

***The Biblical Basis for Counseling***

***Biblical Directionism***

By

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## Psychology, Biblical Counseling and Integration

Many questions face pastors who care for God's people. One particular question which seems prominent, is how to counsel in the local church. The issue of counseling confronts every pastor regardless of his doctrinal position, ministry emphasis or desire to avoid the time commitment. Many pastors feel inadequate to counsel and lack confidence in their qualifications. Lack of qualification is often the excuse a pastor offers when confronted with the need to counsel members of the congregation. Today people in general and pastors in particular seem to think that training in psychology is necessary before they are able to counsel. This position seems to be the dominant thought among a large number of Christian clergy. However, there are a growing number of clergy who believe they are qualified to counsel based upon their knowledge of Scripture. Psychological training is not a prerequisite to offer counsel and may even be a hindrance in the minds of this group. No serious student of Scripture would argue that counseling is not needed, but the basis of the counsel and the methods of counseling are hotly debated.

Dr. Larry Crabb has stated the issue very clearly,

***“In promoting Christian maturity through counseling, are we permitted to draw from secular psychological theory and procedures? Is it permissible for a Christian counselor’s thinking to be shaped or in any way influenced by the work of unbelieving psychologists? Certain secular approaches to helping people such as Transactional Analysis have become popular in evangelical circles. How is a Christian to deal with these positions? Do they offer valid insights from which a Christian can profit or are they in every part unacceptable?”<sup>1</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1977), p.31.

The question involves integration of secular practices, models, concepts and theory into the approaches and application used by Christian counselors. Can this be done in such a way as to ensure the integrity of the faith, and produce lasting and Biblical responses in the counselee? The issue of integration is a concern for Christian counselors not for secular counselors. This is clearly a one sided problem in the field of psychology. The concern over integration between the secular and the spiritual is only in the Christian communities. The secular counselors fail to display any urgency or even a hint of concern over the question of integration. The secular counselors are not attempting to include anything Christian, it is only the Christians who attempt to integrate the secular into their counseling models. The obvious conclusion is that secular counseling has something to *enhance* and *improve* Christian counseling, but Christian counseling has nothing or at least very little to improve the secular. The fact that Christian counselors are trying to incorporate the secular into the spiritual would suggest a lack of confidence in the Scriptures' ability to meet the challenge.

The secular field of psychology has resisted any incorporation of religious principles for a long time. Recently that attitude has changed somewhat. In 1992, the American Psychological Association included religion in their standard on human differences in the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct." The secular field has been very hostile to Christian principles and openly smug when confronted with the possibility that they may actually work. This should not be a surprise when we understand the belief system of many secular psychologists is anti-religion and most are secular humanist. A survey taken by Bergin and Jensen (1990), showed that 72% of the general population claimed religious faith as the most important influence in their lives, but only 29% of the mental health professionals that were surveyed viewed religious matters as important for therapeutic work with clients.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Rebecca S. Hawkins, (Journal of Psychology and Theology, 1999, Vol.27, No.4, 309)

Dr. Ed Bulkley states that,

***“Psychology and religion are competing faiths. If you seriously hold to one set of values, you will logically have to reject the other.”***<sup>3</sup>

William Kirk Kilpatrick, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at Boston College, has struggled with this issue and has made some interesting observations. His answer to the problem of integration was to blend all his training, seeing all truth as God’s truth he was very comfortable looking elsewhere for help. Kilpatrick had a strong foundation of faith and attempted to add to his Biblical understanding from other sources. What he failed to realize was a shift in his thinking, a move from relying on Scripture to a dependence on psychology. In the process, discernment of real truth was lost. Complicating his situation was the constant encouragement from religious leaders to seek out and understand what the secular psychologists were teaching. Over a period of time the difference between religion and psychology became indistinguishable to him. This fact is a warning that needs to be understood. The secular and the spiritual are distinct and separate they cannot blend. They are like oil and water, and are not compatible.

Others express the same point of view as Kilpatrick. Paul Vitz, Associate Professor of Psychology at New York University, agrees with Kirkpatrick that Psychology is a form of religion. Paul Vitz has written a book entitled *Psychology As Religion*, in this book he states:

***“Psychology has become more a sentiment than a science and is now part of the problem of modern life rather than part of its resolution.... Psychology has become a religion, in particular, a form of secular humanism based on the worship of self.”***<sup>4</sup>

Paul Vitz goes on to say that Psychology is very anti-Christian and is in fact hostile to most religions. This hostility can be very intimidating to many Christian counselors, which creates pressure to conform to what seems to be the overwhelming consensus of the Christian

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<sup>3</sup>Ed Bulkley, Ph.D., *Why Christians Can’t Trust Psychology* (Harvard House, 1993), p180.

<sup>4</sup>Gary R. Collins, *Can You Trust Psychology?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.94.

community. Psychology is accepted and even promoted by our schools, government and churches. The acceptance of psychology by all areas of our society makes the question of integration more difficult than it should be. The pressure to conform is overwhelming for some and impossible to resist for others.

The issue is not simply the best method, assuming that all the methods work just some work better. The questions that need to be asked are, does it work and what are the guidelines for determining success? At this point presuppositions are critical, but what are the presuppositions based upon? Authority and the source of that authority come into play at this stage of examination. One does not have to look far to see that psychological counseling, psychotherapy, psychiatry, and other secular methods are in direct conflict with Biblical positions on the needs of man and the means to meet those needs.

The fact that Christian counselors are the strongest supporters of psychological counseling indicates more confidence in secular methods than Biblical authority. The loudest critics of secular methods are the secular psychologists and psychiatrists who are trying to understand and deal with the damage their own methods have produced. The evidence is coming in showing that secular counseling is failing to accomplish even minimum expectations from those seeking help. The real standard must be the amount of genuine help and healing that results from the counseling process. It is this standard that reflects the need for some honest evaluation of the counseling being offered.

In the publication *Journal of Psychology and Theology* an attempt is made at understanding integration as it relates to our changing society. In an article by Canning, Pozzi, McNeil, and McMinn, they offer an interesting and tragic view of what integration should involve. In their opinion integration is simply adding some Christian sympathy and offering the counselee some encouragement:

***“...an expression of hope, revealing an earnest commitment to the work of the Kingdom of God. Without this essential identifying marker of faith-praxis integration, we would offer little that is not available in any competent secular training program.”<sup>5</sup>***

It is very clear from this statement the writers of the article do not believe Biblical counselors have anything to add to the secular models. To state Biblical counselors could not provide much, if anything that any competent secular training program would offer, presents the clear conflict. Biblical counseling is not given credit as a serious approach to solving problems. Secular counseling is positioned as the authority and Biblical counseling as just an opinion. While some secular counselors will mention the power of the Holy Spirit and need to direct people to the Lord, in the same breath they speak of their failure to do so. Rejecting Scripture as the source of healing, secular counselors are stumbling in the dark area of secular thought look for something, anything that will work.

The problem has been complicated by researchers as Bergin (1991) and Cadwallader (1991) who have written articles cautioning counselors about the relationship between religion and mental health, especially in light of the fact the religion can be potentially unhealthy. It is no wonder that many counselors are confused over the question of integration.

Today more schools are offering specialized graduate training programs to help deal with the issue of integration. The large difference between secular and Biblical values raises the question of whether it is possible for them to work together. A clear distrust between the two professions is very evident. The secular counselor looks down on Biblical counselors as inexperienced and simplistic; the Biblical counselor looks at the secular counselor as one who is misguided at best and evil at worst. There is also the Christian who was trained in secular psychology that is torn between secular methods and Biblical truth. The secular trained

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<sup>5</sup>Canning, Pozzi, McNeil and McMinn, Journal of Psychology and Theology (Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University, Fall 2000), p205.

Christian struggles constantly trying to blend, separate, apply, and understand the two approaches.

For many Christian counselors there is a need to stop dividing the private and public areas of life. In an attempt to live in both worlds, secular and religious, some have surrendered the public realm to science and human philosophy, relegating the religious to our private lives. Such a division is impossible to achieve and frustrating to attempt. Yet, that is exactly what many Christian counselors are attempting to present to their clients. Seeking to be wise they have become victims of the worlds' philosophy at the expense of true spiritual wisdom found in the Scriptures. This could only take place if the value of Scriptures is questioned. Dr. Howard Eyrich and Dr. Ed Hindson spell out this problem in their book on the sufficiency of Scripture. They write:

***“There is a great debate raging in Christian counseling circles over the issue of the sufficiency of Scripture. While most Christian counselors profess belief in the inspiration of the Bible, many seem reluctant to trust the Scripture to speak authoritatively to their counseling profession.”<sup>6</sup>***

Many counselors call themselves Christian counselors, but in reality they are themselves Christians, but their counseling is anything but Christian. Their approach involves a wide variety of secular models, but very little if anything that would make their approach distinctively Christian. Apparently they do not believe that a truly Biblical approach would work for their clients. This could be the result of working for a secular organization that does not want religion as part of their counseling service. In this scenario the motives of the counselor must be brought into question. If the counselor really believes that the answers are to be found in Scripture, but is not allowed to approach the counselee from a Biblical point of view, how can he possibly help his client? The motive of the counselor then becomes questionable. Is the counselor simply looking for a

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<sup>6</sup>Dr. Howard Eyrich, Dr. Ed Hindson, ***Totally Sufficient*** (Harvest House Publishers, 1997), p.11.

paycheck? If the goal of therapy is the health of the client, then results should be a moving force in the direction the therapy should go.

The issue boils down to the claims of Scripture versus the claims of psychology. Both claim to have the answer to what ails all of us. Sigmund Freud began a revolution, an attempt to take over and destroy the spiritual and turn it into the secular. Old familiar terms like sin, morality, immorality, and disobedience were replaced with terms that tried to destroy personal responsibility and accountability to our maker. Freud referred to himself as “a complete godless Jew” and “a hopeless pagan.”<sup>7</sup> The last 120 years has seen a steady decline in our accountability to the God of the Bible and our dependence upon the word of God for our happiness and well being. Our society is worse now than it has been for a long time. With all the psychologist practicing their craft, it would seem reasonable that our population should be well adjusted and very happy. The truth is quite the opposite. We live in a land of miserable, unhappy, ungrateful, self-centered, depressed people. John MacArthur observed that:

***[“evangelicalism is infatuated with psychotherapy. Emotional and psychological disorders supposedly requiring prolonged analysis have become almost fashionable.”<sup>8</sup>]***

Much of the blame for what has happened in our society must fall on the local church. Many pastors have refused to counsel their members, preferring to pass them off to someone else, sending them to the professionals, not knowing what they would be told or even if they would be helped. The main point was not to be tied down to hours of counseling, dealing with difficult issues. Counseling was and still is very demanding, emotionally and physically. Many simply are not willing to take on the responsibility because of the effort required. As a result the secular realm has jumped into the arena and supplanted the church as the real source of help for

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.13.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

emotionally crippled people seeking a way to be healed. The amazing part is the acceptance by the general public, church leaders, and government that secular methods are the answer. Part of the reason lies with the failure of the church to be relevant to the needs of people.

The question of integration involves two questions that must be answered. The first question is simple, "Should pastors counsel their own people?" While this may seem like a simple question, it carries some very intense emotions. If a pastor is responsible for the well being of his people, shouldn't counseling be part of that responsibility? If counseling is not part of the responsibility of a pastor, where should a person in need of counseling go? The failure of a pastor to point someone in the right direction is a failure of responsibility. To send someone for counseling without considering the type of counseling they will receive is an act of negligence. Why should a pastor send anyone to a counselor who will undermine the faith of the counselee? I do not believe any pastor would do that knowingly, but to send someone to a counselor who is not a believer, who rejects Biblical principles amounts to the same thing. There is an assumption among many people that psychologists have the answers and are better equipped to deal with life's problems than the clergy. In the book of Romans 1:20-22 Paul writes these words"

***"For the invisible things of him from the creator of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,"***

God makes His point very clear. When you reject Him, you become vain in your imaginations, and the heart becomes darkened. God does not need unsaved men to help Him provide for His people. It appears foolish on the surface to look to unsaved, unregenerated men to add anything to what God has already given us.

The answer to the first question, "Should a pastor counsel?" Most certainly the answer is yes! In Deuteronomy 32:28, Moses is talking about the foreigners and he states:

***“They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.”***

The conclusion is clear, they do not have the Lord and His wisdom, only their own. Apart from the wisdom of God, men are in deep trouble. Nehemiah 4:15 states that God brought the counsel of the enemies of God to nothing. Job is even more pointed in his assessment of secular counselors. In Job 5:13-14 we read:

***“He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night.”***

The Psalmist begins in Psalm 1:1 stating:

***[“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”]***

Psalm 33:10 is the final statement on this issue:

***“The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.”***

The methods of the secular psychologist appear to offer hope. To one who is not trained in the ways of the Egyptians, secular methods may be enticing, the challenging or even overwhelming, but the counsel of the Lord far exceeds the wisdom of men. The secular methods seek to explain and control the human psyche, but only God knows the heart of man. It is God who made us. It is God who can heal us.

Integration must be seen for what it really is, an attempt to supplant the authority of God. It is the exaltation of men above God. The only possible result is confusion, and minimizing the power of God to heal His people. There is a lack of confidence in the power of God to meet individual needs, and to provide the wisdom needed to counsel those who seek help. Pastors need to accept their responsibility to offer Godly counsel, and have complete confidence in the Word of God to equip them for that work.

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