee. The counselor also seeks to help the counselee resolve his problems. But the Bible teaches that the counselor’s goal is more profound and eternal than anything affirmed by existentialists. The counselor endeavors to bring about the conversion and consecration of the counselee.
Person-Centered Therapy:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

This approach maintains that people are essentially trustworthy, that they have a vast potential for understanding themselves and resolving their own problems without direct intervention on the therapist’s part, and that they are capable of self-directed growth if they are involved in the therapeutic relationship. There is an emphasis on respecting the client’s freedom, choice, values, personal responsibility, autonomy, purpose, and meaning.

The view of humans is positive. For example, people have an innate inclination toward becoming fully functioning. In the context of the therapeutic relationship the client experiences feelings that were previously blocked from his awareness. The client actualizes his perceived potential and moves toward an increased awareness, spontaneity, trust in his self, and being inwardly directed.

The person has the ability to become aware of problems and the means to resolve them. Faith is placed in the client’s capacity for self-direction. Mental health is defined as a congruence of the ideal self and the real self. In contrast, maladjustment is defined as the result of a discrepancy between what one wants to be and what one is. A focus is placed on the present moment and on the experiencing and expressing of feelings.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

The problems facing humankind are an unrealized and unactualized potential. These problems are caused by lack of self-awareness, being overly constrained, having a mistrust in one’s capacity for self-direction, and being too outwardly directed. Feelings being blocked from one’s self-awareness compound the problem. This leads to a discrepancy between what one wants to be and what one is.

This approach maintains that people tend to wear “masks” to hide their true selves. These facades are developed through the process of socialization. It prevents a person from truly knowing his real self and what he wishes to become. Because he has lost contact with himself by using facades, he is not open to new and different experiences, he mistrusts himself, and he is unwilling to continue growing.

Person-centered therapy aims toward a greater degree of independence and integration of the individual. Its focus is on the person, not on his immediate problem. The goal of the therapeutic process is not merely to solve the client’s problem. Rather, it is to assist the client in his growth process. It is to enable the client to better cope with problems he is now facing and with future problems.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

This approach maintains that people have the capacity to tolerate and even welcome uncertainty in their lives, accept themselves and others, be spontaneous and creative, and welcome privacy and solitude. They have the ability to establish deep and intense interpersonal relationships, display a genuine care for others, express a sense of humor, and convey an open and fresh attitude toward life.

This positive view of human nature maintains that people have an inherent capacity to move away from maladjustment toward psychological health. The therapist therefore places the primary responsibility on the client for change. Therapy is rooted in the premise that the client has the capacity for self-exploration and self-awareness and that he can use these to bring about meaningful change.

Persons are held responsible for at least resolving their problems. They must come to realize their full potential and then take steps to actualize it. They must take the initiative to become more self-aware, to increase their spontaneity, to trust their ability to direct their lives, and to become more inwardly directed. Clients must learn how to recognize and remove the obstacles to self-awareness. Through their efforts, a congruence of the ideal self and the real self will be made possible.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

Guilt might be described as bad feelings for not recognizing and achieving one’s full potential. Guilt also might be identified with a sense of embarrassment over not being more self-aware, spontaneous, trusting of oneself, and inwardly directed. A sense of inadequacy arises over the inability to recognize and remove barriers to self-awareness.
The person-centered approach focuses on the client’s responsibility and capacity to discover ways to more fully encounter reality. It is assumed that the client knows himself best and thus is the one to discover more appropriate behavior for him based on his growing self-awareness. It is believed that the client has the innate desire to move toward psychological maturity.

*Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

Person-centered therapy maintains that there are three counselor attributes that release a growth-promoting climate in which clients can move forward and become what they are capable of becoming: congruence (namely, genuineness or realness); unconditional positive regard (namely, acceptance and caring); and accurate empathic understanding (namely, an ability to grasp deeply the subjective world of another person).

When the helper communicates these attitudes, the client will become less defensive and more open to himself and his world. He also will behave in social and constructive ways. He will be naturally inclined and motivated to move toward meaningful self-exploration and mental health.

This approach seeks to provide a safe climate that is conducive to the client’s self-exploration. The goal is to enable him to recognize the presence of blocks to growth and to help him experience aspects of self that were formerly denied or distorted. Person-centered therapy seeks to move the client toward openness, greater trust in self, a willingness to be a process agent, and to gain increased spontaneity and aliveness. The client is encouraged to take an active stance and assume responsibility for the direction of his therapy.

*Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

This approach makes use of nondirective counseling, in which the therapist creates a permissive and noninterventionist climate. The therapist strives to be nonjudgmental in his listening and accepting of the client. Rather than give advice, persuade, and teach, the counselor tries to reflect and clarify the verbal and nonverbal communications of clients.

In this approach the relationship between the therapist and the client is of primary importance. The qualities of the therapist—including genuineness, warmth, accurate empathy, respect, and permissiveness—and the communication of these attitudes to the client are stressed. The client uses this real relationship with the therapist to help him transfer his learning to other relationships.

The therapist focuses on the constructive side of human nature, on what is right with the person, and on the assets that he brings with him to therapy. The therapist focuses on how the client acts in his world with others, how he can move forward in constructive directions, and how he can successfully encounter obstacles (both from within himself and outside himself) that are blocking his growth.

This approach uses few techniques but stresses the attitudes of the therapist. Basic techniques include active listening and hearing, reflection of feelings, clarification, and “being there” for the client. This model does not include diagnostic testing, interpretation, taking a case history, and questioning or probing for information.

*A critique:

The main strengths of this approach is its emphasis on respect for the client, active listening, being understanding and caring, and giving the client an opportunity to take an active role in the therapy process.

Person-centered therapy, however, wrongly assumes that people have certain innate desires and potential. The Bible teaches that all people are fallen and prone to sin from the moment from birth. Scripture also rejects the notion that people can solve their problems simply by being more self-actualized.

This approach’s emphasis on increased self-awareness and self-actualization is a form of idolatry, where the person makes the worship of himself his chief preoccupation. He deludes himself into thinking that he can trust himself to control and direct the affairs of his life. He also becomes misguided as he devotes increasing amounts of time and energy to inwardly directed pursuits.

The Bible teaches that no one has the ability to recognize and resolve the key metaphysical problems in his life. People must rely on God to convict them of sin and lead them to repentance and faith. Contrary to person-centered therapy, faith is not placed in the client’s capacity for self-direction. Rather, Christ and His all-sufficiency are supposed to be the objects of the client’s faith.

Scripture would not define mental health the way person-centered therapy does, for the Bible would reject the fictitious distinction that is made between the ideal self and the real self. Instead, God’s Word teaches that dealing
with the client’s sin problem is paramount to achieving mental health. Apart from forgiveness and spiritual regeneration in Christ, no true mental health can exist.

The Bible would differ with person-centered therapy on the importance of the present moment and on the experiencing and expressing of feelings. While these have their place, there are other factors equally important to consider, such as the past, the future, and the attitudes and feelings of others, not to mention those of God.

Person-centered therapy has concocted an incorrect solution to deal with a spurious problem. Contrary to this approach, people should doubt their ability to realize their full potential, and they should mistrust their capacity for self-direction. Apart from Christ, the only real potential people have is for sin, and the only actual capacity they have is to walk down the path of immorality.

Person-centered therapy is correct in stressing personal responsibility. However, this approach wrongly assumes that people are sufficient in themselves to bring about a resolution of their problems. Apart from Christ they cannot recognize the real issues of importance in their lives and they are unable to achieve what is called for in Scripture.

People can take the initiative to become more self-aware, to increase their spontaneity, to trust their ability to direct their lives, and to become more inwardly directed. Yet they will still be eternally lost, without any real hope for the future. The solution is to reject all notions of human potential and greatness, and humbly turn to Christ in faith.

This statement means that guilt is more than having bad feelings for not recognizing and achieving one’s full potential. Guilt is the condition of having violated God’s decrees and incurred His penalty for disobedience. Thus, self-exploration and self-realization are not the solutions. Rather, the solution is to renounce sin and receive by faith Christ’s offer of salvation. True and sustained growth cannot be achieved apart from doing these things.

Person-centered therapy correctly notes that the relationship between the counselor and the client is important. It also is true that the therapist should be genuine, empathetic, and respectful. Nevertheless, the therapist and the role modeling he conveys are not foremost in importance. Rather, it is the counselee’s relationship to Christ. Ultimately, the therapist should point the client to a saving relationship with the Lord, who alone can bring true inner healing.

Gestalt Therapy:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

In Gestalt therapy genuine knowledge is believed to be the product of what is immediately evident in the experience of the perceiver. It also is assumed that individuals can themselves effectively deal with their life problems, especially if they make full use of an awareness of what is happening in and around them.

This approach is an experiential therapy that stresses personal awareness and integration. It is anti-deterministic in that the person is considered to have the capacity to recognize how earlier influences are related to present difficulties. Growth involves moving from environmental support to self-support. The person strives for wholeness and integration of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Gestalt therapy emphasizes the “what” and the “how” of experiencing in the here and now to help clients accept their polarities. Nothing exists except the “now.” The past is gone and the future has not yet arrived; thus only the present is significant. Key concepts include personal responsibility, unfinished business, avoiding, experiencing, and awareness of the now. Gestalt is an experiential therapy that stresses feelings and the influence of unfinished business on contemporary personality development.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

Gestalt therapy contends that people use only a fraction of their potential. In other words, their lives are patterned and stereotyped. They play the same roles over and over again. Because of certain problems in development, people form various ways of avoiding problems and, therefore reach impasses in their personal growth. They also fail to find few ways to reinvent their existence and make full use of the possibilities of the present moment.

This approach further maintains that people lack an awareness of what they are experiencing and doing. This prevents them from having a sufficient amount of self-understanding and the knowledge they need to bring about personal change and growth. Not being aware of how they are behaving in the present (as opposed to the past or the future) prevents the client from achieving maturity and self-understanding.

Gestalt therapy says that many people never take advantage of the power of the present. Rather than being in the present moment, they invest their energies in bemoaning their past mistakes and ruminating about how life could
and should have been different. Or they engage in endless resolutions and plans for the future. As they direct their
energy toward what was or what might have been, the power of the present diminishes.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

Gestalt therapy is phenomenological in that it focuses on the client’s perceptions of reality. The approach is
existential in that it is grounded in the here and now. The approach is experiential in that clients come to grips with
what they are thinking, feeling, and doing as they interact with the therapist.

This approach teaches that people are responsible for what they are thinking, feeling, and doing. It is believed
that if the client can discover how he is preventing himself from realizing the full measure of his human potential, he
can learn many ways to make life richer. This potential is based on the attitude of living each moment freshly. A
major goal of the therapeutic process, therefore, is to help the client live a fuller life.

Gestalt therapy maintains that people must find their own way in life and accept personal responsibility if they
are ever to achieve maturity. It is maintained that clients can obtain an awareness of what they are experiencing and
doing, and this awareness can lead to self-understanding and the knowledge needed to bring about change. Clients
are expected to do their own seeing, feeling, sensing, and interpreting, as opposed to waiting passively for the
therapist to give them insight and answers.

The general orientation of this approach is toward clients’ assuming more and more responsibility for
themselves—for their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. They are confronted with the ways in which they are avoiding
their personal responsibilities and are asked to make decisions about continuing therapy, about what they wish to
learn in it, and about how they want to use their therapy time.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

The concept of guilt might be framed in terms of lacking self-awareness of what one experiences and does.
Persons feel disoriented and frustrated because they do not have enough self-understanding and knowledge to bring
about personal change and growth. They feel bad about themselves because their perceptions of reality and their
existential experience of the here and now are skewed.

An immediate aim of Gestalt therapy is the attaining of awareness. Increased and enriched awareness—by and of
itself—is seen as curative. Without awareness, clients do not possess the tools for personality change. But with
awareness they have the capacity to face and accept denied parts of their being and to get in touch with subjective
experiences and with reality. They can become unified and whole. When clients stay with their awareness, important
unfinished business will emerge so that it can be dealt with in therapy.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

It is assumed that people must find their own way in life and accept personality responsibility if they hope to
achieve maturity. The goal of this approach is to assist clients in gaining awareness of moment-to-moment
experiencing. The client is challenged to accept responsibility for internal support, as opposed to depending on
external support. The client also is encouraged to be more open about his feelings and to come in contact with his
present-centered experiences.

This approach focuses much more on process than on content. Emphasis is given to what is being presently
experienced, rather than to the content of what clients reveal. How individuals behave in the present moment is
considered much more crucial to self-understanding than why they behave as they do. Thus the stress in Gestalt
therapy is on directly experiencing and doing, rather than merely talking about feelings. This approach tries to
provide a perspective on how to achieve personal growth and enhancement, not merely how to treat disorders.

Gestalt therapy recognizes nonverbal behavior as a key to understanding. In fact, the client’s behavior is used as
the basis for making him aware of his inner creative potential. The experience and examination of dreams is used to
help clients discover basic inner conflicts. In this regard, therapy is viewed as an existential encounter. As a result,
counseling is process oriented, not technique oriented.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

This approach places a premium on the willingness of the therapist to be fully present during the therapeutic
encounter. Growth occurs from genuine contact between the client and the counselor, not from the counselor’s
interpretations and techniques.
The therapist does not interpret for clients but assists them in developing the means to make their own interpretations. Clients are expected to identify and work on unfinished business from the past that interferes with current functioning. They do so by re-experiencing past traumatic situations as though they were occurring in the present.

“How” and “what” questions are often used, but “why” questions are rarely asked. “Why” questions lead only toward rationalizations and “self-deceptions” and away from the immediacy of experiencing. “Why” questions lead to an endless and heady preoccupation with the past that only serves to encourage resistance to present experience.

In order to promote “now” awareness, the therapist encourages a dialogue in the present tense by asking such questions as “What is happening now? What is going on now?” and so forth. The questions and exercises used point up the specific methods the client employs to escape reality. The therapist’s aim is to help clients make contact with their experience with vividness and immediacy, rather than merely talking about the experience.

A wide range of techniques is designed to intensify experiencing and to integrate conflicting feelings. Techniques include confrontation, dialogue with polarities, role playing, staying with feelings, reaching an impasse, and reliving and re-experiencing unfinished business in the forms of resentment and guilt.

Imagining and fantasizing play a prominent role in this form of therapy. Formal diagnosis and testing are not done. The client does interpretation, instead of the therapist. Confrontation is often used to call attention to discrepancies.

* A critique:

Gestalt techniques make intense emotional expression an end in itself. These feelings are inadequately processed and thought through. This prevents the client from cognitively benefiting from his emotional experiences, thus limiting the potential learning that can take place. This approach also fails to explain how being aware of one’s present experience can lead to solving one’s problems.

Gestalt therapy is correct to assert that personal awareness can be beneficial to the counseling process. Nevertheless, too much is assumed about the innate goodness and ability of people. The Bible rejects the notion that people have the capacity to reform themselves to the degree that they and their lives can be pleasing to God.

This approach places too much emphasis on the here and now. For example, the client supposedly must bring any concerns about what was or will be into the present and directly experience these concerns. Such a free flowing process may create a dynamic and lively experience for the client and the therapist, but it does not give a sufficient amount of attention to past and future concerns in their own contexts.

The Bible would affirm that people lack an awareness of what they are experiencing and doing. However, Scripture would reject the notion that people have the ability within themselves to become self-aware, at least in areas that have eternal relevance. The Bible also would contend that the main problem is a person’s severed relationship with God, not his insufficient self-understanding and knowledge.

Scripture would say that personal change and growth cannot be fostered merely by experiencing things in the here and now. Rather, personal maturity only can occur when the client is in a saving relationship with Christ. Apart from Him, all attempts at self-understanding and knowledge will be narcissistic and lead to a worship of self, as opposed to a worship of God.

The Bible would agree with Gestalt therapy that people must accept personal responsibility for their situations. However, Scripture would reject the notion that people can control their present and determine their future. Instead, the Bible would point the individual to faith in the sovereign Lord, who alone has control over the past, present, and future.

The Bible’s concept of self-awareness differs sharply from Gestalt therapy. Scripture says that people are ignorant of their sin. Yet through the convicting work of the Spirit in conjunction with the ministry of the Word, they can become aware of their fallen condition. The goal is not to encourage an overly introspective look at what one is thinking and feeling in the here and now. Rather, it is to get the already inwardly-focused person to turn his attention from himself to God and others. Only then will true growth and maturity take place.

Guilt is not merely a lack of self-awareness of what one is experiencing and doing. It is a breach of God’s moral law and the penalty that accompanies such transgression. Freedom from guilt is not achieved by becoming more narcissistic. Rather, it can only be received by trusting in Christ for salvation. Only in spiritual union with Him can a person truly become self-aware, knowledgeable, and experience personal change and growth.

This statement indicates that the treatment of the problem facing people is not to help them gain awareness of moment-by-moment experiencing. Rather, it is to communicate to them the propositional truths of Scripture concerning their need for salvation and God’s provision of it through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The therapist
does not encourage the client to become even more self-absorbed; rather, the client is urged to abandon his sinful
and selfish tendencies and enter into a personal relationship with the Lord.

Gestalt therapy is correct to note that the client through nonverbal behavior can convey important information.
However, this approach is incorrect in its assertion that people have an inner creative potential to bring about
eternally relevant reform. No existential encounter can overcome the client’s enslavement to sin. Only the power of
Christ can do this.

Thus, the therapist is most concerned about dealing with sin issues in the client’s life, not with getting them to
identify and work on unfinished business from the past. The latter might have a measure of importance, but not to
the extent that it confuses the issue--namely, that the client must abandon sin and turn to Christ in faith.

There is value in recognizing how past traumatic situations can affect people in the present. But this is not a key
to personal growth and maturity. Only the saving grace of God through Christ can bring about true and lasting
wholeness. Neither imagining nor fantasizing can enable the client to overcome his sinful preoccupation with
himself. Only the power of the Spirit in conjunction with God’s Word can bring the client to an awareness of his sin
and his need for the Savior.

**Transactional Analysis:**

* Presuppositions about humankind:

TA says there are three distinct patterns of behavior, or ego states within people: Parent, Adult, and Child, and
these provide the framework for understanding how thinking, feeling, and acting take place within people. In the
Parent ego, people re-experience what they imagined were their own parents’ feelings in a situation, or they feel and
act toward others as their parents felt and acted toward them. The Parent ego state contains “shoulds” and “oughts.”

The Adult ego state is the objective part of the person. It is here that people gather data and process information
about what is going on. It is not emotional or judgmental; rather, it works with the facts and with external reality.
The Adult is without passionate convictions.

The Child ego state is made up of feelings, impulses, and spontaneous acts. Each person has a “Natural Child,”
which is impulsive, untrained, spontaneous, and expressive like an infant. There also is a “Little Professor,” which
represents the unschooled wisdom of a child. This dimension of the Child ego state tends to be manipulative,
egocentric, and creative. Furthermore, there is an “Adopted Child,” which tends to wine, complies, and rebels. The
presence of traumatic experiences, demands, training, and decisions about how to get attention force the Adopted
Child to modify the inclinations of the Natural Child.

TA says that children grow up with injunctions--namely, messages given to the child by the parents that tell
them what they have to do and be in order to get recognition. On the basis of these parental messages they make
eyearly decisions. These early decisions are aimed at receiving parental strokes (recognition and attention), as well as
ensuring basic survival.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

TA says problems are due to people having entered into conspiracies and game playing to avoid intimacy in
transactions with others. They have adopted excuses and rationalizations for their behavior patterns and goals. They
are unaware of the ego states in which they operate as well as their adaptive behavior. They thus are not as wise and
discerning as they ought to be in choosing the best options knowingly.

Games develop as a way of supporting one’s early decisions. Rackets are familiar bad feelings that people save
up. In many families certain feelings are not allowed. For example, only one person in a family might be allowed to
get angry, while the others must substitute another feeling. Thus, someone strongly forbidden to be angry might feel
sad instead and may make a racket of calling up this sadness to mask anger or resentment. All of these elements fit
into a life script, which includes one’s expectations of how his life drama will be played out.

This approach says people are influenced by the experiences and demands of significant others, especially
because their early decisions were made at a time in life when they were highly dependent on others. Yet decisions
can be reviewed and challenged. If previous decisions are no longer appropriate, new ones can be made.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:
TA is rooted in an anti-deterministic philosophy. It places faith in the person’s ability to rise above habit patterns and to select new goals and behaviors. TA, however, would admit that people are not free from the influences of social forces and that they cannot arrive at critical life decisions totally by themselves.

In this approach people are held responsible for their actions. Although the person may be a victim of early decisions and past scripting, self-defeating aspects can be changed with increased self-awareness. It is the client’s responsibility to decide what he will change and to take concerted actions to make the change a reality.

People are told that they can learn to see how decisions they made in the past helped them survive as a child in their family. Since these patterns of thinking and acting are no longer working for their welfare today, they can choose to redesign their lives in new and effective ways. Although people make certain decisions in order to survive at some point in life, these do not have to be permanent decisions. People are able to make new decisions and thus change the course of their lives.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

Guilt might be thought of as having entered into conspiracies and game playing to avoid intimacy in transactions with others. People feel bad about themselves because they have embraced archaic, dysfunctional decisions. They also feel confused because of the excuses and rationalizations they have adopted for their outmoded behavior patterns and goals. Furthermore, they feel a sense of frustration because they are ignorant of the dynamic interplay between the three ego states.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

Transactional analysis stresses the thinking, feeling, and behavioral aspects of personality. This approach tries to increase the client’s awareness so that he will be able to make new decisions and alter the course of his life. TA also focuses on early decisions that each person has made, and it stresses the capacity to make new decisions.

The goal is to help the client become script-free, game-free, and autonomous. The client is trained to become more capable in choosing how he wants to be. He is assisted in examining early decisions and making new decisions based on a heightened self-awareness.

This approach is primarily contractual and decisional. The client develops a contract that clearly states the goals and direction of the therapeutic process. Doing this tends to equalize the power of the therapist and the client. The contractual nature of the process also allows the client’s degree of change to be objectively evaluated. When the contract is completed (that is, when the specific changes are achieved), therapy is terminated. This leads to a de-emphasis of transference and dependence on the therapist.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

The therapist teaches the client how to recognize the ego state in which he is functioning when there is a problem. In this way the client is able to make conscious decisions about the particular ego state in which he wants to function. As the therapist helps the client become more aware of the ego state he is in, the client also becomes more aware of his adaptive behavior. With this awareness, the client is better able to choose other options knowingly.

The basic goal of TA is to help clients make new decisions about their present behavior and the direction of their lives. The therapist helps the client learn alternatives to sterile and deterministic ways of living. The therapist pays attention to didactic and cognitive issues. He helps the client to discover the disadvantageous conditions of the past under which he made certain decisions, adopted life plans, and developed strategies in dealing with people that he might now wish to reconsider.

The therapist does not function in the role of a detached, aloof, superior expert who is there to cure the “sick patient.” Rather, the relationship is framed as one between equals and partners. The therapist aims to help the client acquire the tools necessary for change. The therapist encourages and teaches the client to rely on his own Adult rather than on the therapist’s Adult. The therapist’s job is to allow the client to find and rely on his own power.

* A critique:

TA is overly optimistic about the client’s ability to rise above his habit patterns and select new goals and behavior. The Bible teaches that people are enslaved in sin, ungodly thoughts, actions, and goals are a reflection of
this fallen state. The well established patterns of thought and behavior cannot be broken and replaced apart from the power of God, which is made available to all who have experienced the new birth.

TA is correct to note the influence that social forces and significant others play in a person’s formative years. TA also is correct in stressing that undesirable decisions that were made earlier in life should be reviewed and challenged. TA, however, provides no objective moral standard to ensure that the new decisions are any better from an eternal perspective than the old ones. Only God’s Word provides the needed ethical and spiritual foundation by which to make decisions that are pleasing to the Lord.

TA’s emphasis on three distinct ego states is ingenious, but there is little empirical research and no biblical data to support the basic concepts espoused by TA theory. Thus, the three patterns of behavior espoused by TA are more fantasy than reality. All that can be said is that people may at times act overly childish, very adult-like, or excessively authoritarian.

TA has correctly noted that people often try to avoid intimacy with others, and they use a variety of techniques to accomplish their goal. However, the labels that TA uses to describe this activity are not the causes of the problems; rather, they are mere descriptors of the symptoms.

Thus, TA is wrong to maintain that ignorance about one’s ego states and adaptive behavior are the main problems facing people. From a biblical perspective the issue is not the symptom--for example, game playing and entering into conspiracies--but rather the undeniable presence of sin and the alienation from God it spawns.

TA is to be commended for holding people responsible for their actions. This approach, however, is wrong to think that increased self-awareness about one’s ego states and adaptive behavior are key ways to resolve personal problems. The Bible teaches that the client should be told about his sinful condition, about his estranged relationship with God, and about the Lord’s provision of salvation though faith in Christ.

Unlike TA, Scripture does not teach that people have the power to reform themselves, at least in a way that has eternal relevance. The Bible also denies the idea that people inherently know and choose what moral path is best for them. Rather, apart from Christ, people are sinful, selfish, and bent on doing evil.

It is only in the light of God’s Word, the illumination of the Spirit, and the encouragement of fellow believers that a person can make wise decisions that will change the fundamental direction of his life. When the client has renounced sin and turned to Christ in faith, he will want to love God and serve others based on that love.

Such a person realizes that his problem is more profound than mere avoidance tactics, game playing, and entering into conspiracies. He knows that he has transgressed God’s law, that he has made excuses for his sin, and that he once preferred spiritual darkness to light. Only with the help of Christ, in conjunction with the Spirit and the Word, can the person experience true freedom and renewal.

In the biblical paradigm, the goal is not to help the client become script-free, game-free, and autonomous. Rather, it is to help him become more consecrated to Christ and inter-dependent on others. The client’s personal decisions are made within the context of and in agreement to the teachings of Scripture. The client realizes that greater understanding and awareness can only come through the renewal of the Spirit and the Word.

The therapist thus is not focused on helping the client recognizing his “ego states.” Rather, the therapist helps the client recognize his sinful state and his need for salvation in Christ. Only through the new birth experience can the client possibly begin to make life-changing decisions that are eternally relevant and God-honoring. It is only as the client comes to know God personally and His Word intimately that he will have the ability to make appropriate choices and bring honor to the Lord.

Behavior Therapy:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

This approach is based on a scientific view of human behavior. It is maintained that when people come into this world, their conscience or moral psyche is like a blank slate. This means that people initially are neither bad nor good; rather, they are morally neutral.

People are not viewed as a mere product of socio-cultural conditioning. Rather, people are considered to be both the producer and the product of their environment. It is believed that clients can have a measure of self-determination and freedom to change and direct their own lives, if given the chance.

Behavior modification aims to increase people’s skills so that the number of their response options is increased. By overcoming debilitating behaviors that restrict choices, people are freer to select from possibilities that were not available earlier. This, in turn, will increase rather than stifle individual freedom.

It is believed that if people are given the techniques and skills, they will be able to change their thoughts and behaviors. In other words, people have the innate ability to improve their life by altering one or more of the various
factors influencing their behavior. The idea is that self-movement can be successfully achieved through greater levels of personal enlightenment.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

People suffer from maladaptive behavior primarily due to external stimuli from their environment. In other words, a distorted environment—namely, the surroundings and circumstances in which someone lives—is the root cause of humanity’s problems. This twisted environment begins to imprint itself on the initially clear moral psyche of people. As this process continues, people begin to take on certain desires, aspirations, behaviors, and perceptions of the world. The extent to which the environment is twisted impacts the extent to which people are programmed to be twisted in their behavior.

Behavior therapy focuses on the client’s current problems and the factors influencing them, as opposed to their historical determinants. An emphasis is placed on overt behavior changes as the main criteria by which treatment should be evaluated, yet cognitive processes are not excluded. Treatment goals are specified in concrete and objective terms in order to make replication of treatment interventions possible.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

People are not responsible for the cause of their problems. Rather, it is the twisted environment, which programmed people to think and act in twisted ways. This having been said, many behavior therapists believe people have the innate ability to effect change in their lives. The client is expected to take personal responsibility for resolving his problems. This approach systematically adheres to the importance of specification and measurement in the therapy process. For example, problems are identified and recorded; likewise, goals are specified and recorded. The client is guided in the task of assessing problem behaviors and the conditions maintaining them. Behavior therapy is largely educational in nature. There is an emphasis on teaching clients skills of self-management, with the expectation that they will be responsible for transferring what they learn in the office to their everyday lives. The behavioral procedures are tailored to fit the unique needs of the client.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

The highly empirical nature of this approach leaves no room for any real notion of God and the biblical concept of guilt. People think and act the way they do because of the moral programming society imprints on them. Dysfunctional behavior is believed to be caused by aberrant external stimuli. In other words, abnormal behavior is the result of faulty learning.

Goals occupy a place of central importance in behavior therapy. The general goal is to create new conditions for learning. The assumption is that learning can rectify problem behaviors. The client usually formulates the goals, which are specifically defined at the outset of the therapeutic process. Continual assessment throughout therapy determines the degree to which these goals are being met. Thus, assessment and treatment occur together.

A six-step process is used to pinpoint and specify the client’s behavioral problems. First, behaviors that are considered maladaptive or problematic are identified. Second, the client’s assets and strengths are determined. Third, the information gathered is placed into a context in which the problem behaviors occur. Fourth, a strategy is set up to measure each of the identified problem behaviors. Fifth, the client’s potential reinforces are surveyed to identify those people, activities, and things that can provide motivation for treatment and for maintaining changes after therapy ends. Sixth and finally, treatment goals are formulated.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

This approach maintains that the environment needs to be reengineered for change to occur. Unlike other approaches, behavior modification strictly relies on the principles of the scientific method. The therapies used are experimentally derived principles of learning that are systematically applied to help people change maladaptive behaviors. The approach focuses on the client’s current problems and the factors influencing them, not on the historical factors and determinants.

Behavior therapy seeks to increase the self-management skills people have so that the number of their response options is increased. They are enabled to overcome debilitating behaviors that restrict their choices. This, in turn,
makes them freer to select from possibilities that did not exist previously. In this scheme of thinking, the application of behavior modification is intended to increase, not stifle, individual freedom.

There is an emphasis on an action-oriented approach to therapy. Clients are asked to act, rather than reflect passively and introspectively at length on their problems. They are encouraged to take specific actions to change their lives.

A focus is placed on overt behavior, precision in specifying goals of treatment, development of specific treatment plans, and objective evaluation of therapy outcomes. This approach is premised on the notion that abnormal behavior is the result of faulty learning. Likewise, normal behavior is learned through reinforcement and imitation.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

The therapist tries to adjust the environment to bring about the changes in the individual’s life. The roles of the therapist as monitor, model, teacher, and consultant are explicit.

The therapist applies principles of human learning to eliminate maladaptive behaviors and help the client learn more about effective behaviors. She gets the client to focus on factors that influence his behavior and to discover what can be done about problematic behavior. The therapist states explicitly the behavioral concepts and procedures, tests them empirically, and revises them continually.

The therapist encourages the client to take an active role in setting treatment goals and evaluating how well these goals are being met. The general goal is to create new conditions for learning. This is based on the assumption that learning can rectify problem behaviors. Continual assessment throughout therapy determines the degree to which these goals are being met.

The therapist is active and directive, functioning as a teacher or trainer in helping clients learn more effective behavior. Clients are encouraged to take an active role in the process and to experiment with new behaviors. Although a personal relationship between the client and the therapist is not highlighted, a good working relationship is the groundwork for implementing behavioral procedures.

* A critique:

Scripture would take issue with behavior therapy on its view that people have a morally neutral conscience or psyche when they are born. Rather, they are born in sin and bent on rebelling against God.

Behavior therapy brings balance to the discussion by recognizing that people are not a mere product of socio-cultural conditioning. While the environment in which they live can influence them, they are morally responsible and accountable for their actions.

Perhaps the major flaw with this approach is its belief that people can have a measure of self-determination and freedom to change and direct their own lives. This idea might appear to be true from a human and temporal level; but from the divine and eternal perspective, people have no innate ability whatsoever to free themselves from sin and to chart the course of their lives.

No amount of training, reeducating, and skill-building can bring about the change in thoughts and behaviors that Scripture says needs to take place. The Bible would reject the notion that through greater levels of personal enlightenment one can alter the various factors influencing his sinful, selfish behavior.

The key element is the new birth. A person has to be born again before freedom from sin and a right relationship with God can become realities. This statement implies that the lack of these qualities is the real problems needing to be addressed, not maladaptive behavior due to a distorted environment. The fallenness of each person, as well as all humanity, is the root cause of twisted thinking and acting in the world.

Clearly, the secular and atheistic viewpoint represented by behavior therapy clashes with the perspective of Scripture. The former would say that the dysfunctional environment is the primary agent of concern, whereas the Bible would put significantly more emphasis on a person’s own culpability for sinful behaviors and desires.

Both approaches underscore the importance of the client taking personal responsibility for resolving his problems, but their reasons for advocating this are profoundly different. Behavior therapy says people are the product of their environment, and it is up to them to change things through their will power and self-determination. Supposedly true, lasting change can be realized by adhering to the techniques and procedures mapped but in behavior therapy.

Scripture, however, says that no amount of human striving can change a person enslaved to sin and bent on evil. Replacing faulty learning with supposedly correct learning is not the Bible’s solution to the sin problem plaguing humanity. One must first turn to Christ in faith, having rejected the sin that is in one’s life.
Drinking deeply at the well of secular and atheistic philosophies will not transform one’s thinking in a way that pleases God. The person must humbly receive and apply the truths taught in Scripture for any true and lasting change to take place--namely, change that meets with God’s approval and has eternal relevance.

The Bible makes it clear that people are responsible for their sinful behavior. They have violated God’s will and stand guilty in His presence. Changing one’s environment will not resolve this fundamental problem. Only faith in Christ can bring about an eternally satisfying solution.

Thus, the counselor is not an environmental engineer. Rather, he is a proclaimer of divine truth and an advocate of righteousness. He urges the counselee to renounce his sin and put his trust in Christ. Only then can true and lasting change be experienced.

Until these key things happen, all the efforts of the therapist to bring about change will be pointless. The therapist will be operating from a skewed presuppositional base about the nature and cause of the problem and the way to solve it. The goals, plans, and objectives surrounding the client’s proposed treatment will all fall far short of what Scripture advocates.

Such things as positive reinforcement and imitation can do much good, but only if the belief system and goals square with the teaching of Scripture. The therapist should be reinforcing biblical truth, modeling Christlikeness, and teaching the client to submit to the authority of God’s Word. Apart from doing these things, it is pointless to state explicitly the behavioral concepts and procedures, test them empirically, and revise them continually.

Rational-Emotive Therapy:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

RET is based on the assumption that people are born with a potential for both rational (or straight) thinking and irrational (or crooked) thinking. People have predispositions for self-preservation, happiness, thinking, and verbalizing, loving, communion with others, and growth and self-actualization. They also have propensities for self-destruction, avoidance of thought, procrastination, endless repetition of mistakes, superstition, intolerance, perfectionism and self-blame, and avoidance of actualizing growth potentials.

In this approach it is maintained that people contribute to their own psychological problems, as well as specific symptoms, by the way in which they interpret events and situations in their lives. People are said to have the ability to reinterpret their “self-statements” and thus reorganize their corresponding behavior patterns. If people can undergo a profound philosophical change, this will result in a deep-seated emotional and behavioral change.

RET assumes that people condition themselves to feel disturbed, rather than being conditioned by external sources. It is believed that people have the biological and cultural tendency to think crookedly and to disturb themselves needlessly. RET says humans are unique in that they invent disturbing beliefs and keep themselves disturbed about their disturbances. It is maintained that people have the ability to change their cognitive, emotive, and behavioral processes, to choose to react differently from their usual patterns, to refuse to allow themselves to become upset, and to train themselves so that they can eventually remain minimally disturbed for the rest of their lives.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

RET maintains emotional disturbances are the central problem and that it is caused by irrational thinking. People condition themselves to feel disturbed, rather than being conditioned by external sources.

According to RET, people are self-talking, self-evaluating, and self-sustaining. They develop emotional and behavioral difficulties when they take simple preferences (for example, the desire for love, approval, and success) and make the mistake of thinking of them as dire needs. They often sabotage their movement toward growth as a result of their inborn tendency toward crooked thinking and also the self-defeating patterns they have.

RET insists that absolutistic cognitions are at the core of human misery, for most of the time these beliefs impede and obstruct people in their pursuit of their goals and purposes. It is maintained that practically all human misery and serious emotional turmoil are unnecessary. People create--whether consciously or unconsciously--the ways they think and feel in a variety of situations. People’s capacity for self-awareness enables them to observe and evaluate their goals and purposes and, thus, to change them.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:
People are seen as fallible, yet capable of self-improvement. RET attempts to help clients accept themselves as creatures who will continue to make mistakes, yet at the same time learn to live more at peace with themselves. Since people largely create their own disturbed thoughts and feelings, they have the power to control their emotional destiny.

RET teaches that people have inborn tendencies toward growth and actualization. They are able to creatively decide to feel differently about a situation and therefore stubbornly refuse to make themselves anxious or depressed about anything. They have the ability to change their cognitive, emotive, and behavioral processes. They can choose to react differently from their usual patterns, refuse to allow themselves to become upset, and train themselves so that they can eventually remain minimally disturbed for the rest of their lives.

In this approach, the focus is on working with thinking and acting, rather than primarily with expressing feelings. Therapy is seen as an educational process. The therapist functions in many ways like a teacher, especially in giving homework assignments and in teaching strategies for straight thinking. The client is a learner, who practices the skills in everyday life that are being acquired in therapy.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

RET would reject the biblical conception of guilt, for it is assumed that human problems are philosophically grounded. This approach would say that people originally learn irrational beliefs from significant others during their childhood. Additionally, they create irrational dogmas and superstitions by themselves. Then they actively reinstall false beliefs by the processes of autosuggestion and self-repetition. Consequently, it is largely a person’s own repetition of early indoctrinated irrational thoughts, rather than a parent’s repetition, that keeps dysfunctional attitudes alive and operative.

RET insists that blame is the core of most emotional disturbances. Thus, if one is to cure a neurosis or a personality disorder, he needs to stop blaming himself and others. Instead, he should learn to accept himself, despite his imperfections. If people stay with their preferences and rational beliefs, they will not become inappropriately depressed, hostile, and self-pitying. Contrastingly, when people live by demands, they disturb themselves. Their unrealistic and illogical ideas create disruptive feelings. In other words, crazy ideas result in dysfunctional behaviors.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

RET is a combination of humanistic, philosophical, and behavioral therapy. It stresses thinking, judging, deciding, analyzing, and doing. RET is highly didactic, very directive, and concerned as much with thinking as with feeling. It is based on the assumption that cognitions, emotions, and behaviors interact significantly and have a reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship.

This approach insists that blame is the core of most emotional disturbances. In order to cure a neurosis or a personality disorder, the client must learn to stop blaming himself and others. Instead, he must learn to accept himself and others, despite the presence of imperfections.

RET maintains that all people are born with the ability to think rationally; however, they also have strong tendencies to intensify their desires and preferences into dogmatic, absolutistic demands and commands. The key is to stay with preferences and rational beliefs. This will help the client not to become inappropriately depressed, hostile, and self-pitying.

Through RET, a client learns how to identify and dispute irrational beliefs that have been acquired and are now maintained by self-indoctrination. They learn how to replace ineffective ways of thinking with effective and rational cognitions. This in turn causes them to change their emotional reactions to situations.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

The therapist helps the client see that his disturbed thoughts and feelings are self-created and self-perpetuated. The therapist also gets the client to see that he has the innate power to control his emotional destiny. Through autosuggestion one can reprogram his thinking, attitudes, and desires. Therapist and client work toward transforming an unrealistic, immature, demanding, and absolute style of thinking into a realistic, mature, logical, and empirical approach to thinking and behaving.

For example, if the client is upset, the therapist might suggest that he look at his hidden dogmatic “musts” and absolutistic “shoulds.” This recommendation is premised on the idea that absolutistic conditions are at the core of
human misery, for most of the time these beliefs impede and obstruct people in their pursuit of their goals and purposes.

The therapist helps the client to see that his misery and turmoil is self-induced and unnecessary. He is told he has consciously and unconsciously created the ways that he thinks and feels in a variety of situations. The client is reminded of his ability to be self-aware, to observe and evaluate his goals and purposes, and to change them when necessary.

The therapist tells the client that he can usually change his feelings, regardless of what happens to him. The client is led to believe that he is able to creatively decide to feel differently about a situation and therefore stubbornly refuses to make him severely anxious or depressed about anything.

The therapist convinces the client that he does not need to be accepted and loved, even though it may be highly desirable. The therapist teaches the client how to feel confident, even when significant others do not accept or love him. The client is taught ways in which he can overcome depression, anxiety, hurt, loss of self-worth, and hatred.

* A critique:

There is a mixture of truth and error in RET regarding the nature of people. It is true that people are able to think rationally and irrationally. Likewise, they often display a concern for such things as self-preservation, happiness, loving, community, and growth. Additionally, people have tendencies for self-destruction, superstition, intolerance, and so forth.

The fundamental flaw in RET is its premise concerning the cause of humankind’s problem. In this approach, irrational thinking is the culprit. Supposedly if people replaced their irrational thoughts, they would move down the path of normalization and growth.

The Bible paints a different picture of the human predicament. Scripture teaches that irrational thoughts and ungodly behaviors are due to the presence of a sin-nature in every person. The solution is not simply to reeducate the person into a secular and atheistic “enlightened” view. Rather, it is to point them to the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

It is true that people can be conditioned to think and act in certain ways. It also is true that people cause problems for themselves when they make simple preferences into dire needs. Contrary to RET, these are not the root cause of humanity’s problems; rather, they are mere symptoms. People do these destructive things because they are alienated from God and are searching for meaning in life apart from Him.

The Bible teaches that apart from faith in Christ, people are not able to reform themselves in a way that meets with God’s satisfaction and approval. Through self-talk and auto-suggestion they might be able to achieve a humanly acceptable level of self-improvement. However, they will always fall short of the divine standard revealed in Scripture.

In a sense, RET is a grand self-improvement scheme that is humanly engineered and maintained. God is not really needed. In fact, belief in a supreme being might be identified as one of the irrational beliefs the client needs to jettison. The Bible, however, reveals that those who reject God are fools. They have deluded themselves about right and wrong, and about truth and falsehood.

RET says that people should examine their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors and replace these with more appropriate ones. But what is the basis for evaluation, and who decides what new belief system should replace the old one? Most likely the atheistic therapist will substitute his own belief system for what he thinks is the client’s irrational system.

The biblical view is that Scripture provides the only valid belief system. All other systems of belief are aberrant and objectionable. The biblical counselor will encourage the client to examine his thoughts, attitudes, and actions in the light of Scripture. God’s Word, not the opinions of the therapist or others, forms the basis for right thinking and acting.

The Bible would agree with the idea that people have irrational beliefs and that they pick up skewed ways of thinking from others. Scripture, however, would reject the notion that people can truly know their own hearts apart from God’s help. The Spirit must convict them of their sin and make them aware of their need for salvation in Christ.

RET is correct in maintaining that cognitions, emotions, and behaviors interact significantly and have a reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship. The cure, however, is not simply reeducating the client to think and act differently. He needs God’s wisdom to know what to do and His power to be able to do it. Only the Lord can enable someone to overcome such things as depression, hostility, and self-pity.

In RET, hidden dogmatic “musts” and absolutistic “shoulds” are discovered and eliminated. In Christianity, the person’s belief system is examined in the light of Scripture. Moral imperatives that conform to God’s Word are not rejected but embraced, and the Lord is sought for help in living uprightly.
In biblical counseling the sinful self of the client is not propped up through self-talk. Rather, he is encouraged to acknowledge his sin and his need for salvation in Christ. The client also is encouraged to evaluate his goals and purposes in the light of Scripture, and to adopt aims and objectives that meet with God’s approval.

The therapist does not try to deceive the client into thinking that he can do whatever he wants if he puts his mind to it and stubbornly refuses to give up. Rather, the therapist should teach the client that he needs God and His people to overcome sin and live virtuously. The client also is reminded that only God can enable him to overcome such things as anxiety, hurt, and hatred.

**Reality Therapy:**

* Presuppositions about humankind:

Reality therapy says that people have four psychological needs—belonging, power, freedom, and fun. People also have the physiological need for survival. This approach furthermore asserts that human behavior is purposeful. For example, the behavior of people is geared toward fulfilling the basic human needs identified above.

Reality therapy attempts to explain not only how people function as individuals both psychologically and physiologically, but also how they function as groups and as societies. The central tenet of this approach is that people choose their behavior and therefore are responsible not only for what they are doing but also for how they think and feel. It is assumed that people who learn reality therapy will be able to take more effective command of their lives. In other words, by applying the principles of reality theory, people can prevent many potential problems that could lead them into treatment.

This approach maintains that human behavior originates from within the individual, rather than from external forces. Although external forces have an influence on people’s decisions, their behavior is not caused by these environmental factors. Rather, they are motivated completely by internal forces. Therefore, human behavior is the person’s best attempt to get what he wants and to gain control of his life.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

The basic problem is that people have unmet basic needs, whether psychological (belonging, power, freedom, and fun) or physiological (survival). The unmet needs of people are a powerful force that affects the way they think and act.

Reality therapy says that the brain functions as a control system to aid the person in getting what he wants. When a person’s psychological needs are thwarted, the behaviors he chooses feel painful, and this produces dissatisfaction with life. Thus a major flaw to be corrected is the irresponsible way people try to get needs met.

This approach is grounded in the assumption that people create their own inner world to satisfy their needs. This inner world, however, does not reflect the way the real world exists. Rather, the inner world mirrors the way people perceive reality to exist. Through their behavior, people try to force their perceptions of the external world to fit their internal and need-satisfying world.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

This approach rejects the notion that people are victims of their environment or others. Rather, reality therapy says that people choose their behavior and are therefore responsible not only for what they are doing but also for how they think and feel. The client is encouraged to learn the principles espoused by reality therapy so they can become better at effectively controlling their lives.

Reality therapy is based on the assumption that people are ultimately self-determining and in charge of their lives. Thus the key to changing a total behavior lies in choosing to change what one thinks and does. This in turn changes the person’s emotional and physiological reactions in the process.

Reality therapy maintains that if the right conditions are provided, clients will be able to develop the psychological strength to evaluate their present behavior and, if it does not meet their needs, to acquire more effective behavior. It is argued that establishing an accepting counseling environment and using the proper mix of counseling procedures can foster the right conditions.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:
This approach rejects the biblical notion of sin and culpability before a holy God. Instead, reality therapy would say that a person’s shortcoming is his skewed perception of reality. It is maintained that all people create an inner world that satisfies their needs. However, this inner world does not reflect the way the real world exists, but the way people perceive it to exist. Reality therapy would say that people have blundered by choosing incorrect ways they try to control their perceptions of the external world to fit their internal and need-satisfying world.

Reality therapy focuses on what clients can do in their present situation to change the behavior that is designed to fulfill their needs. The counselor’s efforts to establish a therapeutic involvement with clients encourage them to make an assessment of their current style of living. This assessment in turn enables them to determine how well their chosen behaviors are working for them.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

A major goal of reality therapy is to teach people better and more effective ways of getting what they want from life. This approach tries to create the conditions necessary for clients to develop the psychological strength they need to evaluate their present behavior. If they discover that their present ways of thinking and acting do not meet their needs, they are encouraged to acquire more effective behavior patterns.

The process of learning effective behavior is facilitated by the application of the basic principles of reality therapy. Rather than aloofness and detachment, the therapist tries to establish close and warm involvement with the client. The therapist backs this approach by projecting personal interest in the client and by providing some self-revelation.

Reality therapy rejects the medical model of mental illness. Rather, people choosing inappropriate ways to meet (their) needs cause problems. Clients are taught to identify these wrong behavior patterns and to satisfy their needs in ways that do not interfere with others’ fulfilling their needs. This approach emphasizes that a person can only control his behavior. Thus the best way to control events around oneself is through what one does.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

Therapists concentrate on what clients can do in their present situation to change the behavior that is designed to fulfill their needs. The counselor works hard to establish a therapeutic involvement with the client. This encourages him to make an assessment of his current style of living and whether his chosen behaviors are truly working to meet his needs.

The therapist focuses on the client’s current actions and thoughts, rather than on his insight, feelings, past experiences, or unconscious motivations. The therapist helps the client to see that he can improve the quality of his life through a process of honest self-examination. In this approach, the therapist is active and directive, and functions as a teacher or trainer in helping the client to learn more effective behavior.

The therapist alerts the client to his basic needs and how he tries to satisfy these needs through his behavior patterns. The therapist challenges the client to evaluate whether his current behavior is truly satisfying his needs. If it is not, he is encouraged to formulate a plan for change, to commit to this plan, and to follow through on his commitment. The therapist urges the client to be active in the process and to experiment with new behaviors.

* A critique:

This approach is a “needs-driven” orientation to therapy. The human problem is reduced to the simple concept of the client trying to fulfill his needs in unsuitable ways. The solution is for the therapist to try and help the client recognize his needs, determine the effectiveness of his present behavior, and make the needed changes to help him more appropriately and effectively meet his needs.

It is true that people have basic needs that often go unmet. However, Scripture rejects the notion that unmet needs (at least those identified by reality therapy) are the problem and fulfilling them the solution to the human predicament. The Bible teaches that alienation from God is the fundamental problem that must be resolved. The sinful behaviors that exist ultimately are the outgrowth of this problem.

When considered from the perspective of Scripture, reality therapy advocates a self-centered and self-exalting view of people. The client is led to believe that meeting his needs is the most important goal in life and that he should structure his thinking and acting in socially acceptable ways to meet his needs.

The Bible would reject such a self-idolatrous notion of life. Instead, Scripture would argue that one’s focus should be shifted away from self to God and others. The Bible also would reject the idea that people can control
events around them through what they do. The reality is that unpleasant things continue to happen to us despite what we might consciously choose to do.

Perhaps in a twisted sense reality therapy is a debasing approach to life. After all, it tells people, whom God created to worship and serve Him, to worship and serve themselves. Their highest human potential—namely, to honor and obey the Lord—is thwarted by a preoccupation with self. Such a narcissistic orientation always is dehumanizing.

Reality therapy is correct in stressing that people are responsible for what they do. However, this approach is wrong to suggest that people have the power within them to bring about meaningful moral reform, at least ethical change that meets with God’s approval. In reality therapy, people are not motivated by a desire to glorify God. Rather, their desire is to meet their perceived unfulfilled needs.

In this approach, the key to changing a total behavior lies in choosing to change what one thinks and does. But what is the standard for determining proper thought and action? Apart from Scripture, all values, goals, and beliefs are questionable, for they arise from an atheistic paradigm.

It is true that people have a skewed perception of reality. However, the view of life espoused by reality therapy is not an acceptable alternative. Only Scripture presents a correct view of reality. For example, the Bible teaches that people are sinful creatures who have rebelled against God. Their main shortcoming, therefore, is not just in choosing incorrect ways to control their lives. Rather, it is rejecting God and His will.

The Bible and reality therapy are at odds concerning the best way to treat the client. The latter would encourage people to learn better and more effective ways to get what they want from life. The former would encourage people to abandon their self-centered desires, recognize their need for salvation, and turn to Christ in faith.

Scripture encourages the client to evaluate his behavior in terms of whether it conforms to God’s teaching, not in terms of whether it helps him to meet his needs. The bottom line is not self-gratification and fulfillment. Rather, it is to know God personally and to honor Him in every area of life.

The Bible would affirm the importance of the therapist establishing a sensitive and caring involvement with the client. However, the goal is not to get the client to become more self-focused. Rather, it is to encourage him to become more concerned about God’s will and the needs of others.

It is true that the therapist should help the client to assess his current style of living. However, it is not for the purpose of enabling him to get what he thinks he wants from life. Rather, the goal is to alert the client to his eternal need for forgiveness and redemption in Christ. It is only through faith in Christ that the client can begin to function in the ways that God originally intended.

Reality therapy is correct in maintaining that the client should formulate plans, make a commit to those plans, and follow through on that commitment. The problem concerns the plans being adopted. If they do not conform to the teaching of Scripture, they are unacceptable. Only goals, objectives, and plans that agree with the written Word are pleasing to God.

Adams’ Nouthetic Counseling Model:

* Presuppositions about humankind:

Adams maintains that God created all people in His own image. Consequently, all people have great potential as God’s representatives and servants here on earth. The great potential, though substantially diminished, still exists after the Fall of humankind into sin.

Adams maintains that all people are fallen and therefore have a sin nature. All people are personally responsible for their actions, whether good or bad. Personal sin, of course, complicates a person’s life, and that is why it must be dealt with.

Adams maintains that although the image of God in people still exists, it has been terribly distorted and marred. The image of God in all people can be restored through faith in the Son of God. Eyrich, commenting on Adams at this point elaborates, “enabling them to become three-dimensional beings again. In other words, they can live in reference to time, space, and eternity.” That is why Christian counselors endeavor to help their counselees become more Christlike. Of course, the starting point is faith in Christ.

Adams maintains that the image of God in people is restorable because the Lord says He will sanctify those who have believed in Christ. Becoming more holy—that is, becoming increasingly separated from sin and more set apart for God and His service—is the permanent answer to the sin problem.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:
Adams maintains that sometimes the problems people experience are physical in nature. They are organically based. The problems are the result of something not functioning right in the person’s body. On other occasions, the problems people experience are demonic in nature (see 1 John 5:18; Adams, 1973, p. 9). In other words, Satan and his devilish cohorts can traumatize, harass, and even possess individuals (non-Christians).

Sometimes the problems people experience are spiritual in nature, that is, the sinful responses to the pressures of life. The largest percentage of human problems is the result of people living in ungodly ways.

Adam’s maintains that humankind’s problems are solvable, regardless of their source. For those who have trusted in Christ there is temporal and eternal hope. Such confidence is based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the renewing work of God’s Word.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

Adams would maintain that people are directly responsible for their sinful actions and attitudes and thus must take full responsibility for their personal situations. They cannot blame others for the things they have done wrong. If they have violated God’s will, it is not because they victims of their environment or because someone forced them to live and think a certain way.

Adams would affirm the teaching of Scripture that all people are sinners and live in rebellion against the Lord. Apart from Christ all people wallow in sin, gratify their ungodly desires, buy into the world’s way of thinking, and follow the precepts of Satan. While a person's past--including his parental upbringing and environment--are important to consider in the counseling process, these must not be allowed to excuse away the wrongdoings of the counselee.

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

In agreement with Scripture, Adams would see guilt as the fact and result of violating God’s law. It not only is real but also punishable by Him. Guilt is not just a feeling of inadequacy or having done something bad. More importantly it is a state of existence in which one stands culpable before the Lord as a transgressor of His perfect and holy will.

Adams would maintain that the presence of guilt is real, not imaginary. It is something to be affirmed, not denied. The concept of “guilt” carries with it the notion that the violator deserves to be punished by God for his transgression, whether in thought, attitude, or action.

Adams recognizes that true, biblical guilt will produce an after-the-fact state of being. For example, the guilty person will feel anxiety, shame, and a diminished sense of dignity and worth. Though uncomfortable, the presence of these can alert the guilty person of his need to repent and get right with God. A sense of guilt can increase a person’s awareness of his need to adopt more constructive behaviors and attitudes.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

Adams maintains that all non-organically based problems need to be dealt with from a biblical perspective. The primary goal is to help people become more Christlike in their behavior. Another goal is to train one’s fellow believers to help others become more Christlike in their behavior. The intent is that all will seek to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Adams would maintain that in treating the fundamental problem facing humankind, counselors should aim to achieve two primary objectives--converts and character; that is, they endeavor through evangelism to bring those who are unbelievers into a saving relationship with Christ. Counselors also seek through various forms of teaching to help believers develop their character so that it reflects increasingly greater Christlikeness.

Adams would maintain that another fundamental aspect of treatment is bringing about greater levels of holiness in the lives of one’s counselees. In this scheme of thinking, man’s primary problem is not his unfulfilled personal needs. Rather, it is his ruptured relationship with God due to the presence of sin.

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

It is not inconsistent with Adams to maintain that the counselor’s role is multifaceted. For example, there are times when the counselor takes an indirective approach. The counselor recognizes that there are times when he should attempt to reflect back to his counselee what he has already said. The counselor also recognizes the value of reworking and rephrasing a counselee’s statements so that the counselee can increase his own understanding of his
problem. Furthermore, the Christian counselor can use the indirective process to discern what the counselee is thinking.

There are times when the Christian counselor’s role is directive. This means the counselor attempts to discern and understand the counselee’s problem, point it out, and recommend to the counselee what he needs to do to resolve the problem.

There are times when the counselor’s role is advisory. This means the counselor is trying to coach counselees along the way so that they personally develop and grow in their relationship with God. This will enable them to make their own important life decisions.

There are times when the counselor’s role is instructional. In other words, counselors should function as teachers. They seek to help the counselee know and understand what God’s Word has to say regarding the particular problem(s) being dealt with. The counselor tries to guide the counselee to the truth of Scripture so that he can begin to let it transform his thinking and actions. Adams’ multidimensional role of the counselor can be seen in his exposition of II Timothy 3:16-17. The Word of God is profitable (that is, useful to bring about change) in the following ways: to teach what is right, to reprove what is wrong, and to effect correction, hence, the counselor’s role of teacher, confronter, and coach. The purpose of these roles is to effect change that produces a useful servant of the Lord (17).

*A critique:

Of all the counseling models examined, Adams’ approach seems to be most in line with the teaching of Scripture. His presuppositions about humankind accurately reflect what the Bible teaches--namely, that God created all people, that they are fallen, and that only through faith in Christ can they find true peace, fulfillment, and happiness.

Adams’ approach does the best job of articulating the problem facing humankind. He correctly recognizes that sometimes people have organically-based problems that need to be medically treated. Adams also rightly notes that people can have problems that are due to the influence of Satan. And Adams is correct to teach that most psychological, emotional, and spiritual problems are due to the fact that people have rebelled against God and are living in sin.

Adams not only takes a proper view of the problem facing humankind but also the responsibility people have for their predicament. Along with Scripture, Adams rightly teaches that people are directly responsible for their sinful thoughts and behaviors. No one can excuse someone or something else for what he or she has done. All people must accept the consequences for the problems in their lives.

Adams is correct to take the biblical view of guilt--namely, that it is the fact and result of violating God’s law. Adams avoids the error of many who equate guilt with a false sense of remorse or a merely distorted feeling of shame that has been created and imposed by others. Rather, guilt is real and must be dealt with according to the teaching of Scripture.

Adams rightly advocates a biblical view of how to treat humanity’s problem. He takes a refreshingly scriptural approach when he advocates that salvation and sanctification are the counselor’s two prime objectives. Unless an individual becomes a Christian and seeks to live for Christ, whatever he achieves in counseling only has temporal and personal benefit.

Adams cast the counseling enterprise in the model of confrontation (nouthetic). However, when his vast writings are consider carefully, it is correct to say that he sees the counselor’s role as being multifaceted. While the counselor must operate according to the teaching of Scripture, he must not make his approach overly simplistic or rigid. There are times when being indirective is better than being confrontational. Likewise, there are other times when being advisory is better than being reflective. The astute biblical counselor will recognize when to operate in a way that is both scripturally sound and sensitive to the state of mind of the counselee.

Adams has given birth to a host of other Christian theorist. Since they represent not new theories, but rather the refinement and development of his work we will not consider them individually. However, let us note here a partial list of the more important writers. Wayne Mack, Howard Eyrich, David Powlison, Ed Welch, Timothy Lane, Winston Smith, Steve Viars, Heath Lambert, Stewart Scott, Robert Kelleman, Robert Jones, and John Street (for a fuller list go on the web to Biblical Counseling Coalition at: http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/)

**Crabb’s Counseling Model:**

*Larry Crabb will be cited as representing Christian counselors who counsel utilizing secular theories and systems. To get a glimpse of who this includes on the American scene go to: [http://www.aacc.net/](http://www.aacc.net/). There is significant*
diversity theory and practice among this group. They attempt to meld the Bible and psychology. Unintentionally they subject Scripture to the authority of psychology. This has been a historical problem in the western intellectual tradition. Until the end of the 19th century, psychology was a sub-category of philosophy. The following is a discussion of the philosophical problem with which we are faced when attempting to meld Christianity and psychology. They must always be kept separate for the Christian and psychology must always be subservient to Christianity.

Schaeffer is correct that Aquinas laid the philosophical foundations which people later used in the development of humanism. Aquinas didn't think that way, but laid the epistemological 'framework'. Natural theology gave rise to science, that is, the examination of data without reference to transcendence which in turn gave rise to humanism.

Modern philosophers like Descartes made man the determiner of 'truth' or 'knowledge'. Kant and Hume followed this approach. How we know 'reality' became center stage instead of what 'reality' is. Man determines 'truth' instead of man discovering 'truth'. Schaeffer in his book, Escape from Reason, the IVP Classics edition says, "In Aquinas's view, the will of man was fallen, but the intellect was not. From this incomplete view of the biblical Fall flowed all the subsequent difficulties. Man's intellect became autonomous. In one realm man was now independent, autonomous. This sphere of the autonomous in Aquinas takes on various forms. One result, for example, was the development of natural theology. In this view, natural theology is a theology that could be pursued independently from the Scriptures. Though it was an autonomous study, he hoped for unity and said that there was a correlation between natural theology and the Scriptures. But the important point in what followed was that a really autonomous area was set up." (Chapter 1, p. 16)

Schaeffer says, "Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274) opened the way for the discussion of what is usually called, 'nature' and 'grace'." (Chapter 1, p.13) Schaeffer goes on to define grace as "God the Creator; Heaven and heavenly things; The unseen and its influence on the earth; man's soul; unity." (Chapter 1, p. 14) Schaeffer defines nature as "The created; earth and earthly things; The visible and what nature and man do on earth; man's body; diversity" (Chapter 1, p.14)

Schaeffer demonstrates this from art. He shows that different painters who became interested in nature. Schaeffer says, "This interest in nature as God made it is, as we have seen, good and proper. But Aquinas had opened the way to an autonomous Humanism, an autonomous philosophy, and once the movement gained momentum, there was soon a flood. The vital principle to notice is that, as nature was made autonomous, nature began to 'eat up' grace. Through the Renaissance, from the time of Dante to Michelangelo, nature became gradually more totally autonomous. It was set free from God as the humanistic philosophers began to operate ever more freely." (Chapter 1, p. 18)

What does Schaeffer mean by nature eating up grace? He means that when we give nature the superiority it diminishes the authority of revelation (Scripture). This is what happens when Christians attempt to integrate (equal authority granted to Scripture and psychology) the Bible and psychology. Psychology has a legitimate place in the disciplines of a Christians. It is a great descriptive tool. But it must always be a tool used under the authority of Scripture.

Larry Crabb and the integrationist perspective he represents are evangelical Christians. We must recognize and relate to them as fellow believers. We must treat them with respect. But, we should be free to disagree with them.

* Presuppositions about humankind:

Crabb would hold basic evangelical beliefs regarding humankind. For example, Crabb would affirm that God created all people in His own image. Consequently, all people have great potential as God's representatives and
servants here on earth. The great potential, though substantially diminished, still exists after the Fall of humankind into sin.

Crabb would affirm that all people are fallen and therefore have a sin nature. All people are personally responsible for their actions, whether good or bad. Personal sin, of course, complicates a person’s life, and that is why it must be dealt with.

Crabb would affirm that although the image of God in people still exists, it has been terribly distorted and marred. The image of God in all people can be restored through faith in the Son of God, enabling them to become three-dimensional beings again. In other words, they can live in reference to time, space, and eternity. That is why Christian counselors endeavor to help their counselees become more Christlike. Of course, the starting point is faith in Christ.

* Presuppositions concerning the problem facing humankind:

Although Crabb would agree with the biblical concepts of sin and human depravity, he adopts a man-centered view of the problem facing humankind. Specifically, he frames the human predicament in terms of unmet needs for love, acceptance, relationship, and impact.

According to this way of thinking, he paradoxically implies that the human heart is basically good. However, because of unmet needs and abusive treatment from others, the heart remains empty, yearning, and wounded. According to Crabb, the counselor’s job is to help the counseelee discover ways to meet his unfulfilled needs. This point of view, at worst, has a veiled Freudian ring to it and at best an Adlerian conception of significance and security as the essential needs of mankind.


"[Freud’s] view of instincts translates into the person-as-needy. Just as Freud’s instincts clamor for expression, so the co-dependency movement suggests that our inner emotional needs constantly demand gratification. If they are not satisfied in various relationships, one is driven to various addictions to meet felt needs. Thus every addiction is attributable to the fault of someone or something else.”

To his credit Crabb does teach that his perceived needs of security and significance can only ultimately be met by Christ.

* Presuppositions concerning the responsibility of humankind for their problems:

Crabb would affirm that people are responsible to solve their problems. He also would affirm the necessity of developing Christian character and maturity in their counselees. For example, in his book entitled “Inside Out” (1988, p. 64), Crabb stressed the importance of people taking an active role in experiencing real change that would lead toward greater levels of maturity. He also underscored the importance of counselees taking an inside look at themselves.

Despite the similarities between an integrationist such as Crabb and a nouthetic counselor such as Adams on the necessity of a counselee making a personal effort to get to core of his problems, the fundamental goals of each authority are significantly different. For example, Crabb believes the primary issue to be examined and resolved is the counselee’s longing for relationship and significance.

This “needs-emphasis” is especially noticeable in Crabb’s chapter entitled “If Anyone Is Thirsty . . .” (pp. 61-76). According to the author, the counselor gets the counselee to do an inward examination of his unfulfilled needs, admit their existence, and look to Christ for true fulfillment and satisfaction. In this scheme of thinking, the Savior primarily exists to address the core needs of the counselee (see p. 70).

* Presuppositions concerning the presence of guilt:

Crabb would affirm the basic evangelical position regarding the concept and presence of guilt. For example, he would maintain that guilt is the fact and result of violating God’s law. It not only is real but also punishable by Him. Guilt is not just a feeling of inadequacy or having done something bad. More importantly it is a state of existence in which one stands culpable before the Lord as a transgressor of His perfect and holy will.

Despite Crabb’s evangelical convictions regarding guilt and its reality, his views are a paradox. This is because he maintains that the counselee should be moved in the direction of trying to satisfy his unfulfilled needs. The fundamental issue of repentance from transgression is largely missing from the majority of Crabb’s earlier writings.
In Connecting, The Saftest Place on Earth and the Pressure Is Off, there is a decided shift in emphasis towards repentance. Crabb’s needs-emphasis is especially evident in “Inside Out” (1977, pp. 77-88). In chapter 5, which is entitled “Springs of Living Water? Then Why So Much Pain?” the author says there are three categories of longings. First, there are crucial longings--that is, “the basic and most profound longings of the human heart, those desires that must be met if life is to be worth living” Second, there are critical longings--that is, “the legitimate and important desires for quality relationships that add immeasurably to the enjoyment of living.” Third, there are casual longings--that is, “every other desire we experience” (1977, p. 81).

Throughout Crabb’s discussion, the important issues of sin, guilt, repentance, and faith are only occasionally discussed. This seems strange, for the author presents himself as a biblical counselor.

* Presuppositions concerning the treatment of the problem facing humankind:

In Crabb’s approach, the core problem facing humankind is not so much sin as it unfulfilled needs. According to him, man is plagued by the problem of “commitment to self-protection that manifests itself in so many defensive styles of relating” (1988, p. 184). In this way of thinking, the counselor primarily tries to help the counselee get his needs met through Christ. The counselor encourages the counselee to “explore old wounds, to get psychological needs met, to avoid enabling and doormat behaviors, to nourish desires, and the like” (Powlison, 1992, p. 199).

For example, Crabb (1988, p. 119) wrote the following: “We rarely consider the value of what I believe is central to real change: taking a hard look at the commitment to self-protection that displays itself most clearly in our ways of relating to people.” And under the heading entitled “Getting at the Core Problem,” Crabb (1988, p. 128) wrote the following: “If we are to change from the inside out, then we must look carefully at our style of relating. The mark of maturity is love, and the essence of love is relating without self-protection.”

* Presuppositions concerning the role of the counselor:

Crabb would say that the goal of counseling is to meet “the deepest personal needs of people” (1975, p. 53). Supposedly the counselor is to help the counselee deal with a “shattered, fragmented, fatally wounded personality.”

Another major goal advocated by Crabb is that the counselor should help people meet their yearning for love and purposeful living. For example, Crabb (1975, p. 50) wrote the following: “In the following discussion, I will develop the notion that every person must first reach the goal of personal fulfillment. Until that goal is reached, man is not free to live for something or someone else. . . . all personal problems are really thinking or belief problems, wrong beliefs about how to meet those needs.”

Crabb maintains that no other objective is more important for counselors than to help people satisfy their unmet needs. For instance, he asserts that people have a primary need for personal worth and secondary needs for significance and security (1977, pp. 61-62). (Crabb apparently acquired this notion from secular, humanistic psychology; see his comments on pages 114-115 of Effective Biblical Counseling, 1977). Presumably, the counselor’s foremost task is to help the counselee get these needs met through a personal relationship with Christ (see Crabb, 1977, pp. 69-70).

*A critique:*

Crabb holds a number of evangelical beliefs, and he is to be commended for this. Nevertheless, his anthropology remains fundamentally man-centered, rather than God-centered. This is evident in what he has written over the years.

For example, Crabb has framed the human predicament in terms of unmet needs for love, acceptance, relationship, and impact. In contrast, the biblical counselor would say that sin is the specific issue that underlies most problems in living. In this God-centered anthropology, the basic issue to resolve is a person’s alienation from the Lord, not satisfying his so-called unmet needs. The counselor helps the counselee to see that he lives sinfully, that he pursues human approval, and that he seeks to control his life’s circumstances to maximize his personal comfort and advantage.

While Crabb seems to lump all human beings together when he looks at the heart an in the process implies that the human heart is basically good. The Bible would say that all people are morally depraved. In the Crabb paradigm, the heart remains empty, yearning, and wounded because of unmet needs and abusive treatment from others. In the biblical model, the person is depicted as deliberately rejecting God’s will so that he can pursue sinful and selfish desires.
Crabb places a great deal of emphasis on the counselee spending a lot of time examining his unfulfilled needs, admitting their existence, and looking to Christ to meet those needs. In the biblical model, however, the counselor admonishes the counselee to make God the center of his life. The counselor also urges the counselee to love the Lord with every aspect of his being and to love people as much as he naturally loves himself. The counselor furthermore stresses the importance of repenting of sin, of humbling oneself before God, and of putting one’s faith in Christ for salvation.

The primary concern in the Crabb model is meeting the counselee’s unfulfilled needs. He cast Christ in the role of meeting these needs*. In contrast, the Bible teaches that counselors have as their primary goal to help people become more Christlike in their behavior. Counselors also seek to train their fellow believers to help others become more Christlike in their behavior. The intent is that all will seek to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Crabb is correct in noting that people have identifiable longings for such things as significance, security, and more Christlike in their behavior. The Bible teaches that counselors have as their primary goal to help people become more Christlike in their behavior. Counselors also seek to train their fellow believers to help others become more Christlike in their behavior. The intent is that all will seek to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

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Crabb is correct in noting that people have identifiable longings for such things as significance, security, and relationship. However, in contrast to Crabb, the Bible does not make satisfying these needs the fundamental problem to be addressed. Scripture also does not make “needs fulfillment” the counselee’s main motivation for taking a hard inward look at himself.

The Bible teaches that the chief problem to be dealt with in the counselee’s life is his severed relationship with God. In this scheme of thinking, the issue is not so much unfulfilled needs as it is the separation the counselee’s sin has made between him and Lord. The motivation for taking a hard inward look is to help the counselee deal honestly with sin issues, such as improper ways of thinking and acting. The goal is help the counselee abandon his sin through repentance and faith as well as grow in Christlikeness.

While it is true that all people have unfulfilled needs and desires, this concern should not be the determining factor in deciding which direction the counselee should go to resolve his problems. Rather, his spiritual status before God is foremost in importance. That is why the counselor should continually coach the counselee to make the changes in his life that will promote salvation and Christlike behavior.

The above analysis suggests that Crabb has imposed his own suppositions on Scripture regarding the core problems facing the counselee. He also has created an elaborate plan for solving the “needs-fulfillment” problem he has espoused. Ultimately Crabb has, at best, presented a counseling model is questionable in its presuppositions and prescriptions, for it is based on a man-centered anthropological base.

One further word on Crabb is necessary. If the investigator places his books in historical order, with the exception The Marriage Builder, it is like reading a an autobiography of his spiritual journey. The reader gets the definition impression that Crabb is in search of healing for his own heart. Each book seems to be a somewhat different analysis of his “longings” coupled with a theoretical approach to assuage these longings. It is difficult to assess his works since he weaves an evangelical theology through each book. Yet, careful exegesis of the passages he utilizes often surfaces various levels of eisegesis (a reading into the text the very concepts he is attempting to support).

*It should be noted that the Biblical Counselor acknowledges that man perceives himself with these needs that humanistic psychology has catalogued. He also acknowledges that most of these “felt needs” are legitimate and that even after becoming a Christian finds the meeting of many of these needs a reality. However, in contrast with Crabb and others, the meeting of these “needs” does not constitute the goal of counseling. They are, when biblically understood, legitimate objectives in some cases, and legitimate outcomes in many cases. Nonetheless, when they are not fulfilled, the Christian is not left to live in a condition of rejection, depression or self-pity. He/she is loved by God and in love with God. He/she can crawl into the Father’s lap and cry, “Abba Father”. The Psalms are replete with phrases and word pictures that the Christian can make his/her own in expressing frustrations and seeking God’s relief and God’s comfort when relief is not immediately His gift. The wife, who has been an abuse victim, will have the need (desire) to be loved and cherished (that is what her husband was intended to provide for her in marriage by God’s design). However, while she may not have these “needs” fulfilled by her husband, she is not left in life to be a broken and unfulfilled woman. As a Christian, her first priority remains to “glorify God and enjoy Him for ever”. As by the grace of God she pursues this priority in all the appropriate ways she will find her life rich and rewarding though she may live in poverty both economically and affectionately. While we have no other words about the widow to whom Jesus points the disciples, there is something encompassing in his observation that “Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow put more in than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for all they put in out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty did cast in all that she had, even all her living. His implication is that she had “no need” because she was trusting completely in God to supply her needs. While the need here is focused upon
economics, the application can certainly be applied across the board since a widow in New Testament times found herself bereft of a support system to meet the personal needs of life.
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