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**The Use of Biblical Teachings on Grace when
Counseling Sexual Addiction:
Grace-Based Counseling**

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Christian counselors have the perfect resource for using Biblical teachings on grace when counseling sexual addiction in Paul's recorded narrative on his admittance of addiction to wrongdoing, despite his established position as a recipient of God's grace. The letters Paul wrote to the church at Rome chronicling his battle against sinful desires are actually his personal testimony of God's enduring grace even throughout his (Paul's) failed attempts at overcoming his addictions. Although Paul never named his addictions, he clearly admitted to having them. If a Christian counselor chooses to use God's message on grace (and they certainly should choose to do so) to therapeutically reassure a sex addict on his or her impending victory over their struggle, then that counselor should use Paul's testimonies in their efforts. The Bible demonstrates that there is no more powerful weapon against sin and sinful nature than God's grace. One's testimony is key in assisting another in overcoming—accompanied with the saving grace of our Savior, of course (cf. Revelation 12:11). The counselor can certainly benefit from the use of Paul's testimony in their efforts to guide the counselee into overcoming their struggle with sexual addiction.

While I am a stout proponent of demonstrating the power of grace in situations where the counselee feels hopeless in their struggle against sexual addiction (or any addiction for that matter), I assert that

the counselor should stay keenly aware of the danger of desensitizing the consequences related to acts of sin. Those penalties are ever present in every form of repercussion fathomable to humankind including spiritual, physiological, and psychological ramifications. Personal accountability of the counselee to continuously endeavor at overcoming the sinful act(s) must remain at the forefront of the counselor's efforts as he or she delicately and incessantly introduces the grace factor. Hence, the counselor must achieve and maintain a good balance between the application of grace and the employment of personal accountability in their counseling efforts.

This article addresses the grace aspect of a balanced approach to counseling on sexual addiction. So, it lends itself mostly to ministering to the spiritual measure of humankind's nature. Exercise of the suggestions herein in isolation will place all impact of the counselors' efforts at one end of the continuum of possible approaches to improving the counselee's state such that a balanced approach to counseling would be lost. The counselee is entreated to only use the advisory information found here as a supplement to other efforts in bringing the counselee wholly to a place where he or she can find peace with self, peace with others, and peace with God. Efforts of a balanced approach outside of Bible teachings on grace should also be sought in assisting the counselee in completely overcoming their struggle with sexual addiction. Those endeavors must include bringing to the forefront of the counselee's psyche the importance of taking personal accountability of their actions. Hence, the counselee must be made and kept aware of the adverse physical and psychological effects of addictions that reach beyond their spiritual being.

The reason a balanced approach is stressed here is that trained Christian counselors are taught that humankind's nature is constructed of either three parts or two parts. Teachings on the makeup of humankind are included in many Christian counselor training curriculums. Those who believe there are three parts to the construction of humankind believe those parts to be body, soul and spirit. Those who believe there are two parts believe those parts to be body and soul/spirit (using the terms latter interchangeably). The three-part view is known as a tripartite view. The two-part view is known as a bipartite view. Understanding the counselee's complete

makeup allows the counselor to take different approaches at ushering the counselee into a place of complete healing. If the counselor chooses to use biblical teachings on grace in their efforts, then understanding of a multi-faceted nature of man is absolutely imperative. It's only with this understanding that the counselor can pinpoint the segment of the nature of the counselee he or she will be addressing in this grace-oriented portion of their counseling sessions.

Before the counselor begins the grace-oriented sessions, he or she must determine which view of the nature of man they choose to follow. The approach herein proposes subscription to the tripartite view simply because the Bible portrays God as a triune being and it states clearly that He created humankind in His image (cf, Genesis 1:27). Beyond that seemingly simplistic rationale, there are also two passages of Scripture that strongly support the tripartite view: I Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. Those passages read as follows—respectively (KJV):

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Those who subscribe to the bipartite view apparently believe that the words *soul* and *spirit* are synonymous. Hence, they believe the resulting view is humankind as a two-part being: body and soul/spirit. The above referenced Scriptures clearly show demarcation in the soul and spirit. Still, for the sake of academic evidence, one might wish to take a closer look at the original Greek meaning of “soul” and “spirit” before deciding which view to agree with. Resulting evidence should steer the researcher to a tripartite view of the makeup of humankind.

Understanding the Greek meanings of the words lets one know the terms are not identical in meaning; therefore, they are not interchangeable. The Greek word for soul (as it is used in the two referenced Scriptures above) is *psuche* and it means “the seat of the feelings, desires, and affections” according to *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Greek and English Lexicon*. The reader probably has already noticed the close similarity to the Greek word *psuche* and the English word *psyche* that means “soul, personality, mind” according to the

Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary 11th Edition. So, the word “soul” as used in these passages relates to a person’s psyche.

The Greek word for spirit (as it relates to humankind) is *pneumatikos* and it means “part of the man which is akin to God and serves as his instrument or organ (Brown-Driver-Briggs).” This segment of the three-part makeup of humankind is the portion that relates humankind to God or if we decipher the meaning fully—causes them to serve/honor/respect/glorify God. The Bible gives first indication of this understanding in Genesis when Pharaoh describes Joseph as “...one in whom is the spirit of God (cf. Genesis 41:37).”

This all might seem insignificant in building a case for the use of Bible teachings on grace when counseling sexual addiction, but rest assured it is very significant. It was stated earlier that it is important to keep balance when counseling on addictions. The grace factor must be introduced, but so must the accountability factor. The way that balance is achieved is that the counselor addresses the spiritual aspects of the counselee’s addiction, the physical aspects of their addiction, and the psychological aspects of their addiction. If the counselor can’t draw clear lines of delineation for the counselee, it will be difficult to help them maintain a balanced approach to overcoming the addiction. Not only does understanding the tripartite view of man help the counselor follow a balanced approach in assisting the counselee, but it also helps the counselor convince the counselee of the power of grace as a spiritual weapon in seeing them through their struggles with overcoming the physical and psychological aspects of the addiction.

Since it is so important for the counselor to understand the tripartite view of humankind as well as get the counselee to understand it, the following script is offered as an example of how the counselor can provide this understanding to the counselee:

I need you to really understand this tri-fold make up of humankind, so you can better understand the effectiveness of God’s grace. Let me see if I can help you do this. You see, we all have this sort of sandwich makeup about us. We have the meat that is so treasured and important to the sandwich maker. Then, we have the trimmings which sort of compliment the meat’s connection to the bread. Finally, we have the bread that holds it all together.

Let’s imagine that the meat is your spirit; the trimmings are your soul; and the bread is your physical body. Let’s also imagine God as the sandwich maker. Of course, the meat is the most important of all three to the Sandwich Maker. The Sandwich Maker does His hardest and best work preparing the meat. He is

most concerned with the meat being just right. It is so important to Him that He names His sandwiches after the meat. If you ever order a sandwich from a deli shop, you know that the sandwiches are named based on their main ingredient, which in most cases is the meat. You never hear a deli worker refer to a sandwich as a wheat bread sandwich with ham in it or a rye bread sandwich with turkey in it. No, they will always make a reference to the meat first: ham sandwich on wheat bread or turkey sandwich on rye bread.

The bread and trimmings are important to the Sandwich Maker, too; don't misunderstand me. However, they are not nearly as important as the inside. The Sandwich Maker spends more time preparing the meat than any other element of the sandwich. He takes great effort in seasoning, curing, and preparing the meat. Once the meat is prepared, it is set regardless of how the bread or trimmings change. There's nothing else to do to the meat. Any other action involved in making a good sandwich revolves around the bread and the trimmings.

God uses grace to prepare our spirits for this sandwich that we call humanity. Once we have come to a place to receive his grace for spiritual preparation, all that's left to make us a great sandwich is to get the bread and trimmings in order. Our spirits are set regardless of how the body and mind goes through iterations of changes.

With the demarcation in place, the counselor can concentrate on treating the counselee's body, soul and spirit separately. The counselor can help the counselee understand and mitigate the physical vulnerabilities associated with the addiction (including ramifications regarding health and appearance). The counselor can help the counselee understand and mitigate the psychological vulnerabilities associated with the addiction (including social and culpability ramifications). The counselor can also help the counselee understand and mitigate the spiritual vulnerabilities associated with the addiction (including ramifications regarding their relationship with the body of Christian believers and with their God). If the counselor is not equipped to minister in some cases of physical or psychological difficulties, he or she can easily extract processes that require other professional guidance. They can then focus on the areas where they can minister to the counselee. Fully understanding and accepting the tripartite view of humankind plays a key role in this approach to restoration for both the counselor and the counselee.

The counselor might take several approaches to addressing the physical and psychological aspects of the addictions. This article will not address those to the full extent, but again, they must be addressed in order to maintain the balance that has been referenced more than

once. This article specifically addresses the grace aspect of the tripartite approach to counseling and for that reason deals mainly with the spiritual facet of the nature of humankind. This approach allows the Christian counselor to focus certain sessions on guiding the counselee to a point where they wholly accept the redeeming power of God's grace.

The purpose of keeping the counselee aware that grace is at his or her disposal throughout the process of overcoming the addiction is because the order of importance of humankind in God's view is the spirit, then the soul, then the body. The counselee will see things in a backwards manner: body, soul and spirit. If the counselor can assist the counselee in realizing that the most important portion of their addiction (the spiritual portion) is conquered through God's offer of grace, the counselor will be more successful in keeping the counselee encouraged to continue striving to conquer physical and psychological aspects of their addiction.

To explain to the counselee the order in which God places the facets of the nature of man, the counselor might reference the following Scriptures (KJV):

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16).

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart (I Samuel 16:7).

The counselor can use the first passage of Scripture above to show the counselee that the Spirit of God witnesses to the counselee's spirit that he or she has obtained grace. God does not offer this acknowledgement to the soul or the body. Hence, the counselee's spirit is most important in the order from God's perspective. The counselor can use the second passage of Scripture above to show that physiologically God takes notice of the soul rather than concentrating on the peripheral properties of humankind. The Hebrew word for heart in that passage of Scripture is *lebab*, which means "soul or the understanding inner part (Brown-Driver-Briggs)." This establishes (again, from God's point of view) the remaining order of positions for each facet of humankind. God is concerned about the spirit, then the soul, then the body of humankind.

The counselee, on the other hand, places the order of importance in the opposite direction as discovered in the Scripture referenced in I Samuel 16:7 above. Because the counselee sees the importance of things in reverse, they see themselves as an absolute failure in overcoming their addiction each time they fail from physical standpoint. The physical failures have an adverse psychological effect on the counselee. If the counselor can get the counselee to understand and believe that the spirit is still in full communion with God (by His grace), even as they fail in the other two categories, grace will become a much more tangible weapon in their battle against the addiction. They will find hope and strength through God's grace that protects and keeps their spirit. An excellent set of Scriptures that will assist in solidifying this concept within the counselee is Ephesians 1:13-14 and Jude 1:24-25. They read as follows—respectively (KJV):

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

The counselee must be kept aware that there will be times during the process when they will grow very weary of fighting the physical and psychological battles involved in overcoming their addiction. Establishing in the counselee a solid foundation of knowledge and acceptance of God's grace will provide the spiritual strength to help them get through the most difficult physical and mental battles. Knowing and believing that God's love does not leave their spirit during the difficult times will afford the counselee the ability to re-establish their fight against addiction, even after a terrible lapse in the physical or mental aspect of their addiction has taken place. The two most recently referenced Scriptures may be essential in the counselee's establishment of a healthy level of trust in God's grace.

Once the counselor has led the counselee to trust that God's grace is sufficient (rf. II Corinthians 12:9), then the counselor can reinforce the concept with practical biblical teachings on grace. The first and foremost Biblical resource for presenting grace as a useful instrument

when counseling on sexual addiction is, in this writer's opinion, Paul's letter to the church at Rome—more specifically, the seventh chapter. The seventh chapter of the book of Romans deals with all three aspects of the sinful activity: The physical, the psychological, and the spiritual. The testimony of Paul found in these letters strengthens the concept of taking a balanced approach to counseling in this situation. It also conveys to the counselee that the greatest combatant to the helpless/hopeless feeling that often accompanies addictions is to view and understand their situation from a spiritual perspective. As preachy as it may sound to the counselee, there is a spiritual aspect to their addiction that must *not* be overlooked. In fact, not only should it not be overlooked, but it should be centric to the counseling process. The counselor's main focus at the onset of grace-based counseling should be on assisting the counselee in realizing that the spiritual aspect of their addiction is what propelled them to seek the counselor's help.

Paul offers a sizeable sum of helpful advice in this portion of his letter to the Roman church for those who find themselves addicted to some form of ungodliness even after they have accepted God's offer of grace. Before Paul deals with their post-salvation struggles, however, he first expresses to them the necessity for salvation, how to obtain that salvation, and the cost of that salvation (both to the individual and to our Lord and Savior (cf. Romans 1-4)). The counselor might benefit greatly in using Paul's approach within their counseling process. Before delving too far into the Counseling Process Model of choice, the counselor should build a high level of assurance in the counselee that they have obtained salvation through grace. Once the *Presenting Problem & Goal* (Cobb 2006) sessions (where the counselor gathers information from the counselee and determines with the counselee the goal of their sessions) are complete, emphasis should be placed on making the counselee feel comfortable and certain that he or she has freely obtained salvation.

The counselee must know that salvation is a pre-requisite for God's unending grace. The counselor should communicate the fact that although anyone can receive God's grace at any given time and for extended periods of time, permanent assignment of grace only comes via salvation. Use of the first four chapters of Paul's letter to the Roman church members would greatly assist in imparting this

information and establishing the counselee's permanent place in grace. The counselor can use this information to not only assure the counselee of their salvation, but also dispel any idea that adhering to the Law (i.e. Mosaic Law) plays any role in the maintenance of their salvation. This will assist the counselor in guiding the counselee through those times when they feel that their wrongful actions work more effective against them than God's grace works effectively for them. That's the approach the Apostle Paul takes and it should prove to be very successful in this approach to grace-based counseling. Offering this knowledge will be instrumental in helping the counselee reach and retain peace while he or she continues through the physical and psychological struggles of overcoming the addiction.

Support Scriptures might also be sought in presenting Paul's opening statements to his letter to the Romans in the counselor's efforts to provide the counselee assurance of their immovable position in grace. Offering a brief comparison of the books of Malachi and Revelation to explain exactly how far removed acceptance by grace is from acceptance by one's actions may prove beneficial at this point. While at its surface this may seem somewhat unrelated to this discussion, the deeper psychological issue with unwillingness to accept God's grace unconditionally might play a huge part in the counselee's mental struggle with personal forgiveness while they work at physically overcoming their addiction. Seemingly, the reason this personal un-forgiveness abides within many Christian believers is because they are sublimely conditioned to the idea that some manner of activity on their part is required to maintain their place of grace with God. In the rudimentary operation of many Christian churches (based on this writer's experience), there are practices or requirements that either closely resemble or perfectly match those required during the period when one's relationship with God was based solely on their actions. Such a factor signifies that some of the Christian church's basic operations are those which were required under the Mosaic Law. This subliminal practice has an adverse effect on Christian parishioners' level of faith in the uninhibited grace of God. Those who have not yet developed complete dependence on unconditional grace as means of a healthy relationship with God might believe it is the amount or nature of the activities they take part in that allows this relationship to remain in effect.

The purpose of removing all doubt of the effectiveness of grace alone in one's relationship with God is to make the counselee aware that he or she can and should rely on God's grace for support in overcoming their addiction. Doing so will make them confident that, in spite of their failed personal attempts at overcoming this addiction, they are still in the perfect position for God to work with their situation. It lets them know that they are still in a relationship with God's that's good enough to cause Him to desire their victory over their current addiction rather than condemn them for their current condition.

Helping the counselee establish his or her place in God's grace also helps protect the counselee from becoming dependent to the counselor during the process. Although the counselor plays a key role as God's instrument in bringing the counselee to peace with himself or herself, others, and God; not establishing the grace factor leaves room for unhealthy dependence. Such an occurrence would prove unethical and counterproductive to the counseling process.

If the counselor were to take some time to make the comparison between the books of Malachi and Revelation to show the counselee they can now rely solely on grace in their relationship with God, it might make the remainder of the counseling efforts much more effective. Below is a brief synopsis of the two books which might prove beneficial to the process. The counselor should be careful not to preach to the counselee, but rather use a matter-of-fact discussion approach to providing this information. After breaking the ice for discussion on the matter, the conversation might go somewhat as follows:

I don't know if you ever noticed this about Malachi and Revelation the final books of each testament in the Bible, but if you pay close attention, you'll notice some strong similarities between the two of them. They both show what has become of the relationship between God and humankind during their respective time periods. They also show what will become of that relationship in the future.

I noticed how they both begin with God sending a message to his people through His chosen messenger. For the people during the period of the law, He chose Malachi as the messenger to the temple. In fact, the name Malachi is a derivative of the Hebrew word *Malak*, which means messenger (Brown-Driver-Briggs). Malachi means messenger of God.

In the book of Revelation, uses an apostle, John, to send messages to the churches during the period of grace. The Greek word for apostle (*apostolos*)

translates to the English word messenger (Brown-Driver-Briggs)–same as *Malak* in the Hebrew. When I learned this, I wondered what other similarities there were between these two books. I began to see a lot of similarities in the two books that are situated at the end of each testament in the Bible. The greatest similarity is the both books have an important message for God’s people during their respective period.

Look at the similarities in the very beginning of Malachi and the very beginning of Revelation. Malachi 1:1 (KJV) says -- *The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel* [that’s God’s people under the law] *by Malachi*. Now look at Revelation 1:1 (KJV)–*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants* [that’s God’s people under grace] *things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John*. Both books have a message for God’s people by God’s messenger.

The message that the book of Malachi brings to the people of God during the period of the law was not a good message. Read through the book when you get some time. The message in Malachi was that they had failed in their attempts to have a good relationship with God based on their actions. They were not acting in a manner conducive to a good Godly relationship. So God promised to remove that factor of their relationship such the relationship was no more dependent on their actions.

That was the message to the people of God in the period of the law. That was before the church age. God proved true to His Word. We know He did, because we have written history of it. God sent Christ and He completely changed the relationship between us and God. Now we can have a perfect relationship with God through the grace He provides through Christ rather than by the things we do. That’s the message that Revelation brings to the people of God. In the end, humankind’s acceptance of God’s grace through the offering of His son, Jesus Christ, is what matters the most. The book of Revelation reinforces that grace plays the key role in our relationship with God from now until the end.

If the counselor will establish the importance of grace in the counselee’s relationship with God (either with the script and Scriptures referenced above or with their own); they should find success in guiding the counselee to a realization of God’s ability to see them through their efforts in overcoming their addiction. From that awareness, the counselee will gain confidence in the spiritual process of overcoming their addiction and that will provide the personal effort and accountability required to complete the physical and psychological processes. This approach should work, because it’s not built on classroom knowledge or theoretical insight. This is the exact approach that the Apostle Paul took as recorded in the Bible.

The seventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Roman church culminates on the idea that the greatest device the counselor can offer the counselee in the struggle against sexual addiction is the acceptance of God's grace. Not only is Paul reminding the reader that God's grace is present during the counselee's struggle, but he is also making the reader aware that the struggle does not affect the spirit. At the very end of the chapter, Paul gives a complete analysis of how grace maintains the counselee's relationship with God while they struggle with getting their body in line with what their spirit has obtained and what their mind desires: complete freedom from the addiction.

The counselor can use the end of Romans 7 and the beginning of Romans 8 to make the counselee feel confident that they can and will overcome their addiction. The counselor might also add II Corinthians 12:9 as reassurance that the counselor will get to a point where the addiction will no longer have dominion over them. The very useful Scripture passages are as follows:

Romans 7: 21-25: I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

II Corinthians 12:9: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Romans 8:1-2: ¹There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

The counselor should walk the counselee through the Scriptures and assure the counselee that the nature of the body is to want to do that which is wrong (rf. Romans 7:21). The counselee should know that once they have obtained salvation and are established in grace their minds seek to do that which God desires of them (rf. Romans 7:22). The counselee should be made aware that there will be many times that the body's desire to do what is wrong will win out against their mind's desire to do good (rf. Romans 7:23). The counselor should

then remind the counselee that despite how bad they feel about their inability to overcome the desires of their bodies at that point (rf. Romans 7:24), they must keep their mind focused on doing good while they are still struggling to get control of the body (rf. Romans 7:25).

It is at this time that the counselor should solidify the principle of grace as he or she encourages the counselee to continue their physical and mental fight against the addiction. The counselor should inform the counselee that God's grace works at its best when the counselee's fight against the addiction is going at its worst. In fact, the grace factor is so strong at this point that the counselee can actually rejoice that he has grace in spite of his or her struggle with the addiction (rf. II Corinthians 12:9). The counselor must be careful to let the counselee know that they are not rejoicing in the fact that they can commit the wrong and still have grace available, but they are rejoicing in that they know that God is getting them through and past their addiction, regardless of how bad it seems at the time.

Once the counselor has established this principle, the counselee can progress to a place where they are no longer overcome by the physical desire of the addiction, but can rather resist the addictive desire mentally before it manifests itself physically. Once they have reached this stage, they can realize that they truly are seeking after godliness and not after the addiction. At that point, if they should have a relapse, they can move away from it quickly and back to a disciplined lifestyle without the condemnation they once felt when totally engaged in the addiction (rf. Romans 8:1).

Biblical teachings on grace are an excellent tool for counseling on sexual addictions. Using a balanced approach increases its effectiveness. Paul's letter to the Roman church is an excellent place to begin when deciding to use the Bible for grace-based counseling in this situation. If the counselor combines its use with other approaches to guiding the counselee into overcoming their addiction, both the counselor and the counselee should be very successful in their efforts.



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