

Counsel From The Cross

Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ

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APPENDIX ONE

Why *Biblical* Counseling?

EVERYONE, AND EVERY counselor in particular, is an anthropologist. An anthropologist studies the nature, origin, and destiny of mankind. Whether we have studied a formal anthropology or any of its subsets – such as psychology, the study of the soul or human mind – or just listened to Dr. Laura on the radio, we are all anthropologists. We have all drawn conclusions about the nature, origin, and destiny of mankind. We have all observed human behavior; we have thought about how we and others think. We just can't avoid it. Make no mistake: whether we get our anthropology or psychology from pop culture sources like *People* magazine or Dr. Phil, from the study of Greek philosophers, or from the Bible, we have firm underlying beliefs about who we are, why we are here, what's wrong with us, and what kind of help we need. We are all anthropologists. We have all studied psychology.

Just think about it: when we sit down with a friend who is struggling in his work or marriage, we bring certain biases or presuppositions about him into the conversation. We bring our psychology. For instance, when a friend complains that his boss is unfair or that his wife is too demanding, we hear him through the grid of our underlying beliefs about who he is and the source of his problem. We counsel and comfort him and prescribe solutions to those problems based on what we believe about him as a human being. Is he a victim? Is he an innocent bystander? Is he responsible? Does he need a better work environment in order to be a better employee? Does he have all the answers he needs within himself? Does he need an outside source? These are some of the questions we'll have already answered before we even start the conversation.

Whether or not we know it, we have all embraced specific anthropological perspectives, and in our day most of these perspectives have been highly influenced both by Darwin's theory of evolution and by the many prominent systems of psychology that have permeated our culture, beginning with Freud's. Unless we have intentionally sought to discern and refuse the presuppositions of Darwinian evolution and Freudian psychology' we will unwittingly accept them and, like Jacob, we might be surprised one morning to find out whom we have been in bed with. There is a great gulf between the psychology propounded by atheists like Freud and our Christian beliefs.

All of our anthropologies and methodologies for helping others will flow either out of the Bible or out of the anthropological presuppositions of the men and women who propound and promulgate them.

Of course, there are many among us who seek to eclectically combine the truths of the Bible with the tenets of whatever forms of psychology most appeal to us, but in the end, because these systems are in competition with one another, one will eventually consume the other.

Because psychology, unlike chemistry, is not "hard" science, it has failed to produce one overarching, unifying system that deeply and clearly describes man and his problems. Because psychology is a "soft" science, many different psychologies have been developed since the days when Freud first espoused his famous doctrines. Most if not all psychologists will gladly admit that there is no absolute truth when it comes to their field and that the practice of psychology is like eating in a cafeteria – one chooses whatever

system happens to appeal to him and then combines it with others. There is not one unified theory that any psychologist can point to and say, "This is absolute truth."

The hundreds of branches or systems of psychology differ from one another, and some are absolutely antithetical to other systems because they are based on the differing beliefs and personalities of their founders. For instance, the Skinnerian behaviorist scorns the dream interpretation of the Freudian psychotherapist. The Gestalt therapist focuses on here-and-now experiences and doesn't care about interpretation, while interpretation is the "main work" of the Jungian psychoanalyst with his archetypes. The warm and caring Person-Centered therapist won't presume to give you any answers but will cordially help you discover your own inward truth on your individual path to self-actualization. Albert Ellis's RET doesn't care a fig about warmth but is "highly cognitive, active-directive, homework-assigning and discipline-oriented."

Of course, in recent years all these therapies (and hundreds of others like them) have been gobbled up by materialistic determinism and the pharmacological giant of biopsychiatry. The materialistic determinist's anthropology is very simple indeed: all you are is a bag of interacting chemicals, and all your problems can be diagnosed and solved by observing and balancing your chemicals. Talk therapy? Nonsense! Take the right pill and you'll feel better!

From this perspective it's easy to see that psychology is not a science, but something more akin to a religion or a philosophy. It is man's attempt to define and assist himself, and its systems are as different as every one of the men who developed them. Of course, psychologists will never discover one great unifying truth because they refuse to acknowledge any absolute truth that would inform psychology from outside itself. Therefore, it continues to be created and recreated in a never-ending cycle of darkness and futility.

We should not be surprised that secular man embraces these futile schemes. After all, what else does he have? He is lost, without hope and without God in this world (Eph. 2:12). His entire life is full of trouble (Job 5:7); he works and is never satisfied (Eccl. 6:7), and his foolish heart is darkened (Rom. 1:21). It is not surprising that he tries to construct fig-leaf false identities while hammering away at his personal rendition of the Tower of Babel. What is surprising, though, is how frequently Christians mimic and employ the systems and psychologies of secularists.

It is in light of the overabundance of counseling principles and methods propagated these days that we are presenting the presuppositions and goals of biblical counseling in this appendix.

To begin with, we'd like you to know what we believe about the role of the Bible in counseling. When we say that we are "biblical counselors," what we mean is that we try to consistently allow the Bible to define us – who we are, where our problems come from, and how we can be helped. We believe that the truths of Scripture, when rightly understood and applied, are the answer to every difficulty, trial, and doubt that Christians face. We believe that any diagnosis of or prescription for human problems that contradicts or disregards the worldview revealed in the Bible is bound in the end to lead away from our Creator's good purpose for us: to glorify and enjoy him forever.

WHO GOD SAYS HE IS AND WHO HE SAYS WE ARE

Every counseling construct that does not begin with an understanding and acceptance of God's self-revelation in the Old and New Testaments is not biblical (or even Christian) in nature. God declares that he is the Creator of all peoples and that he has created them in his own image (Gen. 1:26-28) and for his own glory (Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11). Because God is

man's creator, man owes him his allegiance, obedience, and worship. Because man was created in the image of God, we owe respect and honor to one another.

The counselor who begins with that simple presupposition will embrace a methodology antithetical to the counselor who believes that man evolved into his present state from primordial slime and that his existence is a random occurrence that he must fight to sustain. The "survival of the fittest" fits well into many secular psychologies ("look out for number one," "get your needs met first," "learn to love yourself before you can love others"), but not into biblical Christianity, in which the Fittest laid down his life for the weak. Every psychology from Freud on has been developed in the belief that there is no Creator-God and that man owes no allegiance to anyone besides himself. This is the ultimate fly that spoils the ointment of every modern psychotherapy. Man is not, as Freud and his ilk believe, autonomous. He is a dependent creature in dire need of a help from outside himself.

Because God is our creator, his knowledge of us is perfect and complete (1 Chron. 28:8; Ps. 139:2; John 2:25; Heb. 4:13). Any methodology that has its primary genesis in the mind of fallen man *must* by definition be skewed in some way. Fallen man does not know the heart of man because it is hidden from his perception, and he is darkened in his understanding and deceived by sin (Jer. 17:5; Rom. 1:21; 3:10-11; Eph. 4:18; Heb. 3:13). Due to the noetic effect of sin we must be suspicious of any counseling construct that does not intentionally begin and consistently continue with the Bible's definition of God, man, and our problems. Proverbs 28:26 puts this thought even more bluntly: "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool."

Apart from the illumination of God through the Scripture and the Holy Spirit, we would forever stumble in darkness about the cause and ultimate cure of our problems (Prov. 4:19). Hebrews 4:12 gives us hope, however, because it tells us where we can find a clear and accurate diagnosis and understanding of ourselves and others: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews goes on to observe about the omniscient divine speaker of Scripture: "No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (4:13). God has told us who we are, and he has told us where we can discover information about ourselves – in Scripture.

In addition, God has clearly stated where all our problems originate. If man had not succumbed to the tempter's lies in the garden, we would not be having a discussion about counseling today. We would have unbridled, free, and delightful fellowship with one another and with our Creator. We would not be saddled with the heavy burden of shame and embarrassment or with difficulties with others and the failures and disappointments that are so common to our lives. God defines the source of all our problems as sin. In the new heavens and earth where there will be no sin, there will be no "mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore" (Rev. 21:4). There won't be any need for counseling because there won't be any sin, and the bitter fruit of all sin – mourning, crying, and pain – will be destroyed.

We are not saying that we willfully cause all our own problems (although we do cause many of them). We are saying that sin – in others and in ourselves, and all through life in this sin-cursed world – is the source of all the difficulties we face. The world, the flesh, and the Devil conspire to produce all our sin and suffering. If we refuse to recognize this reality, we cut ourselves off from the only source of lasting relief or help. If we refuse to say that we sin or that those we love sin, we refuse the help of the One who was born to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

We refuse Jesus' help because it isn't the sort of help we want, but he wasn't sent to deliver people from their issues, dysfunctions, or imbalances. He was sent to "seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). It is our lostness, our helplessness, our self-deceived and

wandering hearts, our selfishness, our frailty, and our ultimate death that are the root of all our troubles. These are the very troubles that Jesus Christ came to overcome and conquer.

Biblical counselors define man as both created and dependent but also desperately lost and sinful. We see man as being responsible to "give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), but we also see him as enslaved to sin and unable to save himself (John 8:34; Acts 4:12). So we refuse to point man inward toward himself or outward toward us as counselors. Rather, we direct him to the Scriptures and upward to the Lord of those Scriptures.

The Scriptures' self-testimony is that it was written so that we might have hope (Rom. 15:4), know truth (John 17:17), and have life (John 6:63, 68). Jesus himself, the Word who became flesh (John 1:14), came that we might have life through belief in him (John 10:10; 20:31). He "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

Any counseling that does not consistently strive to anchor itself in the Scriptures and in the saving work of Jesus Christ for sinners is not Christian. Any anthropology or perspective on man that ignores man's relation to God and his desperate need for a Savior is not Christian. Biblical counselors believe that all the "treasures" of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:3). Any so-called wisdom not originating in Scripture and particularly in Jesus Christ is not Christian.

THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Biblical counselors also define the goal of their counseling (and all of life) as not merely the alleviation of suffering but the living of life for the glory of God. Although we always hope for alleviation of suffering, we have a higher goal than the here and now. Our goal is that the God who loved us, who gave his Son for us, would be glorified through us, and that the name of Jesus Christ would be praised.

When people finally decide to find a friend or counselor and ask for help, the glory of God is not usually on their wish list. Instead goals such as "feeling better about myself," "getting my husband to love me more," or "having more obedient children" top the list. The biblical counselor does hope, of course, that people will feel better and have better relationships as a result of their meeting together. But that is not his primary objective. No, his primary objective is that the counselee would see her life as having one goal: making the great love, holiness, power, beauty, and majesty of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit more evident in her life.

The goal of glorifying God through our lives is, of course, absent from all secular counseling, since secular systems do not acknowledge any higher authority than the human individual, or possibly human society (except one you might create in your mind). The goal of glorifying God is also absent from any system of counseling that does not consciously seek to keep it as its central motivation. A counselor who is a Christian might give tacit acknowledgment to the importance of glorifying God, but if he believes that what his counselee really needs is to have his "love cup" filled up before he can love others or glorify God, then self-fulfillment will become his goal and God's glory will fade into insignificance.

Here we are again with our primary premise: any counseling that does not begin *and consistently stay with* the Bible's revelation about God and man will always slide into man-centeredness. It will always make man and his plans, power, goals, and aspirations the focus of counseling. It is impossible for anything else to happen.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS A TRUST TRANSFER

And finally, biblical counseling reflects the "trust transfer" that is part of our Christian faith. Rather than trusting in ourselves as counselors or in our system's power to change lives, we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge that we are unable to change anyone and that all of our words will amount to only so much hot air unless we bring in Scripture, and thereby the Holy Spirit who inspired that Scripture, to our counselees. So even though we know we are weak, and the bread of the Word seems weak as we break it, we also trust that there is a power great enough to transform lives. We trust in the power of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

This trust transfer is actually one of the great benefits of being a counselor who relies on Scripture. Trusting in God and his Word frees us from having to depend on our own wisdom or strength. Of course, God uses means to accomplish his goals in our counselee's life, so we want to be prepared; but even so, we can depend on God who will accomplish the work he wants to do in the lives of those we speak to.

So, to answer the question, "Why *biblical* counseling?" here is our summary: We believe in and practice biblical counseling because we have embraced an anthropology taken from the Bible, and we trust God's evaluation of us and of our condition as our only source of help and our ultimate goal. We are not looking for new systems, because we have embraced the one authoritative and absolute truth. We have embraced the Bible as being "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).