

Sin, Suffering, and Biopsychosocial Damage:

A Comprehensive
Christian Framework
for Understanding
Psychopathology



What is psychopathology?

- ⊙ In the field of medicine, pathology is the study of diseases and disorders of the body
- ⊙ *Psyche* is the Greek word for soul

So, psychopathology is the study of the diseases or disorders of the soul

Modern Psychopathology

- ◎ The worldview underlying *modern* psychopathology is naturalism
 - > Reality consists entirely of natural entities and processes
 - > There are therefore no spiritual or ethical realities and no *persons*
 - > Psychopathology is therefore due entirely to biological and social causes
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Modern Psychopathology

- ◎ What is right with this approach?
 - > Biological and social dynamics *do* cause psychological problems
 - > It has done a vast amount of research on these causes
 - ◎ What is wrong with this approach?
 - > Reduces humans to mere organisms
 - > Promotes determinism, victimhood, and passivity
 - > Undermines human freedom and responsibility
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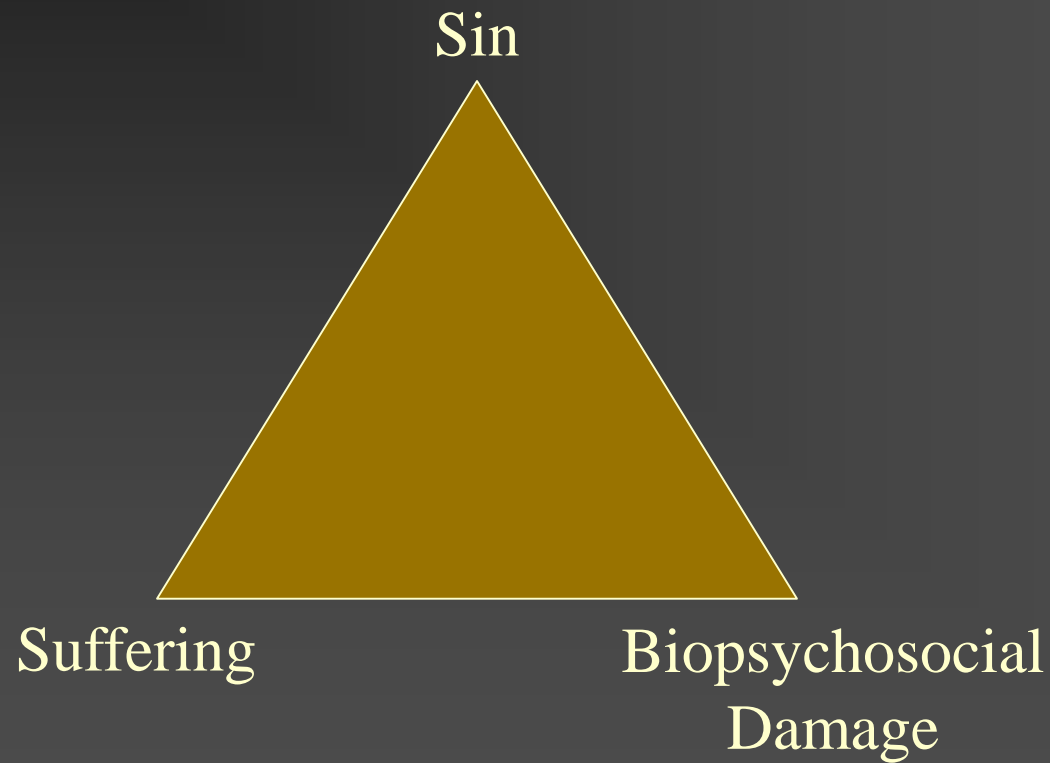
A Christian Model of Psychopathology

- Treats humans as personal agents, made in God's image, as well as organisms

More comprehensive

The Spiritual Order	Sin
The Ethical Order	Sins/Evil deeds
The Psychosocial Order	Psychosocial Damage/Disability
The Biological Order	Biological Damage/Disability

A Christian Model of Psychopathology



Sin

A Christian Framework for Understanding Psychopathology

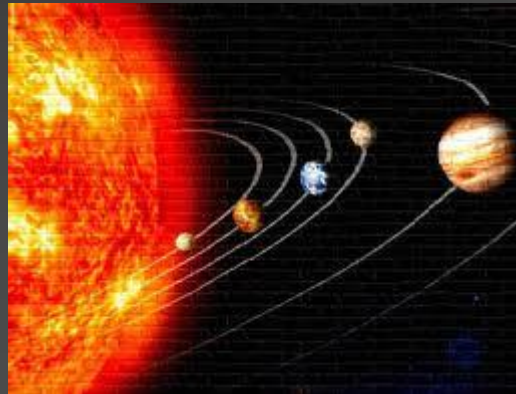


How can sin be a type of psychopathology?

- ◎ Sin is the biblical word for “disorder of the soul”
- ◎ However, sin is an ethical and spiritual disorder
- ◎ It is as if in the Bible God put a circle around this set of disorders and said, “*These* are the most serious, and you bear responsibility for them. Focus especially on them with my help.”

Why is sin so important in Christianity?

- In a theocentric universe, there is nothing more important than God's glory, so sin is the worst thing in the universe.



What is sin?

It's puzzling. We don't really know



Yet, "Original sin ... is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved," G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Teachings about Sin according to Genesis 3-II and Romans 1, 3

- ◎ Sin is not a part of the creation
 - > Sin is like a wound in our nature, like a hole
 - ◎ Sin is a relational disorder
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Sin is a relational disorder

- ⊙ Autonomy/Independence from God (related to the word of God)
 - ⊙ Disobedience (1Jn 3:4)
 - ⊙ Hatred of God (Ro 1:30); hostility to God (Ro 8:7)
 - ⊙ Disordered love: we love creation more than Creator
 - ⊙ But its *usually unconscious!*
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Sin is a relational disorder

- ◎ Sin also destroys humans and their relationships

“[Sinners] lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush their own lives.” (Pr 1:18)

“We were hateful and hating one another” (Tit 3:3)



The Nature and Development of Sin

◎ Original sin

- Humans are born with an inborn propensity to resist God's centrality and glory
 - w/out original communion with God humans inevitably move away from God, Created desires are "bent"

"No longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me" (Ro 7:17)

The Nature and Development of Sin

◎ Sins or Sinful Deeds

- Humans become personal sinners by committing *sins* or *sinful deeds*
 - Deeds—behavioral or mental (e.g. fantasy)—contrary to God's norms
 - Sins are *signs* of original sin
 - Sins are shaped by biology and socialization
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The Nature and Development of Sin

◎ Vice and Vicious Character

- Practicing sins creates a *vice*
 - A vice is a sinful habit predisposing one to specific sinful deeds, formed through repetition (and imitation of others), that get wired into the brain
 - Vices are shaped by biology and socialization
 - The 7 deadly sins are vices: pride, envy, sloth, lust, wrath, gluttony, greed
 - Vices contribute to a malevolent character
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Suffering

A Christian Framework for Understanding Psychopathology



What is suffering?



Strong negative emotion or
psychological or physical pain

Addressing the “problem of suffering” is often involved in Christian counseling

Many counselees have suffered a great deal, raising questions about God’s attitudes towards them



What does the Bible teach about the reason for personal suffering?

1. All human beings will suffer (Gen 3:15)
2. Personal sin generally leads to suffering (Pr 1:18)
3. But not all suffering is due to personal sin (Job)
4. Suffering brings about wisdom and spiritual maturity (Job, Ro 5:1-3; Ja 1:3-5)

But there is so much we don't understand

For example, what about suffering in childhood?

Neurons are organized into networks in childhood, which can be integrated or disconnected

Children who have suffered a lot will store those negative emotion schemes in their brains/memory systems and will be prone to re-experience them throughout their lives

So, severe suffering in childhood (trauma) results in brain/souls that do not function according to God's design plan, because of *biopsychosocial damage*.

Suffering in childhood?

Adults who have suffered a lot in their childhood will generally be disposed towards negative perceptions and emotions, though they may be vigorously avoided and severely repressed

They may also believe that they are bad or that God has singled them out for bad and is against them

Biopsychosocial Damage

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New Testament Teaching on Weakness

“astheneia”

- * Means “weakness,” “incapacity.” or “infirmity”
 - * Most common word for physical illness in NT (Jn 5:7); also used for poverty (Acts 20:35)
 - * But can refer to any kind of physical, psychological, spiritual limitations
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New Testament Teaching on Weakness

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is *weak*” (Mt 26:41)

“We do not know how to pray as we ought, because of our *weakness*” (Ro 8:26)

Some believers are *weak*, because of their scrupulosity, others are strong (Ro 14-15:1)

Paul was attacked for his *weakness* by teachers at Corinth, and he conceded to being *weak* with regard to having an unimpressive personal presence (2Co 10:10) and a lack of skill in speech (11:6, 21), and then he listed all the difficulties he has had on his apostolic travels (11:23-27).

Sin and Weakness Contrasted

◎ God's Viewpoint

- > God judges and punishes sins
- > God is concerned for those with weaknesses and desires their protection

◎ Christ's Relation to Sin and Weakness

- > Christ did not sin, but was punished for our sin
- > Christ became weak for us

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15)

He was crucified “in weakness” (2Co 13:4)

Sin and Weakness Contrasted

◎ The Christian's Self-Appraisal

- > Believers are to confess and repent of their sins (1Jn 1:9)
- > And boast in their weaknesses

“I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Co 12:9-10)

Sin and Weakness Contrasted

◎ Conclusion

- > Sin is created by humans, something God hates, for which we are responsible, and something we are to confess and resist
 - > Weakness is creational damage (not due to personal sin), something God values, for which we are not responsible and in which we can boast
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Implications for psychopathology

◎ Weakness?

- > Autism
 - > Hallucinations and paranoia
 - > Depression due to child abuse
 - > Homosexual orientation
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Fault: Both Sin and Weakness

◎ Poverty in the Bible

“Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate” (Pr 22:22)

“Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Pr 10:4)

◎ Jesus and sinners

“ Why do you eat and drink the tax-gatherers and sinners?” “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance (Lk 5:30-32)

Fault: Both Sin and Weakness

◎ Sin is a kind of weakness

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.” (Heb. 5:1-3).

Implications for psychopathology

◎ Fault?

- > Depression due to loss of job because of repeated poor work performance
 - > Alcohol addiction
 - > Habitual anger
 - > Homosexual activity
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Implications for therapy

- ◎ Faults will take more time to overcome than mere sin, because of their weakness/determined quality. Some will never be fully overcome in this life
 - ◎ Nonetheless, because faults are sinful, there is also responsibility and usually some possibility of change
 - ◎ Faults entail confession of the sin and acceptance and surrender of the weakness (analogous to boasting)
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A Christian Psychopathology will be centered on Christ

- ⦿ Christ identified himself with our sin (2Co 5:21), and we see sin unmasked on the cross
 - ⦿ Christ identified himself with our suffering (Mt 27:46; Heb 5:8)
 - ⦿ Christ identified himself with our weakness (2Cor 13:4)
 - ⦿ Christ resolved all three in the resurrection. We participate in his resurrection insofar as we overcome sin in him, suffer with him, and receive healing for our weakness from him in this life, partial resolutions that will be perfected in the age to come
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A Comprehensive Christian Psychopathology

- ◎ It is easy to focus on only one kind of disorder. But the most comprehensive psychopathology will take into account all three, treating them differentially according to their unique nature

“Blessed are the poor in the spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:3)

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.” (ITi 1:15)
