

# Why Biblical Counseling?

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## 1. What is the Primary Issue in Counseling?

The central issue in counseling is WORSHIP. Is worship a lifestyle or merely a once-a-week activity? Who or what is controlling the counselee's life (his emotions, thoughts, and activities)? Do his "wants" please God? Is he observing the two great commandments to love God with his whole heart, soul and mind, and his neighbor as himself? Who or what is the counselee worshipping?

It is not enough just to deal with a person's ability to function. It is possible to help a person function better, but continue in his rebellion against God. To do so is to encourage a hardness of heart in which he says: "I don't need God." Such an approach only gets the person deeper into his sinful patterns.

For example, if someone is attempting to swim across the English Channel and a lifeguard discovers that he has a poor stroke and is going in the wrong direction, what should he do? Suppose he rows his boat up next to the swimmer and says, "I hope you don't mind my saying so, but you have a lousy stroke. Let me teach you how to function better in the water." So he hops in and thirty minutes later the swimmer has a beautiful stroke and the lifeguard says, "Take care and good luck on your journey." Has the lifeguard helped the swimmer?

No. He has merely taught the swimmer to get farther from safety. He should have said, "Mister, you not only have a sad stroke, but you are headed in the wrong direction. If you don't turn around you won't reach your destination."

The ultimate issue of life is not how I can function best in an effort to reach goals apart from God and His will. That was the very attitude that got Adam and Eve in trouble in the Garden. Man's purpose is to honor the Lord as God and give thanks (Rom. 1 :21). Anything short of that brings God's ultimate judgment.

Any system of counseling that fails to see the worship of God as its basic goal is deficient in its understanding and unworthy of Christ's name. It will fail to teach the counselee a proper view of life and the world in which we live. Every thought is to be taken captive (2 Cor. 10:5), even the thought patterns associated with sexual perversion, stealing, treatment of spouses, fears, and eating disorders. While biblical counselors are practical, they are not pragmatists. Life is more than the sum total of our daily functions.

The goal of counseling must be to help the person grow "in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). This wisdom begins with a proper fear of God (Proverbs 9:10). The foolishness evident in much secular counseling today is the result of idolatrous worship. Romans 1:18-32 describes the degeneration of knowledge and wisdom as man turned from the right worship of God to worship of the creation. The result was that people became "futile in their speculation ... professing to be wise they became fools" (1:21,22). This change of focus in worship led to changes in sexual behavior that most today would regard as unrelated to worship.

The shift in worship that resulted in homosexual behavior demonstrates the necessity to counsel from a biblical model. To counsel a homosexual apart from the question of worship is to completely miss the heart of the issue - to miss the heart of the person.

Our approach at the Biblical Counseling Center recognizes that the nature of God and His Truth is foundational in all of counseling. We see the context of counseling as worship. A person's motives and attitudes (issues of worship) are equally as important as his behavior (Prov. 16:2, Heb. 4:121. "For as he thinks within himself, so he is ...." (Prov. 23:7). "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (I Prov. 4:23).

## **2. Is the Bible Intended for Counseling?**

Yes. The Bible was written in part to address man's heart issues that grew out of his fall into sin. Many today refer to these as mental health problems. The Bible was written to define life for man. This includes the nature of his problems, his purpose in life, and the solutions whereby he could know peace, fulfillment, and joy. Through Scripture man learns of his ultimate need -- fellowship/relationship with God. He also learns that this need can only be met through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Every counseling issue can only be adequately and properly addressed from this foundation.

Some have argued that the Bible is no more a counseling textbook than a chemistry or math textbook. This is not true, consider the Bible's own testimony. "All Scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Peter said, " ... His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us ...." (2 Peter 1:3). Scripture was given for the expressed purpose of addressing man's spiritual (his non-organic) problems. It was not given to teach chemistry or math.

## **3. Does the Bible Address the Psychological Problems We Face Today?**

Yes. The confusion arises from the fact that Christians have allowed the secular community to define the problems. For example, what is a "dysfunctional family?" The term does not appear anywhere in Scripture. It is necessary to go beyond the descriptive term and look at the characteristics of the family.

"Dysfunctional" describes a family in which the roles of husband and wife are confused, communication has broken down, anger and unresolved bitterness abound, and shouting and verbal abuse are common. This description may also involve sexual or physical abuse as well. The Scripture does address all of these issues.

Another example is bulimia. Again, this is a descriptive, not an explanatory name. It is not found in the Bible, but Scripture does talk about being judgmental, self-centered, deceitful, legalistic, vain, and full of self-love, all characteristics of a bulimic person.

The problem leading to confusion is twofold. First, the church has been wooed by the descriptive abilities of the secular psychological community, an ability at which they excel. Many Christians come away saying, "he really understands me." It is easy to confuse descriptive ability with prescriptive ability. The ability, for example, to clearly describe an automobile does not make a person a good mechanic.

Secondly, the understanding of sin has been depreciated to the point that any problem beyond a mild response of anger or impatience is thought to have something other than a spiritual cause. Sin can and does lead to bizarre behavior. The total depravity of man is nearly limitless in its expression. A five-year-old boy may throw a glass. At fifteen he may throw a punch. At twenty-five, he might shoot everyone in a family.

Each may be a sinful response to the girl next door scorning him. Only Christ as revealed in Scripture is able to address the "deep" issues at their root - a sinful heart. Usually when people refer to "deep" issues they are speaking of issues of the "unconscious" as defined by Freud. Freud's "unconscious" was his attempt to address the question of motivation by redefining in secular terms the biblical concept of the heart. The confusion and fruits of psychotherapy are testimony enough of his failure.

#### **4. Can Secular Psychology be Integrated with Scripture?**

Can the Christian community borrow from the best of the secularists and integrate it with Scriptural truth? Is there a large central pool of information, methods, and facts that are neutral?

Can those on the left and those on the right both drink from a common spring? Can two systems of thought, both claiming to address the same issues in contradictory ways still be compatible?

No, they can not. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). Just as all of life is spiritual, all understanding is affected by man's relationship to God. All perceived wisdom and knowledge is the result of a person's evaluation and interpretation of what he observes. Interpretation is more than a biological function of the brain. It is the work of the mind. God's Word says "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The "mind" and heart in Scripture are usually equivalent in function. "The fool says in his heart, there is no God" (Psa. 14:1). The one who may dwell on God's holy hill is the one who "speaks truth in his heart" (Psa. 15:2). "... the heart of fools proclaims folly" (Prov. 12:23). "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt. 12:34). God judges the "thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The father of a virgin must do what he "has decided ... in his own heart" (1 Cor. 7:37).

Our speech and thinking process, which we associate as a function of the mind, is associated with the heart in Scripture. "A striking feature of the New Testament is the essential closeness of *kardia* to the concept *nous* (mind). *Nous* can also have the meaning of person, a man's ego. Heart and mind (*noemata*) can be used in parallel (2 Cor. 3: 14) or synonymously (Phil. 4:7).... Thus it is the person, the thinking, feeling, willing ego of man, with particular regard to his responsibility to God, that the New Testament denotes by the use of *kardia* ... " (The New International Dictionary of New Testament, 2:182).

How can two learned scientists look at the same information and reach opposite conclusions about the existence of God and the origins of the universe? Because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). One scientist knows God and fears Him. The other doesn't. It is a heart issue. A person's beliefs cannot be separated from his conclusions, nor his methods separated from his convictions.

How do you discipline your children? Why do you do what you do? Why do you think some methods are right and others are wrong? Why do you believe in fidelity in marriage while others do not? Why do you believe the husband should be the head of the home yet many others are appalled at the thought? It is because of what you believe.

There is no neutrality. Jesus' statement, "He that is not with me is against me" (Man. 12:30), reflects the absence of neutrality. Paul carries this thought over into the area of knowledge when he says, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are {to be} taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:4-5).

When a secular psychologist moves beyond observation to explanation he has entered spiritual territory for which he has no map. In fact he denies God, the only One who is able to give us a proper understanding. It is like trying to explain the behavior of a boat while denying the existence of the very water in which it floats.

*You cannot take two systems with warring definitions of life, truth, and reality and integrate them into one coherent system.*

Definitions of problems, methods used, and goals set are all the product of a person's beliefs. Paul wisely asked, "... what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness" (2 Cor. 6:14)?

## **5. Can You Separate a Counselor's Beliefs From His Methods?**

People act on the basis of their beliefs (Prov. 4:23). The great thinkers down through the ages as well as today understand this principle and strive for consistency between belief and practice. Any belief system (even one that is wrong overall) gains recognizable strength from internal consistency. The greater the number of internal inconsistencies a system has, the weaker it is. If a building that has structural integrity is constructed on sand, it may remain standing for a long time, although it will shift and ultimately crack.

Secularists understand the relationship between a person's beliefs and his methods. For example, Skinner does not borrow his methods from the Christian community. It is this relationship of beliefs to methods that fuels conflict, even among secularists like the Rogerians and Freudians. Rogers described Freud's view of human nature as "primarily made up of instincts which would, if permitted expression, result in incest, murder, and other crimes." He goes on to say, "it seems to me that I have been very slow to recognize the falseness of this popular and professional concept" (*On Becoming A Person*, p.91). Rogers attacked Freud at the level of his beliefs.

One point of conflict between Freud and Rogers is that Freud believed the counselee needed an expert who could sort his life out for him. Rogers was appalled by such an

approach. He said, "There is also a complete freedom from any type of moral or diagnostic evaluation, since all such evaluations are, I believe, always threatening" (ibid., p.34). "The meaning and value of his experience is in the last analysis something which is up to him, and no amount of external judgment can alter this" (ibid., p.55). Their different beliefs led them to opposing methods.

Proverbs 23:7 says "For as a man thinks within himself, so he is." A man's beliefs will ultimately direct his behavior, and his methods. For example, one method used by those who follow Freud in dealing with anger is to allow the counselee to vent his anger on a pillow or a punching bag. They believe man has an unconscious that is like a tank that needs to be emptied. Drain the tank of its anger and the problem will be solved.

Biblical counselors know that anger comes from the heart of man. It is not like a tank to be drained, instead it is like an artesian well that needs to be properly directed (Prov. 16:32). Therefore the methods differ radically.

## **6. How Do the Secularists View Christianity?**

Abraham Maslow, father of the self-esteem movement said, "Organized Religion, the churches, finally may become the major enemies of the religious experience and the religious experiencer. This is the main thesis of this book" (Religions, Values, and Peak-experience, p. viii).

Carl Rogers believed the counselor was only a mirror to reflect the counselee's thoughts. "Neither the Bible nor the prophets neither Freud nor research-neither the revelations of God nor man-can take precedence over my own direct experience" (*On Becoming A Person*, p. 241).

Sigmund Freud saw Protestant and Catholic religion as obsessive neuroses from which to be cured. He stated: "If you wish to expel religion from our European civilization you can only do it through another system of doctrine, and from the outset this would take over all the psychological characteristics of religion" (*The Future of An Illusion*, p.92, trans. by W.O. Robson-Scott, published by Doubleday).

The church has by and large forgotten that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" because they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). The unbeliever is at war with God. "There is none who understand, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside ... " (Rom. 3:11-12), yet the church through psychological theories, invites into her midst those who live "in the lusts of ... (the) flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind ... " (Eph. 2:31) in an effort to help disciple the people of God!

The church should be using the "weapons of our warfare ... for the destruction of fortresses. We are {to be} destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are {to be} taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:4-5). Yet many believers have failed to see the theories of secular counseling psychology as a fortress of ideas that stand in opposition to the Christian faith. The grievous thing, as noted above, is that the secularists themselves have clearly stated their intent to replace the Christian faith,

yet many believers still adopt their unbiblical theories as the structural framework for their own counseling.

Ironically, unbelievers understand the relationship between beliefs, definitions, methods, and goals better than many believers. Secular psychologists do not walk in the counsel of the righteous, nor stand in the path of the redeemed, nor sit in the seat of believers.

## **7. A Biblical Response**

It is time to shed our naiveté. It is time to reclaim our birthright of shepherding and discipling God's people. The impact of psychology and psychiatry is devastating in the church today. The loss in human and financial resources is staggering.

The impact is tearing churches apart and burning out pastors. With the present popularity of "*victimization*" and a "*needs based philosophy*" in counseling, congregations are being converted from servants to takers and from responsible actors to blame-shifting victims.

Biblical counseling is not an option. It is the heart of sanctification and discipleship. It is the core of rebuilding broken lives for service to Christ and His church.

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