

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS MOVE TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING:

An Interview with Daniel Akin, Russell Moore, Paige Patterson, and Sam Williams
by Brad Hambrick

Southern Baptists are making an intentional and historic effort to return to a theory and practice of counseling that is distinctively biblical. This article interviews key leaders in Southern Baptist life concerning their views on what makes a counseling practice distinctively biblical, what role secular psychology ought to play in biblical counseling, and how counseling fits in the overall mission of the church.

Those interviewed are Dr. Daniel L. Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; Dr. Russell Moore, dean of the school of theology and vice president for academic administration at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Dr. Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Dr. Sam Williams, professor of Biblical Counseling at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and former licensed psychologist in Louisiana. These four represent a broad cross section of Southern Baptist life: weathered veterans of the fight for reform, young leaders who will lead well into the future, pastors, professors, counselors, those secularly trained, those with theological degrees, those who fought for the authority of Scripture from a young age, and those who came to the conviction of Scripture's sufficiency later in life.

The purpose of the interview is three-fold. First, the interview intends to garner testimonial evidence that Southern Baptists are embracing the Biblical Counseling model of pastoral care over the "integrationist" or therapeutic model. Second, it is designed to allow the leaders to articulate their definition of "Biblical Counseling" as it relates to key areas of counseling and church life. Third, it should create a format in which the practical implications of this shift to Biblical Counseling can be communicated to pastors and other church leaders.

The responses of each leader to the ten questions are unedited. Answers are attributed to the appropriate individual by means of his initials and arranged in alphabetical order by last name.

1. How do you define the difference between Biblical Counseling and other models of Christian Counseling (a.k.a. integration)?

DA: I believe that Biblical Counseling defines itself as counseling that is intentionally biblical and theological. In other words, the starting point for doing counseling is the Bible. In a real sense Biblical Counseling is simply a form of Christian discipleship on a one on one and intentional basis. While it does not neglect insight from the human sciences, it places much less weight and value on these particular disciplines. Biblical counseling affirms both in theory and practice the sufficiency of scripture for the Christian life in all of its aspects.

RM: I think the primary difference is a divergent understanding of general revelation. Integrationists would tend to see the thought of contemporary secular psychology issuing from God's general revelation in nature and in humanity. We would affirm a robust doctrine of general revelation and common grace, but we would see secular psychology as being much more an ideology, a world-view.

A Biblical Counseling model understands depravity and the fall to the degree that they are able to see the way in which fallen self-interest masquerades as objective science. That is especially true with reference to psychology when this "science" seeks to explain and even prescribe a cure for the fallen condition of humanity. We believe in the primacy of the Scriptures, holding to a Reformation understanding of *Sola Scriptura*. We are able to understand general revelation through the lens of special revelation, through

Scripture, and not the other way around. I believe that is the primary distinction between a Biblical Counseling model and integration.

PP: 1 Peter 3:10 cites Psalm 34:12-16 making the statement "He who would love life and see good days, let him restrain himself." The essential position of biblical counseling as opposed to all other models is that the overwhelming majority of men and women who wish to be in love with life and to see good days can achieve that by following biblical principles. Biblical counselors should be born-again believers who have so thoroughly saturated themselves with the biblical witness that they know how the Bible speaks to all of the different kinds of problems that arise within the human family. Their counsel accordingly is based on biblical mandate and not on other philosophical assumptions of a humanistic origin.

The reason I have said the vast majority is that I leave open for the moment that area of possible neurological malfunction as something that might happen to a very small percent of the total population. This has some potential in being treated by medication. It is also my persuasion, however, that at the present time it is completely over done, and in any event, lacking in hard scientific evidence. I have allowed it here, however, simply to be on the safe side, but at the same time stressing that the vast majority of human beings on the face of the globe can find an answer to all of life's problems and difficulties within the pages of the Bible.

SW: The difference is primarily in the central and active role assigned to the Scriptures, and in particular the Gospel, in both the conceptual model and the actual methods and practice of biblical counseling. God's Word provides more than a filter or screen for errors and more than a set of control beliefs in the Biblical Counseling model. The Bible and practical theology play a dominant constitutive role in the formulation of the model and a creative and redemptive role in the actual counsel.

2. Which approach to counseling, Biblical Counseling or integration, do you prefer? What aspects of doctrine and personal experience are most influential in your decision?

DA: My preference is clearly for the Biblical Counseling model. In fact it is not a preference, it is a conviction. I do believe in the sufficiency of scripture. I believe the Bible provides wisdom and instruction for all aspects of life. This is not to negate the truths that we learn both from natural revelation and that are the overflow of common grace. However, even these avenues of knowledge must be filtered through the purifying Word of God.

For me, doctrine is the starting point for doing counseling, not experience. Now of course that is a philosophical premise not a practical one. Practically speaking you must start where people are as you deal with them. However, you should come to the counseling room with a biblical framework already in place that informs your theology, psychology, and methodology of helping people in terms of soul care.

RM: We hold to a Biblical Counseling model that is very heavily influenced by David Powlison and the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF). As a matter of fact, our academic personnel committee and trustees adopted two documents by David Powlison (including "Affirmations and Denials: A Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling"), my manifesto on Biblical Counseling, and the Southern Baptist Resolution "On the Sufficiency of Scripture in a Therapeutic Culture" which lay out where we are moving as an institution.

PP: While I do not like the term, nouthetic, because it is obscure to most people and also because it is associated with a particular school of biblical sufficiency advocates who hold some other views that I think to be wrong, I nevertheless, continue to advocate Biblical Counseling as the only appropriate thing in which the church should be involved. The church does not have medical training and should not attempt to do that which God has not called her to do in any event. We are called to seek and to save the lost and then to

instruct them in how to have meaningful lives, which is something we can and should do on the basis of the Bible alone.

SW: I was trained as a clinical psychologist and practiced as a licensed psychologist for 10 years. Even though my doctoral training was secular, I tried to integrate my faith and my psychology in my first 8 years of practice. At that point, as a result of frustration with the effectiveness of this method and also because of the lack of conceptual coherence of integrated approaches, I abandoned that project and converted to a Biblical Counseling approach.

I would say that sin and grace are two key doctrinal concepts that I began to believe were crucial in the explanation of garden variety mental disorders and in their care and cure. In addition, I began to see that my role as a people helper was better defined as pastor/minister/disciple than as professional/clinical expert.

3. What do you believe the role of the Bible, the gospel, and the church ought to have in a distinctively biblical counseling model? What role does secular psychology have?

DA: I believe the Bible, the gospel and the church ought to be primary. The churches indeed are to be a hospital for mending and bringing to health the souls of men and women. The primary means whereby we accomplish this is through biblical truth. At the heart of biblical truth of course is the life transforming gospel of Jesus Christ with all of its ramifications. Secular psychology again is not something we should ignore or neglect. We must be aware of it, we must understand it, we must be able to critique it and show its deficiencies. At the same time, as advocates of common grace, we realize that there will be times when they do have insight into particular issues. However, we will approach the secular disciplines with skepticism and caution. This is what sets Biblical Counseling apart from the traditional integrationist model.

RM: I will deal with the second question first. Secular psychology can often be helpful in terms of raising questions. We seek for our students to be thoroughly familiar with secular psychology as well as with Biblical Counseling. The reason for this is because we believe that, just as Darwinism often asks questions and answers them wrongly, but you can discern a lot from just listening to the questions. What kind of questions are being asked by the culture? We need to be familiar with secular psychology missiologically, in terms of a Great Commission mindset. But we don't need to adopt the world-view of secular psychology.

The Bible is not just a casebook or a manual for counseling. The Bible is that, but the Bible also presents an over-arching world-view, a story line, that makes sense of the universe. In order for someone to be equipped as a counselor, they need not only to be equipped to know how to talk to people and pull out a few selected Proverbs and apply it to a situation. A person needs to be theologically grounded and understand the full biblical paradigm of Creation-Fall-Redemption, and to see how Creation-Fall-Redemption plays into the lives of individual believers and into the corporate life of the church. So we believe not only in a biblically sound counseling model, but a counseling model that is theologically rich. One of the weaknesses to the way in which Biblical Counseling has sometimes been practiced in churches is that it is very proof-text oriented, isolated from the larger picture of Scripture.

PP: The role of secular psychology has very little to contribute to the church. In laboratory situations, human behavior can be observed and conclusions of some kinds can be drawn that might be helpful to those working in the church. However, an overwhelming foundation for counseling for the church is discoverable in the triumvirate of regeneration, the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the revelation of the mind of God that is revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture.

SW: The Bible is our primary epistemological and conceptual source; although secondary sources may be utilized provided they are understood through and re-interpreted from the perspective of biblical presuppositions and biblical concepts and categories remain dominant.

The gospel is central because it is only there that we apprehend the depth of our sin and the height of God's love. When sin becomes a central explanatory concept for the problems and miseries of humanity, then the sin-bearing, sin-destroying Savior becomes the obvious solution, to the glory of God. As John Owen has said, "He that hath slight thoughts about sin never had great thoughts about God."

One of the functions of the church is to be God's community mental health center ó an authentic and genuine family in which humility about who we really are and courage in facing sin and suffering are central virtues. It is in this community of believers that the Gospel is preached and sung and taught and lived. It is in the Body of Christ that we taste and see that the Lord is good.

4. How does your school teach that Biblical Counseling should interact with the ministries of the church?

DA: We believe, and are moving more in the direction, of showing how Biblical Counseling is a form of discipleship. In other words Biblical Counseling should be about the business of discipling people to walk in the ways of God, live in the blessings of His grace, and pursue His holiness with disciplines that will promote that holiness.

RM: We do not think that counseling needs to be severed from the rest of the ministries of the church, which is what has happened in so many of our churches up until this point. Counseling needs to be an extension of the preaching ministry and of the Ephesians 4 up-building of the body. We believe counseling ought to be consistent with what is being said in the pulpit, what is being sung in the churches, and what is being practiced in the community life of the congregation. So ideally a counseling situation would be a face to face application of the theology that is being articulated within the life of the congregation. We believe that Biblical Counselors ought to be pastors. Whether or not these individuals are senior pastors of the congregation, we believe that they ought to have pastoral responsibility within the life of the church.

PP: Our school teaches that every minister of the gospel, in whatever area of the ministry he works, will have to be a "biblical counselor." This, it seems to me, is the unavoidable part of personal interface in ministry with people who need guidance, including hurting people. However, I also believe that pastors ought to give themselves primarily to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, and hence, churches are certainly justified in adding to their staffs as early as possible people who will have as a major part of their assignment Biblical Counseling.

SW: We believe that counseling is a ministry of the Word of God, and as such it is given to the church as one component of its evangelism and discipleship responsibilities. Counseling is one of the many ministries of the church that enables people to grow up and into Christ. Ideally, it is integrated with the other forms of ministry.

5. What questions would you ask a counselor you were considering referring to in order to assess whether their practice was distinctively biblical? What "red flags" are you screening for as you ask these questions?

DA: That is a very good question. First of all, I am going to ask them about their own commitment to the Bible's authority and sufficiency. I am going to inquire as to what they believe the role of psycho-therapy and medications might play in the counseling experience. I am going to inquire concerning their theological orientation and the Christ centeredness of that theology. For me Jesus Christ is the starting point of my theology. Indeed He is the hub out of which all other spokes of theology naturally derives. I am looking for someone who is thoroughly Christo-centric in their approach to thinking, counseling and life.

Red flags that would jump out at me would be a premature advocacy of medication, as well as the conviction that helping people almost always requires long term psychotherapy. Further, I am skeptical of those who believe that professionals always do the best counseling. I am a major advocate of a Titus 2 model of church life, which would also include counseling. I know of few better methods than to put a younger struggling believer under the watch care of a more mature godly believer. Such mentoring is thoroughly biblical, and has much greater potential for soul care of individuals who are working through sin patterns and issues in their life.

RM: The first thing I would ask is a series of case studies. I would ask, "How would you deal with an individual who has an eating disorder? How would you deal with an individual who is grappling with anger? How would you deal with an individual who is dealing with same-sex attraction?" The red flags I would be looking for are, number one, a lack of directness. So someone who is not directly engaging the issues is someone I would not want counseling members of my congregation. Number two, I would look for the jargon of secular psychology. Number three, I would look for an end-run around the cross and the empty tomb; trying to treat issues in a medical sense without first addressing issues of regeneration and sanctification. That would be a huge red flag for me.

PP: If I understand this question correctly, I would answer it by saying that any potential counselors teaching for us or going to the churches would be examined for their faithfulness to the concepts enunciated above, namely that conversion is the first step to the healing of most human problems, then learning to be obedient to the Spirit of God, who lives within them, and to master and obey the biblical text. These would be paramount in my mind. If a potential counselor keeps using code words from secular counseling enterprise or thinking in those paradigms rather than in biblical paradigms and particularly invoking secular anthropology rather than biblical anthropology, I would not wish to proceed any further.

SW: I'd ask them what books and authors they found particularly helpful in their counsel. I'd ask them what they thought about theology and whether or not they thought it had any relevance to everyday life or counseling. I'd ask them what makes their "Christian" counseling Christian.

6. Do you see any potential dangers with a church referring to integrationist counselors or using discipleship materials in their church that are from an integrationist perspective?

DA: Yes, I do see dangers, though that would not rule out their use in every instance. Each of those persons and their materials should be carefully weighed. For example I personally have found a number of valuable things in the teachings of Willard Harley and Gary Chapman, John Trent and Gary Smalley, and of course James Dobson. All of these men would fall in to the category of integrationists. What is lacking in most of their teachings is a biblical orientation. However, many times they make practical suggestions and provide counsel that is thoroughly biblical; it is simply the case that they did not see the biblical moorings of what they were teaching.

RM: Absolutely, because I think that it undercuts what a biblical church is trying to do in terms of conforming members to the image of Christ. Integrationist materials, which are widespread, not only within the church but also radio and television programs, actually harden and callous hearts to conviction of sin. As long as I am able to see myself as a victim, or a diseased person who needs healing, rather than as someone who needs to take the sword of the Spirit and apply it to the issues of my life, I am less vulnerable in a good sense to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. So if I were a pastor concerned about this I would make sure that my people had curricula that addressed not only the big questions, but also the small individual questions as well.

PP: Yes, I see monumental problems in churches referring people to integrationist counselors and using discipleship materials in their churches that are taken from an integrationist perspective. Such perspectives

often claim to be informed by the Bible, but, in fact, they seldom give much information of a biblical nature and tend to fall far more in the self help category than in biblical understanding. The church has been one of the major contributors actually to the success of integrationist approaches even while the integrationist approaches themselves have, as frequently as not, damaged the witnesses of the churches.

SW: Yes, such materials would be against the grain of the teaching from the pulpit and the private counsel proffered by those that counsel. Mixed messages could result in confusion and even worse may shortchange those that need help.

However, I would not say that to do so would be heretical or that God could not use integrated counselors or materials for His glory. If God could speak thru Balaam's donkey and through this writer, then he can and certainly typically does work through flawed instruments.

7. What authors and organizations do you believe are doing the best work in presenting a biblical model of counseling?

DA: I believe the two schools that stand out at this particular time are Westminster Seminary and Southeastern Seminary. I have been very impressed with the works of [David] Powlison and [Paul and Tedd] Tripp at Westminster. I am also quite encouraged at what I discovered in the counseling program at Southeastern. Southern Seminary is now moving rapidly in this direction. I still believe we have a long ways to go, but I am very much encouraged about the direction and orientation of these programs.

RM: Well there are not many. I think the pre-eminent organization is CCEF and David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Ed Welch. I think the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* is an invaluable resource.

PP: Presently, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and, increasingly, Southwestern are doing the best work I know about in Biblical Counseling. I also believe that John MacArthur's school, Master's College and Seminary, is doing an outstanding job, as well as Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

SW: The Christian Counseling & Education Foundation's (CCEF) triumvirate of David Powlison, Paul Tripp, and Ed Welch are at the top of the ladder in the world of Biblical Counseling. Their gentle hearts and capacious minds are without equal in the domain of Christian Counseling.

8. Why do you think secular psychology has become such an attractive alternative for many church leaders and members? Why are Southern Baptists embracing Biblical Counseling at this time in their history?

DA: The answer to the first question is simply this: we live in a culture that is awash in the therapeutic, and tragically the church is more influenced by the culture than it is in transforming it. However, Southern Baptists have always been a people of the book and so again, and again, and again, the Word of God has sometimes had to drag us back to our roots.

I think that is perhaps what is happening now in the Biblical Counseling movement. It may also be the case, that we have seen that the integrationist models as a whole are struggling to deliver what they hope to accomplish. This is not surprising with the newness of the whole Christian Counseling movement. It is, however, an indication that we must always be thoroughly biblical in all that we do.

RM: Secular psychology is attractive for pastors and church leaders because it enables laziness. A pastor who wants to hide from people in his office and not equip members of his congregation to counsel the flock can simply refer someone to a "professional" outside the walls of the church, and he is simply now rid of these people. Also secular psychology is everywhere in the culture; we live in a therapeutic culture. Church

members are listening to our preaching for a few hours each week, but many of them are watching Oprah for the rest of the week and they are reading books that encourage this kind of mindset. It's a Romans 1 situation. We want to evade the conviction of sin and to justify, suppressing the truth of unrighteousness, our own sin. Secular psychology does that very well.

Psychiatric and psychological establishments are turning against evangelical Christianity in such explicit ways. So for instance, on issues like homosexuality, the divergent world-views are just so clear that Southern Baptists are realizing that we cannot function in the atmosphere of secular psychology any more.

PP: Secular psychology has mastered the ability to sound official, professional, and even therapeutic. This has caused many people to be deceived by it, and there have been broad scaled failures to look concretely at the general failure of secular psychology. A recent book that chronicles this failure is *The Road to Malpsychia: Humanistic Psychology and Our Discontents* by Joyce Milton, a book which focuses clearly on the origins of all of this.

Some Southern Baptists are thankfully seeing through this now and coming to understand that the only thing churches are going to be able to do successfully is what Christ commissioned us to do, and that is to bring the lost to Christ and teach them how to live successful and meaningful lives by following the teachings of Jesus in the Bible. That is what we are trained to do, and that is what we ought to do.

SW: The therapeutic has triumphed in our radically autonomous, hyper-individualized culture while the moral and communal elements of life have been marginalized. Even in the church, our understanding of personal problems has been dominated in secular therapeutic terms rather than moral and spiritual terms. Sin and salvation seem only to apply to our private little souls and little else.

Theology has been marginalized as an irrelevant and academic thing that has no practical effect on how life is understood and lived. The understanding of the ministry of the Word of God has been constricted, so that it is equated with public preaching and teaching and the personal, one on one ministry has been forsaken.

Counseling is messy work. Many pastors and churches would just as soon not get their hands sullied. It is so much easier to refer the dirty work to Dr. So and So. Secular psychology has successfully packaged and marketed its product to the medical establishment, health insurers, and employers.

9. How would you envision an ideal relationship between local churches and a parachurch ministry devoted to a biblical model of counseling?

DA: Ideally they would mutually support one another. A parachurch group would perhaps provide top level counseling, but even more, they would be in the process of training other persons to do biblical discipleship, which is in my judgment Biblical Counseling. Again, even many professionals are now recognizing that lay persons are often as effective, if not more effective, than so called professionals. To train lay persons in skills of marital and family counseling, as well as biblical guidance in terms of developing discipleship skills to my way of thinking is a perfect way for these two entities to partnership with each other.

RM: I think parachurch ministry is important, but it has to truly be *para*-church not *extra*-church. Say there is a group of churches that are banding together supporting a counseling center, these counselors must be held accountable to the local congregations and must be involved in the lives of these local congregations. So that what the counselors are doing is coming from the overflow of the preaching, discipleship, and church discipline of these local congregations.

I would want to know where the counselors were members of a church and how they function in the life of that congregation. Also, I would want to know how is this counseling center asking to be held accountable to these congregations. I would want to be meeting with the leadership of the counseling center on a regular

basis to know that what is happening in the counseling center is consistent with what we are doing in the life of our congregation.

PP: Local churches can have a good relationship with a parachurch ministry devoted to a biblical model of counseling. However, I believe that the major care of the body of Christ needs to be done by the body of Christ. That seems to be the emphasis of Paul in 1 Corinthians, so, while I am thankful for parachurch movements whether in Biblical Counseling, evangelism, or discipleship movements such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Navigators, etcí , they only exist because of the failure of the local church. I believe that local churches ought to assume these responsibilities and minister to their own.

SW: First, the parachurch ministry would recognize its barely legitimate status, and consider its role as provisional and temporary. Second, the parachurch should work toward its own extinction by training pastors and lay leaders, inviting them to counseling sessions, deferring to pastoral authority when warranted, and reminding the church of the crucial importance of Christian community in life change. Ultimately and ideally, counseling is a ministry of the church and should be subsumed under its authority and function as the intensive care unit within its community.

10. What final words of advice would you give to pastors as they consider matters of counseling?

DA: I would encourage pastors to recognize their own limitations. Pastors should realize and be honest in what they know and do not know, what they can do and cannot do. In my own life, for example, I recognize that I do a form of Biblical Counseling on a popular level through my family and marriage seminars. I am exegeting texts, drawing practical applications from those texts, and presenting those on a popular level. I realize that works well with a segment of our churches. However, some persons because of sin, experience, and deep hurt need more than I can give them in that format. Therefore, I do not hesitate to recommend them to persons who on a one on one basis are more trained and equipped to deal with them, and to bring them from where they are to the place of godliness and holiness that I know is God's desire and plan for their life.

RM: The primary word of advice would be that counseling is your job. That does not mean that every pastor must counsel every member of the congregation, but it means the counseling ministry of the congregation is a pastoral responsibility in shepherding the flock. So a pastor who out-sources counseling is out-sourcing his pastoral responsibility and he will be held accountable for that at judgment. That means thinking through issues of counseling and implementing counseling within the congregation is of utmost importance.

PP: My strong advice to any young pastor is to learn everything he can from every single source. I require my theology students to read Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism* because I want them to know the background to the many heresies spawned by that. But, while we ought to know all of that, we ought to know the Bible better, and we ought, above all else, to be teachers of the Bible. This is both a pulpit ministry and an individual one-on-one counseling ministry of teaching the Bible and its precepts to people in order to enable them to navigate life's rough waters. That is our assignment. That is what we must do.

SW: Spend time with your people, listen and learn about their lives. Teach your people to decipher life, including personal and relational problems, in biblical terms. Don't just preach the Word, counsel the Word. Finally, continually remain aware of the difference between talking and communicating, monologue and dialogue, the bully pulpit and the pastoral pulpit.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to thank Dr.ø Akin, Moore, Patterson, and Williams, not only for their time in doing this interview, but also for their commitment to ensuring that Southern Baptists express their commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture, the necessity of the Gospel, and the centrality of the church for counseling.

This interview evidences that, while there may be differences in how the leadership of Southern Baptist nuance their understanding of Biblical Counseling, there is unity on their commitment to the Biblical Counseling movement as a needed correction to the integrationist models. Undoubtedly, the years and decades ahead will be filled with efforts to unpack the core principles contained in this interview.

It is desired that the reader will take at least four things from this interview. First, Southern Baptists, beginning in our seminaries, are transitioning to a Biblical Counseling model of pastoral care. This is a historic and significant shift.

Second, the church need not compromise its theology or ethics in order to address the complex problems in living. Rather than being awkward tangents to counseling, theology and ethics are the core of a biblical philosophy of life that directs people to enjoy life as God intended. Biblical Counseling aspires to be a key component of the churchø efforts to spark revival in our day, by equipping people to understand their lives in biblical terms so that they will grasp the relevance of the gospel for all of life.

Third, churches need to be discerning and intentional in screening when and to whom they hire and/or refer their members for counseling services. Counseling is a Great Commission activity. It is a part of øteaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded (cf. Matt 28:20a).ö The magnitude of this task requires care in selecting those to whom this shepherding role is delegated to by local churches and pastors.

Finally, God is a gloriously wise, loving Father who has instructed His people in how to live through His Word. We ought to praise Him for this loving-kindness and express our gratitude by using His Word for all He intended it to accomplish. Reflection upon the power and utility of Scripture ought to be an encouraging time that results in the settling of our souls and the fervent engagement of our minds in study.