

CHRISTMAS SEASON INTERLUDE
Revisiting Messiah's Descriptive Names
Part I: Christ Our Wonderful Counselor
(Isaiah 9:6)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

This Christmas Season, many people need effective counseling:

(1) It is a pressing need locally: "So drunk she couldn't stand, police say Sara Blackwood" of "Torrington" had "called for a ride then punched and spit at the Uber driver who refused the job and asked her to get out . . . (A)ttorney Robert F. Dwyer, who represented her previously . . . said Blackwood suffered from traumatic brain injury during an attack earlier in life that 'affected her mental health.'" (Brigitte Ruthman, "Woman accused of assault on Uber driver," Republican-American, November 21, 2023, p. 3A)

(2) It is a pressing need nationally: Jonah Goldberg's column, "Step away from America's outrage industry" (Ibid., November 22, 2023, p. 9A), claimed, "Conflict is very real in our universities, courthouses, legislatures, sometimes threatening and even violent . . ."

(3) It is a pressing need with many Christians: Annie Lane's "Dear Annie" column on November 27, 2023 (Ibid., p. 8B) ran a letter by "Worried Wife in Mississippi" who stated: "'My brother . . . in a family of conservative Christians . . . is a homosexual liberal; he is still very loved nonetheless . . . (T)wo days before Christmas last year,'" my "'brother-in-law's parents . . . told us they were not coming'" to the family gathering "'because they couldn't be around someone with 'his views and lifestyle' . . . Any advice on how to handle the situation'" this year? Annie's reply in part reads: ". . . It is Christmas, for goodness' sake . . . (A)gree not to discuss religion or politics." (Ibid.)

(4) Mental health experts are aware of the need to address conflicts in many family gatherings: The Associated Press story, "Tips to improve Thanksgiving travel" (Ibid., November 21, 2023, p. 10B), told how "Dr. Laura Erickson-Schroth, chief medical officer at The Jed Foundation, a nonprofit focused on suicide prevention," said, "'There can be a lot of anticipatory anxiety about the holidays, thinking about what's happened in the previous years . . . (so) she recommended spending some travel time focused on mental health and preparing for what's to come.'"

(5) However, many mental health experts wonder how to address their patients' needs: "Forensic psychiatrist Dr. Joseph E. Podolski" of "Waterbury Hospital Behavioral Health" said, "'You're seeing a lot of patients who have been on everything,' . . . referring to a variety of medications. 'Sometimes people do well in an initial period, but sometimes the neurotransmitters can get used to the medication you are taking and your symptoms come back . . . When I treat patients for severe depression, you're always looking for what else can be done – electroconvulsive therapy, transcranial magnetic stimulation . . . A lot of people who have tried it are just feeling bad and they are tired of feeling bad.'" (Tracy O'Shaughnessy, "New drug for depression," Ibid., November 24, 2023, p. 1B) Meanwhile, the need persists as "21 million U. S. adults . . . have experienced a major depressive episode," and "(d)rugmaker Johnson & Johnson estimates 3 million to 5 million Americans suffer from treatment-resistant depression," Ibid.

Need: So we ask, "This Christmas, what is God's answer to the great need for effective counseling?!"

- I. In the prophet Isaiah's day, the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah experienced great anxiety:**
- A. Aramea's king Rezin had planned to join Israel's king Pekah to attack Jerusalem in Judah and replace Judah's king Ahaz with a puppet king, Isaiah 7:1; Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 1046.
 - B. News of this plan led Judah's people and their king Ahaz to experience great fear, Isaiah 7:2 ESV.
- II. As a result, Judah's people consulted mediums and spiritists for advice, Isaiah 8:19; Ibid., p. 1052.**
- III. However, Isaiah warned that this effort would only lead the people into deep depression, Isaiah 8:20-22:**
- A. Isaiah wrote that unless the people said, "To the law and to the testimony," the "law" being Scripture and the "testimony" (*te'uddah*, Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 620) "prophetic commands, testimony" (B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 730), they had no "dawn" (*shahar*, Ibid., p. 1007), no hope for any insight, Isa. 8:20.
 - B. In thus functioning apart from God's Word, the people would face increasing mental suffering, Isaiah 8:21-22:
 - 1. By turning to other sources than God's Word to relieve their fear, the people would be left "hard pressed" (*qashah*, Ibid., p. 904) in their hunger for helpful insight since all other sources would fail them, v. 21a.
 - 2. Desperate for insight, the people would then roam through the land seeking help, but not finding any, they would "put themselves in a rage" (intensive reflexive Hithpael of *qasap*, "be wroth," Ibid., p. 893), v. 21b.
 - 3. The people would next look up to their superiors, their king and God, but due to the peoples' own rejection of God's Word, they would gain no insight, and curse their king and God as if they were to blame, v. 21c.

4. Frantic for insight, the people would look even toward subordinates for insight, figuratively looking down to the earth, what would only produce “internally pressing distress” (*sarah*, Ibid., p. 865) and *hashekah*, “darkness in the figurative sense of a lack of understanding” (Ibid., p. 365), Isaiah 8:21d.
5. With nowhere else to turn, the people would face “gloom” (*mu’ap*, Ibid., p. 734) and “externally pressing distress” (*sukah*, H. A. W., T. W. O. T., 1980, vol. II, p. 760) as relationships with others soured, v. 22a.
6. Finally, they would “be thrust” (Pual ptc. *menuddah* from *nadah*, Ibid., B. D. B., p. 623) into “calamitous deep darkness” (*‘aphelah*, Ibid., H. A. W., vol. I, p. 64), driven into crushing mental decline, Isaiah 8:22b.

IV. In answer to this awful condition, Isaiah 9:6 presents Messiah as the Wonderful Counselor:

- A. The people of Judah had failed to adhere to the saying, “To the law and the testimony” (Isaiah 8:20), what we would say today as “Go to Scripture,” the “only absolute and trustworthy standard” of truth for every spiritual human need. (2 Timothy 3:15-17; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Isaiah 8:20)
- B. However, Messiah in grace would come and be their “Wonderful Counselor,” the word “wonderful” rendering the Hebrew adjective *pele’*, “wonder, extraordinary” (Ibid., B. D. B., p. 810) and “counselor” coming from the Qal active participle of *ya’as*, “advise, counsel,” here meaning “adviser, counselor.” (Ibid., p. 419)
- C. Revelation 19:11-13, 16 presents Christ as the Word of God personified, so for believers **today** to expose their minds to Scripture and to heed it applies Christ’s “Wonderful Counselor” ministry for mental health **today!**

Lesson: *The great need for effective counseling has been caused by man’s departure from the Wonderful Counselor’s advice in Scripture and the replacing of His advice with futile non-Biblical sources of advice. All people worldwide thus need to turn from such false sources to the Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ in His Word.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God’s gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we reject using all extra-biblical counsel and always immerse our minds and hearts in God’s Word to be blessed by the Wonderful Counselor’s ministry to us.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and provide additional guidance . . .)

(1) To demonstrate how adhering to Scripture solves problems in dealing with tensions at family holiday gatherings, we check Scripture’s input on the “Dear Annie” column matter mentioned in our introduction: (a) By way of review, the problem dealt with extended family members, all of them conservative Christians, meeting together when one of the members of the family was a homosexual in orientation and lifestyle. (b) Scripture addresses this problem (as follows): (i) If the homosexual **calls** himself a Christian, but he is a homosexual in orientation and lifestyle, since that orientation and lifestyle is defined as immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Romans 1:26-27, then God in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 orders other Christians not even to eat with that person. The other conservative Christian family members should not allow the homosexual in the family gathering. (ii) In addition, we cannot heed Annie Lane’s advice here, that “It is Christmas, for goodness’ sake,” so as to invite the sinful party and merely “agree not to discuss religion or politics”! We must obey Scripture at all times, including at Christmas, that we stay mentally healthy! (iii) However, **if** the homosexual relative does **not** profess to believe in Christ, since 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 does **not** forbid a believer from associating with such a person, one can **potentially** invite him to the family gathering so as to **evangelize** him **PROVIDING** that doing so does **not** harm the **consciences** of anyone at the family gathering, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. (For example, the presence of children or young teens in a family gathering often requires that family leaders not invite a practicing homosexual to the gathering due to the vulnerability of the young people to being wrongly influenced to view the homosexual’s sinful orientation and lifestyle as being acceptable before God.)

(2) On the other issues in our sermon introduction, (a) one should check with a medical doctor to see if there are physical issues that create the negative symptoms. (b) If mental problems persist regardless of good physical health, the problem is spiritual, and the afflicted must (i) get into right relationship with God by trusting in Christ for salvation noted in “(1)” of the Application section above. (ii) If one is a believer but he **still** has negative symptoms, (+) he must repent and obey Scripture that he is violating, applying 1 John 1:5-9 in confessing his sin to be put back into proper experiential relationship with the Lord. The believer’s violation of Scripture has led to his anxiety, frustration, anger, internally pressing distress, gloom, externally pressing distress in souring relationships with others or even crushing mental decline as presented in Isaiah 8:21-22 and described in III, B, 1-6 in the sermon notes above. Having confessed his sin and been restored to fellowship with God, the believer must then (+) rely on the Holy Spirit to focus daily on Scripture truth to **maintain** good mental health, Deuteronomy 17:18-20; Psalm 119:105, 107.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God’s gift of eternal life. May we partake of the Wonderful Counselor’s mental health ministry by applying His Word.