

WHERE BIBLICAL COUNSELING BEGINS

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Once we exempt God, everything and everyone else had a beginning. The some 500-plus counseling techniques we have mentioned had a beginning. Some of the more popular counseling philosophies began with Freud, Rogers, Jung, Maslow, Skinner, Adams, Ellis, Minuchin, Beck, and the list goes on. Then there is the debate over who was the first psychological counselor. For example many believe Dr. William James is the father of modern psychology in America. Most professional or secular counselors are graduates of programs where teachers advocated a certain approach based on the works of some so-called expert. And much of what is being passed off as “Christian Counseling” is a mixture of teachings from various secular approaches; an example would be Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

We should not be surprised to learn that biblical counseling, as practiced today as a recognized discipline among churches, seminaries, etc., has its roots in the eclectic work of men. The “Competent to Counsel” movement which advocates that every Christian equipped with the Bible is competent to counsel, was begun by Dr. Jay Adams. Like secular counseling, so-called biblical or Christian counseling, has numerous schools of belief relative to how to practice counseling based on the word of God. Some of these are on target; some are mixtures of secular and humanistic approaches.

While a survey of various counseling theories may be essential to an academic education in the field of counseling; even biblical counseling; it must not sidetrack us from the original Counselor and His counseling methods. God is the originator of giving advice (counsel) and the original Counselor: “*IN THE BEGINNING GOD.*” Therefore, when we turn to His counseling manual—the Holy Bible, we have the original source of counseling.

Since biblical counseling is based on the word of God, it must be true that our heavenly Father is the only true source of advice. He is the perfect counselor. Suppose you purchased an electronic device and in the passing of time it starts to malfunction. Who would be the BEST source to diagnose and repair the device? Would it be someone who has researched bits and pieces about the device or would it be the inventor (creator) of the device? The creator is the one who can repair the device because he knows everything about it.

Since God created man in His own image it makes sense that He is the perfect one to give counsel to His creation. This is an illustrated truth in Genesis chapters one through three. God gives them positive divine law relative to what to eat and not eat; they chose to disobey. After their disobedience, He gave them advice (promises, etc.) related to their future. From the beginning—Genesis to Revelation—to the end, we see God counseling His creation.

GOD'S PERFECT COUNSEL

The preparation for being a biblical counselor begins by acknowledging and applying God's counsel to one's own life. When I was working on my MFCC graduate degree, I had to have 50 hours of personal counseling: 25 hours in group counseling and 25 hours in private counseling. This was designed to help me, and all students in the program, to discover my own issues as well as know firsthand what it is like to be counseled by a trained professional.

QUALITIES OF GOD'S COUNSEL

The Bible contains numerous attributes of God as the perfect counselor and His counsel (advice and commandments) to His creation. Here is a brief list:

1. God's counsel is immutable (Hebrews 6:17).
2. God's counsel is faithful (Isaiah 25:1).
3. God's counsel is wonderful (Isaiah 28:29)
4. God's counsel is great (Jeremiah 32:19).
5. God's counsel is true (John 1:17; 17:17).
6. God's counsel is sovereign (Daniel 4:35).
7. God's counsel stems from His love (John 3:16).
8. God's counsel is eternal (Ephesians 3:11).
9. God's counsel is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3).
10. God's counsel is worthy of being asked for (Judges 18:5; 20:18).
11. God's counsel is a delight to the soul of man (Psalm 119:24).
12. God's counsel has come to earth in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9:6).

The character of the counselor plays a major part in how advice will be received. Since God is the perfect counselor, it follows that those who serve as conduits for sharing His advice may do so with complete assurance that it is sound, relevant, and workable. The challenge is for the biblical counselor not to let his character flaws limit God's power contained in the word. The challenge is one of being sure the word used is the correct and properly interpreted Scripture for the issue being discussed and resolved.

Here is how Isaiah described God's counsel: *This also comes from the Lord of hosts, Who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance (Isaiah 28:29)*. Since we are living in the midst of numerous counseling approaches, we need to heed Paul's counsel: *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human traditions and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8)*.

If you are involved in counseling or being counseled in an approach that does not have God as the one in whose image you are created and Christ as your Savior, and the word of God as the solution to your problems, biblical counseling is not taking place. If the goal of the counseling is not to help the person become more Christ-like, then it isn't "Christian counseling." Here's how Paul stated his goal: *For to me, to live in Christ, and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21)*. The "attitude of Christ" is the core for all solutions to problems (Philippians 2:4-9).

Everywhere we look we see a multitude of counselors offering advice to the hurting and down trodden. We are encouraged to follow this path, take this road, heed this advice. Yet, in the midst of this maze of choices, Jesus asks us to *follow me* because He is *the way, truth, and light (John 14:6; 10:10)*. Those in need of counseling stand at the intersection where numerous roads to counseling success are being offered. These include materialism, hedonism, relativism, humanism, pragmatism, and religionism. Our Counselor—God—warns us relative to these roads: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends therefore are ways of destruction (Proverbs 16:25)*.

Counselors are teachers and leaders. Jesus warned us to be on guard relative to blind leaders: *Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch (Matthew 15:14)*.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Why is it important for the biblical counselor to know the origin of counseling?
2. What qualified God to be the perfect counselor?
3. Discuss Adam and Eve's response to God's counsel?
4. Why do some counselors reject God's counsel?
5. Write a minimum of 50 words about each of the 12 qualities of God's counsel.
6. What additional observations do you have?
7. What one intentional application will you make of this lesson?