

# **WHY BIBLICAL COUNSELING?**

## **By Dr. Craig Rowe**

### **1. WHAT IS THE PRIMARY ISSUE IN COUNSELING?**

The central issue in counseling is worship. Who or what is controlling the counselee's life, such as his emotions, thoughts, and activities? Are his wants those which 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 the person's ability to function. It is possible to help a person function better 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 a life guard on the east coast discovers a swimmer with a poor stroke swimming due east from New Jersey to France, what does he do? If he rows his lifeguard boat up next to him and says, "Listen mister, 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 a half hour later the man has a beautiful stroke and the life guard says, "Take care and good luck on your journey." Has the life guard helped the swimmer? Obviously not. What he has done for the swimmer is to teach him how to get himself even farther from safety. What he needed to say is, "Mister, you not only have a sad stroke, but you are headed in the wrong direction. If you don't turn your life around you are going to die."

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 worship 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" (Lk 2:52). This wisdom begins with a proper fear of God (Prov 9:10). The foolishness evident in much secular counseling today is the result of idolatrous worship.

Roman 1:18-32 describes the degeneration of knowledge and wisdom as man turned from God to worship the creation. The result was that people became "futile in their speculation ... professing to be wise they became fools" (21:22). This change of focus in worship led to change 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 4:12). "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" (Prov 4:23).

## 2. IS THE BIBLE INTENDED FOR COUNSELING?

Yes. The Bible was written 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, 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 one true need, fellowship with God. He also learns how this need can be met, 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). Referring to the Scripture, 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 Pet 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 a diagnostic name. It is not found in the Bible, but Scripture does talk about being judgmental, vain, lying, deceitful, legalistic, self centered, and full of self love, all characteristics of a bulimic person.

The problem leading to confusion is two-fold. 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 diagnostic and 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 where 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. All three 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 attempted to address the question of motivation by redefining in secular terms the biblical concept of the heart. The confusion and fruits of psycho therapy 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 yet contradictory, 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 the product of a person's moral persuasion. 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 which Paul says we are to "renew." The "mind" in Scripture is the heart out of which flow the issues of life. It is not some emotive organ relegated to the domain of Cupid. "The fool says in his heart, there is no God" (Ps 14:1). The one who may dwell on God's holy hill is the one who "speaks truth in his heart" (Ps 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 in Scripture associated with the heart.

A striking feature of the NT 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, and willing ego of man, with particular regard to his responsibility to God that the NT 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? It is because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). 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" (Matt. 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 taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ..." (2 Cor 10:5). The Lord asked through Amos, "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" (3:3).

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 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 METHODS FROM HIS BELIEFS?

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 if it is wrong over all, 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 such as 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). The 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, 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

which needs to be emptied. Drain the tank of its anger and the problem will be solved.

Biblical counselors on the other hand 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 Gapped (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. 24)

Sigmund Freud, seeing the Protestant and Catholic religion as obsessional neuroses from which to be cured, 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.D.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 2:3) 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 better understand the relationship between beliefs, definitions,

methods, and goals than do 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. ENOUGH QUESTIONS!

It is time to shed our naivete'. 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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