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**The Use of the Concept of New Identity in Christ in
Counseling Sexual Addiction in Young Men**

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The ultimate goal of counseling is to encourage the counselee in making the choice to move from bad habit-forming activities to those which enrich their lives and promote contentment both for the counselee and those they associate with – especially on a regular basis. This is particularly true when the counselee is struggling with sexual addiction. When using the concept of new identity in Christ while counseling sexual addiction in young men, I believe that including the Scripture passage found in II Corinthians 5:17-20 as a supporting tool is an absolute must. Not only does this segment of Scripture stress taking on a new and improved outlook on life, but it also emphasizes moving far from a once-practiced detrimental lifestyle.

In the aforementioned passage of Scripture, The Apostle Paul first explains the transformation that one instinctively goes through when they accept Jesus Christ as Savior. He states it simply: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (The New American Standard Bible is the source for all scriptural passages referenced in this article.) After Paul assures the Corinthian church-goers that they

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have a new identity in Christ and will inherently live by the new standards associated with that identity (it would require a purposed resistance to that instinct to not do so), he then implores them to make every attempt to live by (and not resist) that new instinct which now resides within them. He appeals to them to be “reconciled to God” by living with that newness of perspective on life.

Christian counselors can make very good use of this biblical concept and the Scripture passage that expounds upon it as they attempt to assist young men in overcoming sexual addiction. This article attempts to demonstrate that and to offer helpful information to those who find themselves having to minister to such individuals. This article will also make use of excerpts from Dr. Patrick Carnes’ book, *Out of the Shadows – Understanding Sexual Addiction* (CompCare® Publishers, 2002), to point out areas in the young counselee’s life where the counselor needs to apply the concept found in the previously offered Scripture passage as they assist the counselee in conquering his dependence.

In chapter five of his book, Dr. Carnes discusses the dysfunctional belief system of a male who struggles with sexual addiction. He emphasizes that the root cause of impairment in the young man’s worldview is a feeling of powerlessness. He lists injurious habits the young man practices which create “delusions which he sees as reality (119).” Carnes says (on that same page) of those habits, [they]:

1. Diminish his self-worth
2. Limit his possibilities in relationships
3. Justify his victimization in terms of his needs
4. Connect sexuality with survival.

In this writer’s opinion, the third bulleted item is the most detrimental to the addict’s ability to overcome the old habits which should be passed away and the new habits which should come in knowing Christ. This article will explore some of the Scriptures that direct readers to understanding their new identity in Jesus Christ and the Christian principles those Scriptures exemplify which serve as instruments for defeating such destructive habits as those associated with sexual addiction. The principles offered in Scripture are defense mechanisms that the counselor might present to the counselee in

guiding him to deliverance from what Carnes sees as a dysfunctional belief system.

In stating that a sexual addict will “justify his victimization in terms of his needs (119)” Carnes simply means the addict will see no fault in taking advantage of others in fulfilling what he believes is, by nature, essential to his existence. At one point Carnes suggests, “Sexual addicts are hostages of their own preoccupation (9).” Carnes’ fourth point that addicts connect sexuality with survival is a prime example that he believes the sexual addict at some point feels that sex is essential to life.

Since the addict feels that way, it may be understandable that he would see no fault in meeting his natural need by any means necessary. His actions are driven solely by his will to survive. Hence, the addict will internally justify his actions even in cases where he violates the rights of another in meeting his own perceived needs. This happens because the counselee is using what I term as *epistemologically inferior logical operation* in determining what he feels is a good (or at least acceptable) moral decision.

The term is defined and explained in its entirety in one of my previously published works, *The Other SAT*, but a brief description will be presented in this article for the sake of continuity in the discussion. According to Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, people will make bad moral decisions based on what they internally perceive as good until they can replace those beliefs with better understanding such that they can then make good moral decisions. Kohlberg’s theory (and the weakness surrounding it) is based on his Relativistic worldview. He believes that the individual will somehow find a way (on his own) to replace the bad moral decision-making habits with good ones. This article emphasizes that it is the Christian counselor’s responsibility to help the counselee understand that is not possible. External assistance of some form is required to assist the counselee in moving from the old way of thinking to the new identity they have achieved in Christ.

Perhaps an excerpt from *The Other SAT* will explain this more clearly:

but the issue with this whole relativism theory should be fairly clear. Each stage is based on the condition or position of the person’s own internal moral belief system (what their own reasoning makes them believe is okay). How can a person’s epistemologically inferior logic mature into superior epistemological

logic (how will they know how to replace bad moral values with good moral values), when they do not go outside of their immature moral system to find those more mature moral values. Their system is currently too immature to make good decisions, yet it will still decide what's best when the time comes? That's illogical.

If there are no 'nutrients coming in' (no feeding of what is moral), then there is no way for the immature moral system to grow to maturity. It's the same as with your physical body. If you don't provide it with nourishment, it will never mature. If you don't provide your mind with knowledge, it will never grow. If you don't feed your moral system with good moral values, your moral system will never mature. There must be an outside source feeding good moral value into the person's belief system, before the person's epistemologically inferior logic can mature into superior epistemological logic.

Relativism and Kohlberg's moral theory, an apparent derivative of Relativism, both have foundational issues in their element of moral character. They did not include a logical operation by which the person's internal moral character might improve itself. There is no way for the moral system to improve itself without some outside influence (118).

So, it is critically important for the counselor to assist the counselee in moving away from justification of his actions based on his internally perceived needs (which is obviously a characteristic of life prior to knowing Christ). At that point, the counselor can proceed to moving the counselee to modifying his actions to better match what is his new identity in Christ. Perhaps the most instrumental Scripture passage for this stage of counseling is Romans 8:1-7. The passage reads as follows:

¹ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*.

In this epistle to the church at Rome, the Apostle Paul makes the reader understand that absolutely nothing of their ungodly nature followed them into their new spiritual relationship with God through Christ Jesus. He explains that their old nature adds no value to their new identity in Christ. He explains how desires, weaknesses,

shortcomings, and struggles associated with the flesh have no positive effect on the new relationship with God, because the flesh cannot subject itself to the will of God. He explains that only the human spirit (not the human flesh) can subject itself to the Holy Spirit (notice the capitalized “S” in the above referenced passage of Scripture). The Apostle Paul concentrates his efforts on making the reader understand that they must now place their mental efforts on getting their body to follow after what the spirit desires and no longer follow the desires of the flesh.

The counselor’s goal at this point is to help the counselee understand and trust this scriptural message and its importance in assisting in their overcoming of sexual addiction. The counselor would do well at the beginning of their sessions to explain the tripartite makeup of the person, so as to reinforce the scriptural message found in Romans 8:1-7 and to assure the counselee that their relationship with God is safe while they battle with overcoming their addiction. The tripartite view of man is explained in detail in another article in this volume titled *How to Use Biblical Teachings on Grace when Counseling Sexual Addiction*.

This passage promotes the Biblical principle that the counselee no longer is “connected to sexuality for survival” as Carnes suggests, but is now associated with a much more powerful source for subsistence. Moving the counselee to an understanding that the previous source was completely inadequate and that the new source is absolutely sufficient is a key goal at this juncture. I believe that once the counselor establishes this confidence in the counselee’s spirit, he or she can then begin attending to the counselee’s physical struggles with overcoming the sexual addiction.

Carnes offers a twelve-step process (137) for overcoming the physical struggle with sexual addiction. His process is an adaptation of “The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.” I have come to personally appreciate what the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous” seeks to accomplish in alcohol addicts. Carnes changes the reference of alcohol to that of sexual addiction and leaves the remaining verbiage intact, which indicates that he recognizes and appreciates the goal of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous as well. Should the reader review the twelve step process, they should easily recognize that God is central in its philosophy regarding

overcoming the addiction. Hence, it is an extremely useful tool for Christian counseling.

I had the pleasurable privilege of sitting in on an Alcoholics Anonymous session with a dear friend of mine and witnessed its effectiveness in action. I distinctly remember an individual who had overcome alcoholism expressing how he depended on God's total grace throughout the process. He was introduced to God's grace at the beginning of the process. I was just mesmerized at his complete understanding of God's amazing grace. He stated that realizing despite the condition he once was in, knowing of God's unceasing grace towards him gave him the strength to continue with the program and succeed at overcoming his addiction. I thought to myself as I sat in that meeting, "Wow! I wonder how many hardcore church-goers understand grace at this level."

I believe use of Carnes' adaptation of Alcoholics Anonymous' twelve step process (or something similar) in the sessions following those to help the counselee understand his new identity in Christ will benefit the counselor and counselee greatly. As I have stated in past publications, I suggest that the lay or non-professional Christian counselor seeks a professional, licensed counselor (preferably one who professes and demonstrates a strong Christian worldview) to assist in this area of counseling. I believe that partnering with such will increase the effectiveness of the lay or non-professional Christian counselor's ministerial efforts.

For sake of brevity, I will not attempt to offer and explain each of the twelve steps; but I will discuss some of the steps that I feel are fundamental to Christian Counseling. Carnes' book and more of his material is still in print and available should the reader determine more research in that area is warranted. At the time of writing this article, the seemingly best web site for obtaining more of Carnes' information is www.iitap.com.

Carnes' and Alcoholics Anonymous' first step helps the counselee to understand just how helpless it is to expect to overcome his addiction through carnal efforts alone. According to Carnes' writings, it appears that his intent at this stage is to move the counselee away from a number of core beliefs that negatively affect the counselee's addiction. Carnes feels that four destructive core beliefs are held by sexual addicts – particularly the belief that he is

“basically a bad, unworthy person (138).” Carne’s strategy of dispelling this belief aligns well with the sessions suggested above where the Christian counselor works toward moving the counselee from the carnal view of his situation to a spiritual view. Again, please read the article titled *How to Use Biblical Teachings on Grace when Counseling Sexual Addiction* article to understand the full purpose and approach to those first sessions. After having secured the counselee in his spiritual relationship with God, the next logical step is this step one of Carnes’ and Alcoholic Anonymous’ process that attempts to move the counselee away from his mental connection to the physical person he has known himself as prior to establishing a new identity in Christ.

The second step in Carnes’ and Alcoholic Anonymous’ process assists the counselee in realizing that he has a new source (or as The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous states, “a Power greater than ourselves”) to draw from for overcoming the sexual addiction. This step also aligns perfectly with the sessions and Scripture suggested above where the Christian counselor works toward moving the counselee from the carnal view of his relationship with God to a spiritual view. Once the counselee realizes how God now views him in his entirety, he will easily see the need for this second step in the process. Following exercises included in the second step will then take less effort on the part of the counselee.

The counselor might also use Romans 6:1-14 at this point to encourage the counselee to stay focused on his new identity in Christ and move further away from the old. In this passage of Scripture, the Apostle Paul is a bit more intense in his delivery, so the counselor must be sure he or she has already assisted the counselee to a point where he is confident in his new identity in Christ. The counselor must also ensure that he or she does not appear judgmental or condemning as they convey this Scriptural message to the counselee. The possibility of sensitivity to the matter on the counselee’s part and the intensity of the message will require a very empathetic approach to relaying the meaning.

The remaining steps of Carnes’ and Alcoholics Anonymous’ process are designed to move the counselee to a point where he can eventually not only overcome his current addiction, but also use his new found confidence in his new identity to assist others who struggle

with the same. With successful completion of the process, the counselee becomes what Father Henri Nouwen refers to as “a wounded healer” in his book that bears the same term as its title, *The Wounded Healer* (Doubleday, 1972). The goal of every Christian counselor should be to assist their counsees to a point where each counselee can effectively witness to others. It is probably safe to say that each good Christian counselor has become so because someone assisted them in moving to the point where they are now from the point where some of their counsees are currently.

Again, the philosophy existent in the twelve step process is purely biblical in principle and is very useful to the Christian counselor. If I were to suggest anything in addition to what can be found in those steps, I would suggest a final session where the counselor reinforces in the counselee the necessity to be aware of and avoid situations that might cause a physical relapse. The counselor must not take for granted that the counselee should know the danger of re-establishing the bad habits they have recently overcome through the counseling process. I believe an anecdote involving a personal testimony regarding such might serve well to meet this requirement. Testimonies of wounded healers are very instrumental in assisting others in the overcoming process (cf. Revelation 12:11).

Having made that statement, I will close this article with my favorite anecdote (another excerpt from *The Other SAT*) for such counseling opportunities:

may I use my preaching voice [to explain] the danger of playing with sin:

I remember first learning about variables in math from Mr. Cutchens in Algebra I. He took his time and taught us the concept of variables. I was young then and so I couldn't really see where I would ever need to know the concept of variables for the math I used in my every day activities. I am much older now and I think I'm a little wiser and I still don't see a need for knowing the concept of variables for performing my normal math routines. I know there might be some engineers out there that beg to differ that variables in math are quite useful, but I'm talking about for my own personal use.

Mr. Cutchens kept it simple when he taught us the concept of variables. He used binomials where you have only two terms (you know, something times something = some number). He taught us that variables are letters that take the place of unknown numbers in an equation. He always used x and y in his examples as in X times Y = some number. He told us the value of a variable may change depending on the scope of the problem. Until the problem is fully realized (solved), the variable is unknown. He would give us the value for one

variable then after we understood the concept, we could figure out the value for the other variable.

Once I understood the concept of variables, I thought they were pretty cool. I still thought they were useless, but it was fun to work out the problems—until Mr. Cutchens started throwing in exponents. When he taught the concept of exponents, the letter he used for the exponent variable was always the letter “n.” Exponents can be tricky, because they make the numbers grow much faster. You can have just one number with an exponent and that one number can get big in a hurry.

I’m sure most of you know this, but bear with me for a moment. If you see a variable exponent beside your number, it means you have to multiply the number by itself however many times the variable stands for. So if $n=4$ and you have 10 to the n th power (or n th degree), then you multiply 10 by itself, four times. You multiply 10×10 , then multiply whatever that equals by 10, then multiply that by 10 again, which is ten thousand. $10^4 = 10,000$.

You can see when the variable is in the exponent position your numbers can grow really big really fast can’t they? It’s called growing exponentially. When your number is growing to the n th degree, it can get out of control really quick. Just think if you have an exponent where $n=10$. 10 to the 10th degree equals 10,000,000,000 (ten billion). See how quickly the numbers can grow when they’re exponential? And we’re just using the nice round number of 10. Imagine if our number was 437 and our $n=24$: 437^{24} . You’ll run off the paper trying to solve that one. It could get out of control real quick, couldn’t it? That’s how exponents work in math.

Once I understood the concept of exponents and variables, I was ready to take on the world of algebra. I enjoyed working out binomial and trinomial equations where I had to solve for the variables, even if they included exponent variables. I still, however, felt like the concept of variable exponents were of no use beyond the classroom. I spent all of my childhood and most of my adult life feeling that way. In fact, it was not until very recently that I finally realized a use for understanding the concept of variable exponents and that use had nothing to do with math.

I was talking once with one of the Missionaries at our church and we began to casually address the concern with prominent pastors who were currently making the news headlines for the wrong reasons. Our discussion went from how the terrible things they were “allegedly” doing were to how could someone so high (in the religious ranks) stoop so low. I thought about that long after our conversation was over. I concluded that they just started with small wrongdoings and eventually it got way out of control.

Then, somewhere along the way of my pondering this thing, it hit me. Here is a very logical use of math’s concept of variables. This concept explains the danger of playing around with sin. The variables associated with sin are always in the exponent position. Sin always grows to the n^{th} degree. It grows exponentially. And we just saw when something grows to the n^{th} degree it can get really big really quick. It can easily get out of control. Maybe (if the

accusations were true) those pastors didn't realize the concept of exponent variables as it relates doing wrong.

Let's look at sin at the n^{th} degree for a few minutes. I want to show you how this thing can get out of control quickly. In my opinion (now this is just my opinion). This isn't the result of deep, concentrated theological study. I just made this up; but it makes sense. And, it aligns well with Scripture.

In my opinion, there are four exponential variables of sin and they all just happen to begin with the letter 'n'. There is the "no way" variable. There is the "nonchalant" variable. There is the "no big deal" variable. And finally, there's the "nothing bothers you anymore" variable. Now pay close attention to the variables in all of this.

Here's how I think these variables work:

When we are in the right relationship with God (when we are really allowing the Holy Spirit to reign over our lives), I don't care what kind of sin comes our way, we're going to say "No way! I'm not doing that! I'm not saying that! I'm not watching that! I don't want to hear that!" At this point, we see sin as a "no way" variable. Regardless of what the wrong is, we're just not doing it. We're so focused on doing what's right according to God's word that people can do whatever they want to try to tempt us, but we will hold our ground. That's when we're fully in tune with the Spirit of Christ that dwells within us. Don't you wish we could all just stay right there?

Well, sometimes we get a little relaxed with this idea of sin. Sometimes we'll place the nonchalant variable in the sin equation. We expose ourselves to bad situations. We may not physically take part in any wrongdoings, but sometimes just too much exposure will give us a nonchalant view of sin. It may just be the type of movies we watch or the video games we play or the books we read or even the conversations we join in on. If we hold that nonchalant view too long, it will grow quickly. And before we know it we're at the no big deal variable.

When the variable reaches no big deal, we have let bad behavior become commonplace in our lives. We've become desensitized to it. At this point, we'll not want to just watch what's going on or listen to what's being said, anymore. We'll want to take an active part in it. And we will, because at this point, it's no big deal to us.

Sin at the degree of "no big deal" will still bother our conscience, but not enough to make us stop. It'll just make us want to hide it from those who we know are still seeing sin with the "no way" variable. We'll be careful around other folks, too. Even though we see it as no big deal, we don't want to show them too much.

If we stay at the "no big deal" variable of sin a short while, it won't take long to move to the "nothing bothers me anymore" variable. Why? That's because (as we just saw) exponents get out of hand really quick. Of course at that point, we don't care who hears us or who see us or who knows us. As Mrs. Helen Baylor says in her testimony, we'll do "everything we're big and bad enough to do." If you've never heard Mrs. Baylor's testimony on her *Helen*

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Baylor Live CD (1999), you should find it on YouTube and listen to it. That's an excellent testimony of why we can't play around with sin.

Sin grows too big too fast. If we hang around it too much, even if we're not taking part in it, we will get relaxed with it and eventually go from "no way" to "nonchalant." Then we will casually begin to take part in it, even if it means sneaking to do so. We'll find ourselves going from "No way!" to "No big deal." Soon we'll stop hiding it altogether and it won't take long before "Nothing bothers us anymore."



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