

EXAMPLES AND
PRINCIPLES OF
PSYCHOLOGY
IN THE BIBLE

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IN THE BIBLE

DENNIS FARRELL



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DEDICATION

To my son, Brian, without whose input this book
could not have been completed.

ALSO BY DENNIS FARRELL

The Day of the Lord

A serious study of prophetic scripture pertaining to
the second coming of Jesus.

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PREFACE

This book is about principles of modern psychology found in Scripture. I had often noticed in my study of Scripture that it contained instances, examples, and ideas of principles that I found in psychology books. Many of these principles that psychology had discovered could already be found in Scripture. This should not be unusual, since the Bible also contains economic and scientific principles, as well as principles from other disciplines in life. I had read a book many years ago on “Science in the Bible” and decided it would be interesting to write a similar book on psychology in the Bible. Although it took quite a few years, having put it down for over twenty years, I have finally completed the project.

There is interpretation, evaluation, and commentary, but only in keeping with the thesis of the book, which is only to point out the parallels between psychology and Scripture.

The book is not about psychology based on the Bible, or how the Bible is a type of psychology book. It is also not about how to be a better counselor, psychotherapist, or psychologist by using Scripture, nor is it a guide on how to use psychology in everyday life from a biblical perspective. This book is also not a commentary on the values of psychology through the eyes of the Scripture, nor is it an evaluation of the Scripture through the eyes of psychology. It is not a theology book, nor is it a criticism of psychology.

However, sometimes it was necessary to point out the differences between psychology and Scripture despite the thesis of simply revealing principles, although I will not spend much time on these differences because it is impossible to address them all in this limited work. This is because several of the similarities, or parallels, have limits and there is disagreement between the two that cannot be ig-

nored. For instance, both humanistic psychology and psychoanalytic theory contain principles which can be found in Scripture, but there are some distinct differences which must be addressed, like the humanistic idea of the self or the idea of the superego.

There is also a difference between the discipline of psychology and psychotherapy; the two are not equal. Psychotherapy is just one part of mainstream psychology. As the reader who is unfamiliar with psychology will discover, the latter incorporates a wide range of subjects. There are other differences, but they will be pointed out at the appropriate time and kept to a minimum.

I have tried to avoid criticizing theories and individuals, which would be contrary to the theme of this book. While this goal may be nearly impossible, I hope I have succeeded in this endeavor. There are instances where psychologists disagree with one another, as in the area of mental illness, which I also address, but is kept to a minimum.

The assertions and interpretations that I have made regarding the comparison of psychology and the Bible are strictly my opinion, although I have tried not to be dogmatic. There is some speculation concerning certain principles, but I believed this was appropriate and within the limits that Scripture would allow. For example, in the area of language there are interpretations that speculate on the relationship between the language mechanism and parts of the body, like the tongue and lips, found in Scripture. There are also speculations concerning the functions of certain parts of the body that Scripture mentions that relate to brain functions. There are others, and I have tried to be reasonable in these varied interpretations. I also want to establish that presentation of these principles does not mean an endorsement of any of the theories and philosophies of the individuals who may have discovered them. It also does not mean that I endorse the technique of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis or any such approach as solutions to man's problems.

Finally, it does not mean that I endorse the categorization of man's problems as a theory of mental disturbances as they appear in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. I merely found some principles in these theories and techniques, which also appear in Scripture, in my opinion. The Bible itself does not contain any of these theories or philosophies.

Several of the topics discussed in this work can become complicated as, for example, the mind-body problem. This is a concept about

which articles and books have been written, but I have attempted to keep the explanation as brief and simple as possible, just enough for the reader to grasp the basic understanding before presenting the verses corresponding to it. The only purpose in presenting such subjects is because they can be found in Scripture, which is in keeping with the thesis of this book. In fact, I have tried to keep all discussions of the psychology portion as brief and simple as possible so that the goal of simply giving principles of psychology in Scripture is maintained, rather than a lengthy discussion on modern psychology.

Other examples of precarious subjects are the spirit and soul, which are not found in most modern psychology writings. However, they cannot be ignored because the Bible establishes their reality and relationship to human psychology. Many of the early psychologists, like William James, discussed the soul, and early twentieth century textbooks included the soul in their texts. One other example is the topic of mental illness. This concept is not found in Scripture, but there are some behaviors, or symptoms, which psychology has discovered, and which also appear in Scripture. One example is depression. There are a few other difficult subjects, but the same idea of keeping their explanation simple applies.

The format of the book is to present the psychology first, followed by verses of scripture, and then a discussion of the principles of psychology contained in the verses. It is at this latter point where, interpretation, opinion, and some speculation appear. Some of these principles have many scriptural representations, but for the sake of space and redundancy I tried to limit the amount of scriptures I present, hopefully choosing adequate examples. Some of the scriptures are not written out, but are cited in a supporting role, only, because I did not think it necessary, and the reader can look them up if so desired. Many of the principles in these verses are quite obvious, as for example, reward and punishment, while others are implied or a matter of speculation, as those principles related to the nervous system.

There is also an analysis of the Greek and Hebrew words, which I believe to be essential to revealing many of the psychological principles contained in the scriptures. I have relied primarily on *Strong's Concordance*, with some aid from other sources including *Vine's Dictionary*. I have also used the New American Standard translation as the source of the verses presented here, but the King James Version

is also consulted and cited in many instances. In fact, when researching the book I was forced to rely on the KJV in order to use *Strong's Concordance*. This is because the version of the Strong's at the time was only the KJV and, since I used the NASB for my text, I had to look every word up in the KJV first in order to find it in Strong's. This was fortunate, because it meant seeing the verse in both NASB and KJV and getting two perspectives of the same verse to aid my analysis of the psychological principle in said verse.

I have decided to skip any references and endnotes. The reason for this was to keep the reading as smooth as possible so the reader would not have to look up references and thus distract from the text. There is much precedence for this in books using the Bible as their source. However, there are several quotes of textbook authors whose names are cited in the text itself. When I began the research for this project 30 years ago, I borrowed Bible dictionaries and commentaries from a brother. For some reason, which I cannot recall now, I did not keep a record of either of these references and, consequently, I no longer have access to them, nor do they appear in the text or bibliography (except for Jameison, Fausset, and Brown, which was added later). I hope that this does not present a problem for the reader.

There is, of course, a bibliography, and the interested readers may look up any of these psychological principles on their own. The psychology is mostly basic, and much of it can be found in any standard text including the ones cited. I have, however, used several original sources, like Freud, Maslow, James, and Watson, just to name a few. Even these can be researched for the cited portions of their ideas in any edition of their work. There is an extensive index and a detailed table of contents allowing the reader to be able to find an item in either the index or the table of contents and locate it in the text without too much difficulty.

It is my hope that the reader will find it both interesting and fascinating, as I have, that the Bible contains so many of the principles of modern psychology. Much of what we call modern science, social science, economics, ethics, law, philosophy, medicine, nutrition, etc. is found in Scripture. This should excite even the most casual reader of Scripture. The Bible, after all, is an ancient work, written by numerous authors, and yet embodies so much that we consider only recently discovered.

We might even expect that the Scripture would get closer to the truth concerning these disciplines, since it is the Word of God, is infallible, and contains absolute truth. Harold Lindsell has the following to say with respect to the truth of the Bible concerning other subjects: "Whatever it communicates is to be trusted and can be relied upon as being true. The Bible is not a textbook on chemistry, astronomy, philosophy, or medicine. But when it speaks on matters having to do with these or any other subjects, the Bible does not lie to us. It does not contain error of any kind."

Regarding psychology, we might also expect that the Bible, though not a psychology text, would tell us more of the truth about the true nature of man than any psychology book. This is because it tells us what man is really like, that he has a fallen nature, what can be done about it, and how to guide him, all of which relates to his spiritual side, and which modern psychology rejects. Thus, it is not surprising that the Bible would contain psychological principles that would apply to mankind.

It must be pointed out that modern psychologists have been trained in the scientific method and many have gifts of observation. Consequently, they have been able to observe human beings and discover psychological principles that have contributed to the world's knowledge. This includes discovering many created aspects of man despite the fallen nature, although most reject man's creation. The fact that most do not believe in the soul does not prevent them from discovering these psychological principles pertaining to mankind. In other words, it does not prevent them from seeing many of these principles of the human personality, how we behave, think, perceive, learn, etc.

It must also be realized that, since modern psychology studies the fallen nature of mankind, their explanations of man and solutions to man's problems would be much different than the biblical approach. For example, in the area of mental and emotional problems, psychology's way of rehabilitation or restoration consists of various types of therapies and a dependence on self, which address the old nature only, whereas the Bible establishes that man must be spiritually renewed or "born again." Psychology also sees man (fallen nature) as a product of evolution and many of its explanations would therefore reduce man to a higher animal without a soul. Thus,

modern psychology could never discover the complete biblical truth concerning man.

In contrast, the Scripture obviously reveals man as a created being in the image of God and, as previously shown, must invoke the spiritual side of man. The many theories of modern psychology are most likely going to disagree with the Bible in their *philosophies*, but they still contain various psychological principles concerning man, and as I have stated, which are there to observe by anyone, and also stated, many of which are in the Scripture.

As in any science, it is possible to conduct observations and experiments and discover facts, despite one's personal philosophies. Such men as Watson and Crick were atheists and evolutionists, yet they discovered DNA and the double helix. Roger Sperry is an evolutionist and believes in the New Age, yet he discovered that the two brains can function independently after observing the split brain patients and won the Nobel Prize in the process. And the list goes on. God has given humans irrevocable gifts in every area of human endeavor, including discovering knowledge about *man himself*, despite the fact that man does not always use these gifts for His glory.

The Science of Psychology

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to point out the parallels between Scripture and some basic principles of science, at least those used in psychology. In order for psychology to study human beings, it must develop as a science. But what exactly is a science?

The Latin word from which the word science is derived is *scientia* meaning knowledge. Science is merely the accumulation of knowledge and this could be any area of study including the natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, etc. As a social science, psychology is an endeavor to gain knowledge about man. Knowledge about man, however, can have other sources, such as philosophy, theology, humanities, etc.

The Bible actually does contain a few scientific principles that can also be found in psychology. Consequently, the intent of this chapter is to investigate scriptures that contain these principles that apply to psychology. Since the Bible is not a science or a psychology book, it will be limited in its treatment of these principles.

SCIENCE

Science seeks to establish facts about the natural world, a world that God created. Because of man's natural curiosity, he desires to "know and understand." Assuming that man himself can be an object

of this curiosity, psychology would therefore be a legitimate field of study. Genesis 1:26, 28 gives us a “mandate” to “subdue” and “have dominion over” the earth. Henry Morris believes that this mandate includes psychology, which is considered a social science. Because man has a physical nature, he is therefore subject to the natural laws.

In support of this, 1 Corinthians 13:44 says that man possess a natural body. Therefore, our physical nature is also subject to natural psychological laws. The task of the social sciences has been to investigate these laws and to establish theories. Psychology seeks, through scientific methods, to discover the psychological principles and concepts that apply to man. Leander Keyser, a psychologist, confirms that psychology is both a legitimate subject of study and also for a search of psychological principles in Scripture. He says that the Bible contains the “fundamental facts” of psychology and science for man to discover. He asserts that scientific “experience and observation” will provide evidence for the “divine and supernatural character” of the Bible. He goes on to say that in effect, scientific findings should always agree with Scripture and vice-versa, but keeping in mind that the Bible is the ultimate truth in the matter.

PROOFS

Science functions by use of what scientists call empirical or scientific means, that is, the scientific method. “Empirical questions can be answered through the kinds of systematic observations and experiences that characterize scientific methodology,” according to one research methods text. Basically, this consists of making observations, and experimentation when possible, by which the scientist gains evidence to prove a hypothesis. Hypotheses are “predictions about specific events that are derived . . . from a theory . . . , which in general can be considered educated guesses about what should happen under certain circumstances.” Psychology follows these same rules of science in its investigation of human thinking and behavior. Many believe that psychology is a true science because it follows the scientific method and gains evidence regarding human thinking and behavior. However, if the mind is not just a natural entity, but is made in the image of God, and therefore is of a spiritual nature, then a strictly scientific approach to man is limited.

Explaining and giving evidence that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead . . . (Acts 17:3).

The Bible does emphasize the principle of giving evidence. This verse is evidence itself of the importance of giving proof in the historic sense of the Resurrection. The Greek for “giving evidence” is *paratithemi* and means “putting alongside” or “placing before,” that is, a “placing before” of evidence for all to see.

To these he also presented himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

These verses show the principle of giving evidence. The principle is shown by use of the words “many convincing proofs.” The Greek is *tekmerion* meaning “a sure token.” Needless to say this is an emphatic way of saying that the resurrection was a sure thing.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

The Bible even gives instruction on being good scientists. Notice the use of the word “test.” An individual needs to practice good science in evaluating the data, whether in the natural or spiritual sense. The Greek word for test bears this out, since it means “proving.” Also, John 4:52-53 is gospel “proof” of the importance of getting evidence. The principle of scientific testing, although in a spiritual context, is in Scripture.

NORMS AND SAMPLES

Scientific methods include a technique, which is both necessary and time saving, called sampling. Samples are random selections of objects, animals, or people drawn from larger populations. The investigator uses the sample to test out a hypothesis and then infer the results to the population. This requires drawing conclusions and

making interpretations. For example, using a group of students in an experiment and applying the results to the larger population of students. If the sample is random enough, it can be applied to the larger group within reason.

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very thing is unrighteous also in much (Luke 16:10).

I have chosen this verse as an example of the principle of sampling. The “little thing” is being inferred to the “much.” The Greek for “little thing” is *elachistos* meaning “least.” A person faithful in even a small task—sample—has proven himself to be faithful in many larger tasks. In psychology, a sample is the least amount possible that still represents the whole of the population.

In the Gospels Jesus makes use of sampling, also. He usually preaches to a small number of people, yet they are a sample of all peoples. For example, the Romans are a sample of the Gentile nations, and their behavior reflects all people. The Jews are a sample of those to whom He preaches the Gospel of the Kingdom. When He speaks of those who do not believe among the Jews, He is speaking of all who do not believe for all time. Those who are blind to the “light” in the book of John, for instance, represent all in the world who are blind to the Gospel.

Just about everything He says is directed at the few, but the few represent the many, just as a sample is a parameter of a population. Perhaps the best example is John 11:50-52 where the High Priest prophesies that “one man should die for the people.” Jesus Himself is a sample of “one” for the people, but in verse 52, the nation represents the whole world. One other example is John 16:20 with the words, “you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.” The world is represented here by those in Jerusalem at the time who are happy that Jesus has been crucified.

Norms are another tool that psychology uses to substantiate scientific data and theories. Norms are standards that are based on a group, which becomes an average or “reference point.” Usually, the group is tested and standardized from which the average or standards are set up and used for comparison. One example is the standardized

IQ tests used to compare people. A good example of this comparison is the following quote in the field of intelligence “the intelligent are always intelligent relative to the unintelligent.” The norms are usually calculated scores derived from testing a sample of people.

However, standards will change, since the groups (population) changes. The standard, therefore, rests only upon the population to which the comparison is being made.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble (1 Corinthians 1:25).

The relevant point of interest in this particular verse to this discussion is the word “flesh.” The Greek is *sarx* and literally means “flesh,” but can also mean “human standards.” The verse is saying that there is the tendency to judge according to standards. In psychology, this principle of judging or evaluating by comparison has been legitimized for the purpose of determining some human quality, like intelligence.

Thus, comparison is the main reason for having standards or, to use a biblical term, judging. This principle of comparison can also be seen in Ezekiel 16:51-52 where a comparison is made between Israel and Samaria. Israel is being judged according to Samaria’s standards, not that the latter is being condoned, but resting upon this population only. Both verses say “you . . . made your sisters appear righteous,” which closely approaches the relative comparison of psychology. Verse 52 says “because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you.” The words, “more . . . than” also indicate comparison.

Psychology makes use of what is referred to as the bell-shaped curve—high in the middle, low at the ends—a statistical technique to make comparisons. The above quote concerning intelligence is an example of how this comparison works. The normal curve is a probability figure on a graph representing the “normal distribution” of random events. The basis for the human application of this curve is that most people are normal and will thus be distributed near the middle of the curve, that is, the average. Through some type of standardized test (like the IQ test) one constructs such a curve for com-

parison of a group of people. The grading system is generally based on the normal curve. Students are often compared to each other or judged in a competitive system to isolate those at the extremes, as well as the average.

For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; Not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you . . . (2 Corinthians 10:12-15).

Although these verses concern Paul's ministry, the principle of comparison is quite obvious by use of the word "compare." The word "measure" is reminiscent of test measuring instruments. The Greek for "sphere" is *kanon* and means "rule of measure or conduct." Comparisons in psychology do measure most often conduct or behavior. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's commentary says regarding this passage that "they measure themselves by one (standard) made by themselves: they do not compare themselves with others who excel them, but with those like themselves: hence their high self esteem." This description could have come from a modern textbook. It is true that the word "sphere" in this context is dealing with the boundaries of a spiritual dimension, but the word brings to mind the normal curve and staying within parameters.

Verse 13 uses God's "apportioned . . . measure" as the higher standard. In psychology there is another, perhaps higher standard, called a criterion. Rather than comparing one to another, people are compared to a specific criterion that everyone would have to achieve. Examples are the ability to lift a certain amount of weight or run a race in a certain amount of time to qualify, rather than being the best in your group.

Another verse, James 1:17, also implies comparison in the words, “with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.” The words, “there is no variation” are actually saying that there is no comparison, implying that the comparison or variation is in man’s world. The Greek for variation is *parallage* meaning change. Curiously, the word “variation” is the exact word psychologists use when describing the normal curve.

THE PRINCIPLE OF INFERENCE

The principle of inference is a necessary part of science, especially social science. Both the scientific method and the technique of sampling, to cite two examples, require the use of inference. Inferential statistics, a part of sampling, obviously uses inference. The entire field of cognitive¹ psychology depends upon making deductions about the human mind. For example, the existence of grammatical rules in the human mind as suggested by the science of linguistics requires the use of inference. In fact, inference has allowed psychologists to discover many so-called cognitive structures in the mind.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible (Hebrews 11:3).

Some creation scientists believe that this verse has something to do with the law of atomic physics. Whatever the truth is concerning this, it surely includes some type of inference concerning the invisibility of atoms. Some examples cited above about the human mind, like grammatical structures, are invisible to the human eye, yet can be seen in behavior and indirectly with brain machines like the MRI. The whole intra-psychic world of personality is another example of dependence upon deduction. For example, postulating theories of personality are deductions based on observations of patients.

Keyser affirms the principle of inference in psychology. He speaks of “mental experience,” which he says can be the focus of scientific investigation by logical inference. The mind can be “both the

¹ The term *cognitive* means to “think” or “know” in Latin and refers to intellectual processes of the mind.

observer and the object observed.” Of course, this idea was an early part of the history of psychology known as structuralism with its subjective practice of introspection. Introspection is looking into one’s own mind and reporting what one is experiencing at the moment of an experiment. Contemporary psychologists, however, particularly the cognitive psychologists, try to be more objective in their study of the human mind and their inferential techniques.

Genesis 3:1-5 is the account of the temptation of Eve. These verses are an example of both inference and, simultaneously, the principle of sampling. They use a sample of one to make an inference about human nature and generalize to all men from this one. This is obviously the testing of man. One commentary calls it a “probationary opportunity.”

This incident brings up an interesting point. Is it possible to infer from one human being and generalize it to many? For example, could the researcher infer from one human being all of the laws of association and learning? Or, if one man murders does that mean that all men are capable of murder? Perhaps this depends on your view of the human mind and Scripture. Psychology could never accept such a concept, however. The psychologists would say that there are just too many different theories of man to narrow human nature down to one type of an individual. As is evident in this verse, the Bible does accept this practice.