

ISSUES

A Biblical Perspective On Contemporary Topics



COUNSELING, THE BIBLE, & PSYCHOLOGY

**WHEN THE CHRISTIAN NEEDS
ADVICE, WHERE DO WE GO?**

Counseling, The Christian, And The Bible

One of the fastest growing areas of ministry in the modern Church is in the realm of *counseling*. Like never before, people are seeking individual help in dealing with areas of their lives they are discontent with. It may be that they are having trouble in their marriage, their job, or with a deep personal struggle. Whatever the particular issue, they are flocking to pastors, counselors and therapists in record numbers.

In light of this explosion in counseling, it is only right to ask what the purpose and goal of counseling are. What is the role of counseling in the Church? Who is qualified to counsel, and who should seek it?

When we turn to the dictionary we discover that *counsel* means to give consultation, to provide advice.¹ When a person seeks out counseling, they usually do so because they are faced with a problem they do not know how to handle or a decision in which they find themselves unsure of what to do. They then go to someone who possesses more knowledge or is qualified to give them advice. It is good common sense to seek out help from others at a time like this. But the person who is seeking advice should always be careful about who they are asking advice from. You wouldn't go to an auto mechanic if you were having a tooth ache, just as you wouldn't go to a dentist if your car was stalling.

The problem with much modern counseling is that many Christians are turning to counselors who either lack wisdom or who offer counsel contrary to God. Even some of what is called “*Christian*” counseling is nothing more than secular psychotherapy wrapped in Christian terminology.

It may be helpful at this point to define some terms.

- *Psychology* literally means “the study of the soul” but in its contemporary usage refers to the study and categorizing of human thought and behavior. Psychology, in its strict and pure sense, is a legitimate realm of science as it seeks to observe and record statistical information regarding human beings.
- *Psychotherapy* is the application of psychological theories regarding human thinking and behavior with the aim of bringing resolution to individual or group psychological distress. We might say that psychotherapy is the application of

psychology to the real world.

- *Biblical counseling* is the application of the Word and wisdom of God to the problems of human life. Whereas, psychotherapy points to the wisdom of man, Biblical counseling directs a person in need to the Bible and points him or her to the power of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God.

There is a heated debate raging in the Christian community today between what those who would call themselves *Biblical* counselors and others calling themselves *Christian* counselors. While



this might seem like a tempest in a teapot and just one more minor difference that doesn't amount to more than the dust on a table top, the distinction really is an important one. Those who believe in *Biblical* counseling seek to apply the truth of the Scriptures to the problems and issues of those who are troubled. *Christian* counseling is a much broader term. It is used to cover everything from the theories of classical and modern psychology to the Bible. For that reason, a new term has been suggested as a synonym for Christian counseling as opposed to Biblical counseling; *Integrationism*. An *Integrationist* counselor is one who integrates psychotherapy and scripture into a mish-

mash.

The real difference between these two schools of thought lies in the conviction over the *sufficiency of the Bible* to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of men and women. Biblical counseling believes God's Word is *wholly* sufficient, while Christian counseling believes that the Bible needs to be supplemented with the findings of modern psychology.

Other authors have covered this debate in great detail. If you would like to do further reading on this subject, please see the *Recommended Reading* list at the end of this pamphlet.

Studying Psychology

With this understanding, let it be said that to the degree psychology is kept to its proper framework, it can be a legitimate field of inquiry and study. Like any science or art, there is a need for believers to enter this

field and apply biblical principles to it. It is only as committed, biblically-informed Christians apply the disciplines of truth to psychology that it's potential as a science can be fulfilled. The danger is that this field has been so co-opted by the secular branch of psychology it is generally hostile to the Faith. The Christian who seeks to enter this field needs to be forewarned of the incredible pressure he or she will be under to *conform* rather than see the discipline *transformed*.

The Purpose of Counseling

The purpose of counseling is to bring help to a person who is in need. Biblical counseling recognizes that until the *First Need* of a person's life is taken care of, every other need palls in comparison. The *First Need* of every man, woman, and child is salvation through faith in Christ. If the Big SIN question is not addressed first, then all the little sin questions will never be answered. The good counselor realizes that God often uses difficulties to bring the lost to Himself. When a person comes for counseling, the first question to ask is about their faith in Christ. If they are not saved, that is the first step. If they are, then the counselor moves on to ask more specific questions about their concerns.



Many troubles in the Christian life arise as a result of the Holy Spirit calling us to a deeper and more mature walk with God. Rather than obeying Him in simple trust, we resist. It is this resistance that brings about trouble. There may be friction in the home or on the job. There may be tension in relationships with others at church. Whatever the case, God is calling us to a step of obedience. If action needs to be taken, then the counselor will point the person in that direction. If an error in thinking or perception has led to the trouble, then the counselor seeks to clarify things and help the troubled person come to see clearly what is true.

The critical issue is this: What advice is the counselor giving? What is his or her standard of authority in bringing help? What is it that constitutes a real and lasting remedy?

Biblical counselors use the Word of God as their manual. They see in it the definitive text for dealing with issues of the soul. The Biblical

counselor believes this because that is precisely what the Bible says about itself. Consider the following passages and what they say about the sufficiency of scripture..

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for-doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.²

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.³

Jesus answered [the devil], saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God . . .'⁴

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success,⁵

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper,⁶

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.⁷

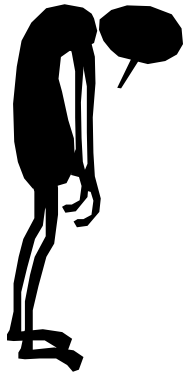
The issue is simple: Counsel is *advice*. The reason people seek counseling is because they are faced with something they find themselves poorly equipped to deal with. They seek help from someone they believe has what they don't. Another way of looking at it is that a person goes to a counselor they deem is an *authority* in the area they need help in. The question is; what authority is the counselor using to provide advice, the authority of the God's Word, or the authority of this world's so-called "experts?" This is where much counseling fails.

Though often wrapped in Christian terms, much of the counsel is actually based on the theories of secular psychologists. That's why you hear so many new and decidedly unbiblical terms from the counseling community. One day it's all about *self-esteem* and *co-dependency*, the next it's *victimization* and *suppressed memories*; later it'll be something else. A close comparison of the treatments and therapies offered in *secular* psychological clinics to the practices of a clinic targeted at Christians will reveal that they are remarkably *similar*.

Is All Truth God's Truth?

One of the favorite retorts of integrationists to the position of Biblical counseling is that all truth is God's truth. Taken at face value, this is correct. God **IS** truth, so if something is true, then it is of Him and is the realm of the Child of God. But what integrationists do is reason thus:

- 1) All truth is God's truth
- 2) There is much truth that is not found in the Bible (i.e. Paris is in France)
- 3) Therefore, when we find something true that is not in Scripture, it can be used as legitimately as the Scriptures.
- 4) Psychology has discovered truths about human behavior and thinking. Therefore, we can apply this in counseling.



If we were to strictly follow this syllogism, this would be correct. The problem is that psychology, because of the nature of its field of inquiry has discovered precious few "truths." It has uncovered some interesting "facts" but facts are not to be confused with Truth. Psychology, by its very nature, is an inexact science. This is why there are over 300 registered psychotherapeutic theories and schools of thought in use in the United States and Europe. If psychology were a more exact and precise study and dealt more in the realm of truth, then there would be a greater consensus among psychologists.

Psychology is limited as a science for the simple reason that its chief focus is in the human *soul*, which is *immaterial*. Science is limited to observation of the material universe. The soul, as a non-physical entity, makes for a highly subjective field of inquiry. If you have a toothache, you see a dentist. If you have a broken wrist, you go to a medical doctor. But where do you go if you have the ache of a broken heart?

Why not take this to the fashioner of the human soul; to the One who breathed into us the breath of life and we became human beings – God.

Whose counsel ought we listen to when it comes to the immaterial issues of life – Man or our Creator?

History and Counseling

For centuries the Church dealt with emotional problems within the Body of Christ through the application of God's Word and prayer. If Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles thought the theories and therapies being used today were so important, why didn't they include them in the Bible. It seems clear they believed all we needed could be found in the pages of scripture and in the context of a loving committed fellowship of like-minded believers. What we need is truth, not therapy. What Christ has offered is redemption from sin, not re-adjustment to it. The Holy Spirit is our Counselor sent to comfort the troubled heart.⁸

Counseling At Calvary Chapel

The ministry of Calvary Chapel is centered on the careful verse-by-verse teaching of the Bible. As we work our way through the scriptures in this way, the foundation of truth is being laid in people's lives so that when problems arise, they discover they often already have the answer. But there will always be situations in which individual counsel is needed. Thus, the teaching ministry of Calvary is not limited to the weekly pulpit. We also teach one on one and face to face. Because the word "counseling" has taken on such a strong connotation of *professional* psychology, we prefer to refer to counseling as, "sharing the Word and prayer." When we meet with people in a counseling setting, we talk with them about their concerns and then search the scriptures to see what they say. Together we pray and ask God to impart His grace and courage to make whatever changes are necessary to see the problem dealt with. Our counseling has the aim of directing people to God, not the wisdom of man.⁹

Galatians 6:2 tells us that we are to bear *one another's* burdens. Rather than establishing an elite group of counselors to whom the majority of counseling is referred, we each ought to endeavor to minister to the needs around us. Studies done by the secular psychological community have discovered that what makes for the successful resolution of a person's distress is *not* the application of some specific psychological theory, but the caring and attentive presence of someone to listen and

offer advice. That all genuine Christians can provide this, coupled with advice informed by the Word of God is a one-two punch that ought to knock out virtually every problem of the soul. Certainly there will be times when the added insights and experience of a pastor or elder will be needed but the majority of counseling can be and ought to be handled within the normal context of Christian fellowship.



From the Apostle Paul's instructions to Titus we believe that it is appropriate for men to counsel men and women to counsel women. He says...

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself *to be a* pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility?¹⁰

There is no charge for the counseling we do at Calvary. It is part of the ministry of the Church. This is another area in which we strongly disagree with much of Christian psychology. They have made it a business and charge people to help them with what they claim is a "ministry." Jesus said to His followers who had received His grace, "Freely you have received, freely give."¹¹

If you have a need that requires some one on one teaching and prayer, don't hesitate to call the Church Office.

Recommended Reading

The Sufficiency of Christ, John MacArthur, Jr.

Christian Psychology's War On God's Word, Jim Owen

Competent to Counsel, Jay Adams

Psychoheresy, Martin and Deidre Bobgran

How to Counsel from Scripture, Martin and Deidre Bobgran

End Notes

¹ New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary, 1987 p.222

² 2 Timothy 3:16-17

³ 2 Peter 1:2-4

⁴ Luke 4:4

⁵ Joshua 1:8

⁶ Psalm 1:1-3

⁷ Psalm 119:105

⁸ Matthew 14:1-4,15-18

⁹ 1 Cor 1:18-30, 2:4-6, 3:18-21

¹⁰ Titus 2:1-7

¹¹ Matthew 10:8