

Why Christians Cannot Trust Psychology

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There is a growing concern by the Christian community about the means used to deal with the personal problems facing us every day. Many believe that Christians should seek out and listen to psychological experts, while others would seek only a biblical counselor. The question deals with the issue of effectiveness, which one works best. The discussion has moved into a third possibility, combining the two methods of counseling. This third approach would combine secular counseling with biblical counseling into what is referred to as "Integration."

Integrating Psychology into Christian Counseling

Many pastors are convinced that they cannot counsel some of the situations they encounter on a daily basis. They believe that without some type of psychological training in addition to their biblical training they are not qualified to counsel. Most pastors will refer their members to a professional psychologist or psychiatrist for treatment of serious emotional and behavioral disorders.

Denver Seminary, Talbot Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Liberty University, Moody Bible Institute, Fuller Theological Seminary, and a wide range of other Christian schools are convinced that psychology and the Bible need to be integrated in counseling if the church is to be effective in this society.

There are many today that believe that secular counseling has great insight to offer the church and that biblical counseling is "***Simplistic, with unqualified solutions.***" The main view that is moving rapidly through our churches sees secular psychology as the answer to our problems. This movement argues that without the insights of secular psychology, pastors and churches are simply inadequate to deal with the emotional stresses of our modern world.

Is Psychology Needed Today?

I believe we can gain some insight from the method Paul used to counsel people in his time. Paul clearly states what we need to be reminded of in Colossians 1:28: "*We proclaim him, admonishing (noutheteo) and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*" He then warns us in Colossians 2:8 "*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends upon human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*"

Are the Scriptures in error when they say we can find all the wisdom we need in Christ? Do we actually need additional help from men to supplement the wisdom of God? Is life really more complex today than in the days of the early church?

Those who would argue for the integration of secular and biblical counseling argue that psychological truths fall under the heading of general revelation and that new insights can be accepted if they are **true and do not contradict the Bible**. The real issue then becomes, “What is true?” This position assumes the Bible is silent about the human condition as it is about modern technologies.

The question still remains: Is psychology necessary today? Integrationists seem to think so because some human problems are not mentioned in the Scriptures. They say that the Bible does not claim to be a self help book or a counseling manual. This is true, but the Bible claims far more authority than just a counseling manual. The Bible in fact claims to be the very word of God, *“It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible does not tell you what job to take or what school to go to; it does not tell you the person you should marry. God expects you to use the abilities He has given to you and make decisions based upon the principles laid down for us in His word. The Bible does present the principles that provide the answers for every human problem.

Consider this, the Bible provides the principles necessary to deal with eating disorders, non-biogenic depressions, scholastic failure, child abuse, bitter memories, anxiety, and a wide range of other problems. The integrationists are grossly mistaken when they say that “Many, perhaps most, of the problems people bring to modern counselors are never discussed in the bible.”

Twenty-first Century Problems

For some strange reason integrationists believe that the problems we face today are more difficult and complex than they were two thousand years ago. The fact is depression is not new. People have faced depression from the very beginning of creation. People have always had to face disease, disappointments, frustrations, bad marriages, confusion, hopelessness and the wickedness of other men since time began.

One interesting observation about our society; psychology is relatively new and the conclusion that society is getting better since the introduction of psychotherapy was introduced seems logical. We now have a large number of therapists treating millions of people, yet our problems are getting worse and the mental well being of our country is falling rapidly. There is clear evidence that society has become more psychotic rather than becoming more balanced. The increase of mental illness may someday be connected to the number of psychologists. An interesting side note, suicides are increasing even among psychologists.

Integrationists refer to the “*psychological truths*” about human behavior not mentioned in the Bible. The fact is the Bible deals with every “*dysfunction*” and gives the necessary truths needed to bring about healing.

The tendency all too often is to look at Scripture through the eyeglasses of psychology when the critical need is to look at psychology through the glasses of Scripture. The tendency for psychologically trained counselors is to lean toward the secular training and miss the spiritual issue or application from Scripture. The result is much of what is called Christian counseling has conformed to secular psychology, and as a result has lost the spiritual perspective and authority. The results are predictable when the wisdom of men is preferred over the wisdom of God.

The Myth That Psychology is Effective

Why would anyone submit to psychological counseling if it never helps anyone? Very few serious critics of psychology would go so far as to claim that no one is ever helped through psychological counseling. Simply having someone to listen is often all that is needed for some people. Another way to look at this would be to ask, “With its claims of superiority over pastoral counseling and its high expense, why is psychological therapy so relatively ineffective?”

One Christian psychologist lists five major reasons that psychology produces disappointing results:

- 1) Unrealistic expectations by the counselees.
- 2) Inaccurate assumptions about the ability of psychology to explain human behavior.
- 3) Wrong motivations for seeking counseling.
- 4) Unfounded faith in psychological experts.
- 5) Undelivered promises by the experts.

These causes of failure in psychology can apply to any counseling system, secular or Christian. People often enter counseling with the mistaken belief that the counselor will solve all their problems. The truth is that counseling success in any system depends more upon the motivation of the counselee to change than on the insights of the counselor. The very fact that counselee has come for help argues for the need of change in their behavior, outlook, and decision making process. These changes can be identified based upon the principles of Scripture. The implementation of the changes depends upon a right relationship to the Lord and willingness to apply (change) the principles of God. At this point a person’s willingness to change becomes the determining factor in the counseling process.