

CHURCH: God’s Counseling Center

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The environment of where counseling occurs is important. The emotional atmosphere of the setting is more important than the physical trappings. The counselor and his or her orientation is the most important element in a counseling setting; i.e. the approach and content—secular or biblical.

Counseling, as I am using it—biblical counseling—refers, orientation wise, to one believer encouraging and helping another believer increase in Christ-likeness (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16). It is continuing the disciplining process which was begun at conversion. It is sharing the “whole counsel” of God’s word to help the “whole person” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Biblical counseling is assisting the counselee become “*More than a conqueror in Christ.*”

The lingering question is: “Where is the best place to do biblical counseling?” This usually has reference to the physical environment more than the spiritual and emotional environment. In recent years there has been a shift from the local church being the place of biblical counseling, to a physical setting, usually an office, outside the church building. These are usually called “Christian Counseling Centers.” The emphasis is on “professionalism” and financial fees, which requires approval and licensing by a state and secular agency. The core philosophy seems to be that counseling removed from the church context is conducive to more successful counseling.

UNUSUAL COUNSELING PLACES

Biblical counseling is using God’s word to help others; especially those who are fellow-believers. Since this is the case, we should note how God, the perfect Counselor and source of all biblical counseling, gave advice, teaching, and counsel to His creation. God’s office is the heart of a person; a heart that can be approached anywhere the word is available. The helping premise is: “*You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free*” (John 8:32). God’s word is true (John 1:17; 17:17). We are commanded to “*imitate God*” (Ephesians 5:1); this includes counseling.

BIBLE EXAMPLES OF GOD COUNSELING:

1. God counseled Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1—3).
2. God counseled Abraham “out-of-the-blue” (Genesis 12:1-4).
3. God counseled Abraham in a vision (Genesis 15:1-11).

4. God counseled Moses on the backside of a mountain (Exodus 3).
5. God counseled Balaam in the plains of Moab (Numbers 22).
6. God counseled Jonah after he had been vomited from the stomach of a great fish (Jonah 3).
7. God counseled Elijah in a cave.

We could go on and on listing the times and places God counseled (i.e. spoke to, advised, taught, commanded, etc.). These seven examples serve to illustrate the truth that God is not limited to where He counsels. His office is the human heart; His words are true. Likewise we can study the life of Christ and discover the numerous times and places He counseled people.

CHURCH: God's Counseling Center

The church is God's "called out people" (*ekkelesia*). The church has been equipped to deal with the issues of life, sin, death, and eternity. We have been given in the Scriptures *all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)*. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)*.

The Holy Spirit—The Comforter—has guided first century writers into recording the things in the Holy Bible that we need to live as God wants us to live. Such chapters as 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 14, give us counsel relative to how to live with each other in the Body of Christ. In Matthew 18:15-20, we are given counsel relative to how to handle problems when they arise. There are more than 50 "One another" passages that admonish us to help, love, and encourage each other in the church. Christians are admonished to *bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1, 2)*. This sometimes involves counseling.

Can you imagine the Apostles and Christians in the first century church going to pagan counselors for advice? In fact, they were warned not to do so: *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8)*. When personal issues arose in the first century church, members weren't told to call a sooth sayer or oracle caster; they were admonished to *call for the elders—spiritual leaders—of the church (cf. James 5:13-18)*. The apostle Paul even gave "medical advice" to Timothy (cf. 1 Timothy 5:23).

The church is where we are taught how we ought to behave: *[B]ut if I am delayed, I WRITE so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)*. The core mission of the church is to GLORIFY GOD (cf. Ephesians 3:21). Counsel from God's word is how we can successfully do this joyous privilege. This counsel come from the Bible and is communicated by Christians counseling each other.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH AS GOD'S COUNSELING CENTER

I am sure there are numerous reasons given by those who advocate taking "Christian Counseling" outside the local church (i.e. the called out of God—*ekklesia*). There are always reasons why we do things. I have discovered that some of the reasons counseling is taken outside the local church is because of misunderstandings relative to the nature and mission of the church, as well as what constitutes so-called Christian or biblical counseling. Thus, the need to clear up some of these misconceptions.

THE CHURCH COUNSELING CENTER IS NOT . . .

(NOTE: The connotation "church counseling center" is not a reference to a physical building. It is a metaphor that refers to and place where mature Christians help each other grow into Christ-likeness. And yes, it may refer to a place or office in a church building).

... 1) is not a secret setting where you sneak in and out of, because you are ashamed to be seen

...2) is not a place where high fees are charged for help

...3) is not a place where human psychology, and humanism is integrated with the Bible

...4) is not a place where only theoretical guessing is the source of help

...5) is not a place where human wisdom is given as solutions to spiritual problems

...6) is not a place where pseudo attempts are made to help others

...7) is not a place where a stigma or shame is created to induce change

...8) is not a place where the Bible is used to "beat people up"

...9) is not a place where there is opposition to referring people to competent medical help

...10) is not a place where only read your Bible, memorize verses, and pray are quick solutions

WHAT THE CHURCH COUNSELING CENTER IS . . .

... 1) it is group of mature Christians obeying the "one another" verses in the Bible

... 2) it is an environment where God is "worshiped in spirit and in truth"

- ... 3) it is a context where God’s word is the source of counseling
- ... 4) it is where the Lordship of Christ is honored
- ... 5) it is where the truth is taught, believed, respected, and obeyed
- ... 6) it is where the whole person—body, soul and spirit—is ministered to
- ... 7) it is where the love and grace of God abound as foundations for solving problems
- ... 8) it is where you are accepted and approached as an equal in Christ
- ... 9) it is where sin is discussed as an issue, as well as the solution for the sin problem
- ... 10) it is where the goal is to glorify God and seek the Kingdom first
- ... 11) it is where people are helped to discover and develop a moral compass for their lives
- ... 12) it is where people are helped to understand and accept God’s comfort
- ... 13) it is where Christians are helped to discover they are the Bride of Christ
- ... 14) it is a safe place where God’s forgiveness is shared and encouraged
- ... 15) it is a place of faith therapy that relates to God’s love for us

The local church is God’s center for counseling, making disciples, and helping people. This doesn’t mean, however, that as soon as a person is converted he/she automatically becomes a biblical counselor. It takes time to grow in knowledge and practice of God’s word, which are essentials for helping others. *It is by reason of time that we are able to teach others (cf. Hebrews 5:12—6:9).* It is the responsibility of church leaders to “mature the church” to the place of being able to duplicate themselves and help others (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16).

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Why has the church been given a negative report relative to counseling?
2. Discuss the pros (if there are any) and cons, for taking counseling out of the church:
3. How can we correct the misconceptions about the church as God’s counseling center?
4. How can the church equip members to be biblical counselors?
5. How can we help the church see the value of biblical counseling?
- 6.
7. How will you intentionally use this lesson in your life and ministry?

