

APPLYING TRUTH TO LIFE

*Grace Gatherings*

THEOLOGY NIGHTS | JUNE 28, 2023

GRACE CHURCH  
WILLIAMSBURG



# Question 6

Explain the doctrine of the **noetic effects of sin** relating the doctrine to the ability of secular psychologists to **understand true information** about the human condition.

# Question 6

Explain the doctrine of the **noetic effects of sin** relating the doctrine to the ability of secular psychologists to **understand true information** about the human condition.

**Noetic (*nous*) = mind**

The noetic effects of sin concern the ways sin **corrupts** a persons ability to think, reason, and to rightly interpret the issues of life. The idea is that sin **pollutes** our thinking.

# Question 6

Explain the doctrine of the **noetic effects of sin** relating the doctrine to the ability of secular psychologists to **understand true information** about the human condition.

**Noetic (*nous*) = mind**

A **sinfully corrupted** mind means that unbelievers:

- **Do not** think about the spiritual and moral issues of life in **neutral**, unbiased ways.
- **Are** actively biased **against** God's truth (suppressing in unrighteousness).
- Have a **demonic-human philosophy** on life. God calls this **foolishness**.

# Question 6

Explain the doctrine of the **noetic effects of sin** relating the doctrine to the ability of secular psychologists to **understand true information** about the human condition.

**Noetic (*nous*) = mind**

A **redeemed** mind means that believers:

- Have the mind of **Christ** (1 Cor. 2:16)
- Live **transformed** by the **renewing** of their minds (Romans 12:2)



# Question 6

The Bible presents a tremendous **contrast** between the reasoning of **believers** and **unbelievers** about the spiritual and moral issues of life.

- **Titus 1:15**: A clean, pure, truthful mind produces clean, pure, truthful behavior. Defiled and unbelieving minds produce impure behavior.

God's perspective on the mind of man is revealed in Scripture's teaching about the **contrasts** between a redeemed (heavenly) mind and a **carnal** (earthly) mind.

# Question 6

## Mankind's Foolish Mind

- 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

## Mankind's Darkened Mind

- Ephesians 4:17-19 Gentiles = unbelievers. There are **four descriptions** of sin's effects on their minds/hearts.
  - ***"Futility of their mind..."*** Futile means what is devoid of truth and appropriateness. **Empty** intellect/minds.
  - ***"Darkened in their understanding..."***
  - ***"Ignorance that is in them..."***
  - ***"Hardness of their heart..."***

## Question 6

“The unregenerate person plans and resolves everything on the basis of his own thinking. He becomes his own ultimate authority, and he follows his own thinking to its ultimate outcome of futility, aimlessness, and meaninglessness--to the self-centered emptiness that characterizes our age.” (MacArthur)



# Question 6

Notice how Paul uses mind/understanding/heart synonymously:

*“So I say this, and affirm in the Lord, that you are to no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their **minds**, being darkened in their **understanding**, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their **heart**; and they, having become callous, have given themselves up to indecent behavior for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”* Ephesians 4:17-19



# Question 6

Mankind's Hostile Mind

- Romans 1:18; 8:5-8

Mankind's Helpless Mind

- 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7-8



# Question 6

How do these truths about the noetic effects of sin relate to the ability of secular psychologists to **understand true information** about the human condition?

- “...sinful human thought **reverses** God’s thought” (Jay Adams). From Rom. 1:18, sinful thinking suppresses truth about God.
- The ambiguous and **conflicting** explanations, definitions, diagnoses, and treatments offered by secular counseling theories show the noetic effects of sin on secular reasoning for soul care.



# Question 6

Since the noetic effect of sin **reverses** and **distorts** God's truth, **how might that influence** a secular psychologist's/counselor's observations, interpretations, diagnoses, and treatment methods for soul care?

## Observation

**Information/data** that all people come to know through God's **common grace**

## Interpretation

Seek to **understand** the information produced by their observations

## Intervention

Efforts to **employ** interpreted observations in helping people in counseling



# Question 6

Can sinful (earthly) minds **know** and **do truthful** things?

- **Yes**, but due to what two doctrines we have just studied?
- God's general revelation and God's common grace.
- God has put the knowledge of Himself in every person through general revelation in **creation** and **conscience** (Rom. 1:18ff.; 2:14).
- Through God's undeserved goodness in common grace shown to all of creation without exception, and through general revelation where God's power and divine nature are **clearly seen**, people can know **correct** things.
- Jesus gives **light** to **all** men to know true things (John 1:9). Without Jesus **enlightening** people's minds, we could not know the things we know.
- In His kindness, God also **restrains** the full effects of sin on one's mind, and He makes it possible for sinners to say and do helpful things.



## Question 6

“The common grace of God in the intellectual realm also results in an ability to grasp truth and distinguish it from error, and to experience growth in knowledge that can be used in the investigation of the universe and in the task of subduing the earth. This means that all science and technology carried out by non-Christians is a result of common grace, allowing them to make incredible discoveries and inventions, to develop the earth’s resources into many material goods, to produce and distribute those resources, and to have skill in their productive work.” (Grudem)



# Question 6

How does God's common grace affect scientific research and the process of observation – interpretation – diagnosis – treatment in the counseling relationship?

- God's common grace applied to the realm of soul-care (counseling) means that secular researchers, psychologists, and counselors can do scientific research, make correct observations, and even counsel someone to make changes in his/her life, **but...**
- Common grace is **not saving grace** -- it does not eliminate sin's effects on the mind, nor does it change the **heart**.
- Sin **completely** infects unbelievers' minds/hearts so that their ability to understand the spiritual and moral condition of mankind is **always distorted**.

# Question 6

How does God's common grace affect scientific research and the process of observation -- interpretation -- diagnosis -- treatment in the counseling relationship?

- The closer science and counseling take a person to the **spiritual** center of life **in relation to God** (who are we, why are we here, why do we suffer, what is wrong with us, why do bad things happen, how do we change, etc.), the **greater the influence** sin will have on a person's **interpretations**.
- The mind set on this world is **anti-God**, and it is **devoid** of the redeeming power of the Holy Spirit.
- General revelation reveals Creator-God; it tells us that **God is**. Common grace tells us that **God is good/kind**. People observe these realities and, because they are **meaning-makers**, they always interpret what they see.



# Question 6

How does God's common grace affect scientific research and the process of observation -- interpretation -- diagnosis -- treatment in the counseling relationship?

- But the noetic effects of sin distorts those interpretations.
- Even though unbelievers see, say, and know some correct things about their world, as their observations move them **closer to interpreting the issues of human existence** (which counseling addresses), they will use that knowledge to **suppress** the truths that God **is**, and that God is **good**.
- Any counseling method that does not apply God's wisdom to the heart/mind with the **goal of greater Christlikeness** is going to be ultimately **unhelpful** and even **harmful**.

# Question 6

How does God's common grace affect scientific research and the process of observation -- interpretation -- diagnosis -- treatment in the counseling relationship?

- Two primary causes for this:
  - These approaches **lack the wisdom** of the Holy Spirit, and
  - They **never deal** with the issues of the **selfish ambition** and **idolatry** of our **hearts** as these things relate to God.



# Question 6

False, ungodly wisdom is man's wisdom on the issues of life. Man's wisdom is counter to God's wisdom, so that they **cannot mix**.

**Three characteristics** of man's false wisdom in contrast to God's gentle wisdom (James 3:15):

1. **Earthly** = of the **world**
2. **Natural** = of the **flesh**
3. **Demonic** = of the **devil**

# Question 6

**Earthly:** “...it is restricted to things that man can theorize, discover, and accomplish by himself. It has no place for God or the things of God. It has no place for spiritual truth or illumination. It is a closed system, a circumscribed box, as it were, of man’s own making and choosing under satanic prompting.”

Earthly wisdom “pervades philosophy, education, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, and every other dimension and aspect of contemporary human life.”  
(MacArthur)



# Question 6

**Natural**: “Those who rely on this wisdom are ‘worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit’ (Jude 19). All of the feelings, desires, appetites, standards, and impulses are grounded in a humanistic view of the world and of man, who, understandably, becomes the measure of all things. Such wisdom not only feeds the flesh but also is foolish.” (MacArthur)

# Question 6

**Demonic:** “Although [false wisdom] is human, earthbound, and fleshly, its root source is Satan himself... The wisdom from below is nothing more than the foolishness of demons. Appealing to men’s natural fallenness and sinful inclination to arrogant self-interest, this wisdom deceives them into believing Satan’s lies rather than God’s truth. What they believe to be their own wisdom is really the devil’s.” (MacArthur)



# Question 6

Contrast these elements of false wisdom with [James 3:17](#).

No matter how educated, intellectual, or articulate psychologists and psychiatrists may be, if their interpretations, conclusions, diagnoses, and methods are not grounded in God's wisdom, they are all foolish and demonic.

# Question 6

*“Give me your heart, my son,  
and let your eyes delight in My ways.”*

Proverbs 23:26



# Question 6

## References:

- Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*.
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*.
- John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*.
- John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary.
- John MacArthur, *James*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

GRACE CHURCH  
WILLIAMSBURG