
A Case for Biblical Counseling

May 4, 2003 Sunday AM

Biblical Counseling Sunday

Introduction This is the Sunday that we have been setting aside as Biblical Counseling Sunday for at least the last eight years. This is the Sunday that we emphasize one of the ministries of the Chapel that has been distinctive in the Miami Valley – the training of others for the ministry of crisis discipleship. That is the term that we have chosen to use here at the Chapel in order to distinguish Biblical intervention in lives that are overtaken in sin from all the baggage that is associated with the term counseling in our culture.

We announced that this morning Pastor Russ would be speaking on being instruments of change, and that I would be speaking tonight on a case for Biblical counseling as part of the graduation service. In God's providential care, Randy Patten, who is the Executive Director of the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors was available for our service this evening. We are delighted to welcome him as our speaker this evening.

There are many new people here at the Chapel and we thank God for that. But there may be those who may not be as familiar as we would like them to be about Biblical counseling. We use the terms Biblical counseling and crisis discipleship often, and yet I wonder if everyone here understands what we mean by that. So this morning, I am going to give a defense for Biblical counseling – what we refer to as crisis discipleship.

Obviously, I cannot give a complete case for Biblical counseling in the short time that we have together this morning. But I want to try to give a broad stroke of the landscape so that you have some perspective of the competing world views.

This past week I was made aware by the media of two new problems facing the human race that are having major damaging effects on literally millions of people. The first was ODD – Oppositional Defiance Disorder. It affects millions of children and has the following symptoms: arguing with adults, losing their temper, getting angry with others, they have a negative attitude, they are spiteful, vindictive, and a few other symptoms that I can't remember. The article stated that it was very important that if your child had four or more of these symptoms, then you needed to have them examined by a professional at the earliest opportunity. But luckily, there is a medication that can bring this awful, destructive disorder under control. I also saw a commercial advertising a new drug for IMS -- Irritable Male Syndrome. It again gave a list of symptoms that required a visit to your trained professional for expert evaluation of the need of this new miracle medication.

Now if it weren't so serious of a matter, these two new mental health disorders would be laughable. If you are anything like me, you wince at the gullibility of the American public and shake your head in disbelief that these behaviors are being passed off as mental illnesses treated with the use of medications.

We in Biblical counseling, stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. I am indebted to men such as Jay Adams, David Powlison, Ed Welsh, Robert Smith, Paul and Ted Tripp, and a

host of others, who have blazed the trail and to whom I give credit for the material that I am going to be presenting. This is a compilation of many articles and books authored by these men and without whom I would be sorely deficient.

What do you mean, “secular pastors”?

The pastoral ministry of the church has historically been involved with the care and cure of souls. It dealt with questions such as: Who we are? What is the meaning of life? What is causing my depression and what do I do about it? How do I rear my children? What is the role of a husband? What is the role of a wife? What is marriage? What do I do when my spouse has been unfaithful to me? What do I do when people don't treat me with the respect I deserve? What do I do when I'm involved in a homosexual relationship? All these questions, and thousands more, were all the turf of the pastoral ministry of the church. But that is not true today. We have pastoral ministers today that deal with these questions, but they are not pastors of the church. They are doing the historical work of a pastor, but they do not call themselves pastors. Nor would they be very thrilled that you referred to them as pastors. They are trained professionals of science. They have given themselves to years of study in order to perform the work of the care and cure of souls. They are degreed and licensed psychologists and psychotherapists – the “secular pastors”.

The psychotherapists of the past were bold in referring to themselves as pastors

The well known names in psychotherapy were very clear in their writings and teachings about their work.

Freud said, “The words ‘secular pastoral worker’ might well serve as a general formula for describing the function which the analyst has to perform in his relation to the public.”

Carl Jung wrote, “Patients force the psychotherapist into the role of a priest and expect and demand of him that he shall free them from their distresses. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which, strictly speaking, belong to the theologian.” He went on to say that the old truths of Christianity no longer do the job; there is a spiritual vacuum of meaning in the modern world, and the psychotherapist is the one now designated to provide meaning, freedom from distress, etc.

B. F. Skinner taught that behavioral technology will solve the human dilemma. He believed that he could arrange the contingencies of reinforcement in such a way that we can create contented, happy, productive, adjusted people.

All psychological practitioners are dispensing a worldview

Why do I refer to them as pastors? Because they operate just like pastors and deal in the same areas that historical pastors have. These pastors are dispensing worldviews that they have taken to be true by faith. They have accepted a set of fundamental beliefs about the nature of people that cannot be proved. They have accepted these beliefs by faith.

They have accepted theories about what is normal and what is abnormal. They have theories about motivation, how we know anything, theories about what is right and wrong, as well as theories about God and Who or what He is. All of these theories have come from their culture, their families, their religious backgrounds, from influential professors in school, from graduate programs, and many other factors that are too numerous to list. But what is so incredible to the outside observer, is that these theories are believed to be true without any scientific validation. They are taken to be true by faith. Yet these secular pastors argue that these theories are self-evident to anyone who will accept them. Isn't this the same ground to which the biblical pastors have held? We have assumptions about God and His Word that we hold by faith and believe them to be self-evident to anyone who will accept them.

Psychology is not scientific

The psychological community has worked very hard to be considered as a scientific community. They have adopted the jargon of the scientific community. They have tried to give the impression that the scientific method is what drives all of their theories. They have fought for recognition as a science. And yet, the philosopher Karl Popper has spoken very pointedly. He stated that psychology, especially as seen in personality theories and therapeutic models, is simply not scientific. His reasoning was that scientific models, if they are to be called scientific, should be able to be proved false. For example, if someone were to say that secondary smoke reduces life expectancy by 15% after thirty years, this is capable of being disproved. It is testable. However, if you say that emotional problems are caused by anxiety, this is not a scientific statement. It cannot be disproved. Those who believe this to be true will find that every person they encounter with emotional problems will confirm that it is from anxiety and those that do not believe emotional problems are caused by anxiety cannot refute it. It is not testable. Therefore, it is not a scientific statement.

Psychotherapy is a form of evangelism

Christians do not keep their beliefs to themselves. In fact, if Christianity is anything, it is evangelistic. They are avid proselytizers who hope to see people converted to trusting in Jesus and adopting a set of beliefs concerning Him.

The secular pastors are also avid proselytizers. First they themselves are converted to a set of beliefs in which they must place their faith. Then they study those doctrines of that faith in the churches of higher learning offering graduate programs in the faith. Finally, they begin preaching to others hoping to make converts to their set of beliefs. In fact, in the book *The Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change*, the researchers stated that it was a myth that psychotherapy was a value-free relationship between patient and doctor. They observed that the improvement of the patient was directly related to how much the patient accepted and adopted the values and beliefs of the therapist as their own.

In summary, these secular pastors are assigning a meaning to life, explaining life, and making sense of life. They are shepherding the human soul. And they are administering the institutions of the care and cure of souls – the mental health centers, the counseling offices, and the psychiatric hospitals.

What are the worldviews of the “secular pastors”?

You may be saying to yourself at this point, “Greg, you are being very unfair and harsh to these professionals who are only trying to help people with the problems of life”. My point is not their sincerity or goal, it is their entire set of beliefs that are fatal to the soul and to the well-being of the person.

Please allow me to give you a short comparison of the cure of souls by the secular pastors and the biblical pastors.

Who is man?

Let’s begin with the basic assumption that underlies all systems of counseling – who is man? Now remember, there are at least 250 different schools of psychology and all of them disagree with each other. There is no way that we can cover all of the doctrines of the secular pastors. I only wish to give a sample of some of the traditional schools of thought.

There are those secular pastors who preach that man is nothing more than a higher form of animal. He is made up of genes, and chemicals, electrical impulses, and DNA, etc. He is a system of biological reactions and processes.

There are others who teach that man is a product of his environment. He is the outgrowth of his childhood experiences, his conflicts, his motivations, his sub-conscious. He is a victim or a product of others. He is a reactor to outside stimulus.

Others preach that man is someone who is struggling to have his needs met. He has a hierarchy of needs that must be met in order to become all that he was meant to be. Man is basically good. He only needs to find a way for that good to come out.

All of these systems have one belief in common – there is no God and people are not sinners. People can be explained in some way or other either by what happens to them or by choices that have been made in a moral vacuum. Every explanation of man is committed to defining people in a way in which Christ, the Savior, will not be the answer.

Biblical counselors preach that man is by nature a sinner. Given the opportunity he will choose the sinful, selfish way. He will sin against others and others will sin against him. Without the intervention of God, he will be dominated by life-long sinful attitudes and actions.

So the basic belief of secular pastors about who man is is wrong.

Why does he do what he does?

Man behaves as he does from a whole multitude of reasons. They range from bad genes, chemical imbalances, the conflict between what a person is versus what others want him to be, their environment for learning, their economic situation in life, their lack of self-esteem, their parents, their past, their drives and basic needs, and on and on.

Please turn your Bibles to James 4:1-3. <Read text> Why does man do what he does? Because he is living according to his wants and desires. Please turn to Matthew 15:16-20. <Read text>. Why does man do what he does? Because he has a heart that is evil.

You will look in vain for anyplace in the Scriptures that even hints that we lack self-esteem, or that we are the victims of our past, or any of the other explanations that the secular pastors give for the behavior of people.

What should he be doing?

Here is a very important point in the care and cure of souls. What or who sets the standard for what people should be doing and thinking? Is it the culture? Is it the value system of the person giving the help? Is it what is the majority vote at the annual meeting? (Just as an explanation, the American Psychological Association determines what is normal and abnormal by vote at their meetings. For example, in the 3rd edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, the bible of the psychiatric/psychological community, homosexual behavior was listed as a deviant behavior. However, at a later meeting the community of secular pastors voted that homosexuality was not a deviant behavior after all; but it is instead an alternative lifestyle. And the 4th edition of that bible documented that change. Does that surprise you? Does that rock your belief in the scientific methods of the psychotherapeutic professions? It should! When we place ourselves into the care of these secular pastors, what standard are they using in their care and cure of souls?

I think that it is self-evident that the Biblical counselor uses the only standard by which man can live – the living, active Word of God.

How do you get him to do what he should be doing?

But then, after you have determined what the person should be doing, then how do you get him to do it?

The presuppositions that I accept control the way I describe something. My presuppositions also control the implications, i.e. the psychotherapy that I will use to treat it. The way I explain something will tell me what to do about it.

If I believe that the person has a chemical imbalance, then obviously I am going to give medication to treat it. Don't you feel sorry for all of those people who have lived before the late 20th century who had to live life without the benefits of those chemicals that they lacked?! Aren't we a blessed generation who have the benefits of modern pharmacology to help us live a productive life?! If I believe that the person been subjected to hurtful behavior by others in the past, then I am going to have them relive those experiences and redefine and transfer actions and responses to what I believe to be normal and right. If I believe that there is a genetic problem, then I teach the person how to cope and teach those around them how to cope and respond to this poor person who has a genetic problem about which they can do nothing. If I believe that there is a huge lack of self-esteem, then I will put the person into a very loving accepting environment in order to give them the self-confidence and affirmation that they need. I will teach them to demand certain behaviors and attitudes from those around them and with whom they have relationships in order to not put them into any environment that does not reinforce their self-esteem. And the list goes on.

The Scriptures tell us how to deal with our hearts and with our sin as well the sin of others in order to glorify God and live a life pleasing to Him.

An Example

Let me give you an example of what I am describing. The situation is a young boy in 1st or 2nd grade in school. He is having some problems complying in the classroom. He is disruptive and very active. He is having some trouble concentrating on his school work. The teacher doesn't have time to give him individual attention, so she sends him down to the office. The school psychologist is called and does some preliminary testing and talking to the boy. A letter is sent home requesting a meeting with the parents. The parents come in and are informed that their boy is displaying the symptoms of ADHD -- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. They are referred to Dr. So-and-so for a professional evaluation and diagnosis.

The parents, thinking that their son has some disease, immediately make the appointment. They are a little surprised that there is no blood drawn, or physical exam performed. There is only a series of questions to them and their son.

At the conclusion of this exam, they are informed that yes, their son does suffer from ADHD. (Just as a little side note – ADHD was invented in committee at the American Psychiatric Association meeting in 1980 and voted into existence at that conference.)

The parents are shocked and very concerned. What is this ADHD. They have heard about it, but they haven't paid much attention to it. They are informed that it is a deficit of certain brain chemicals. Their son is not at fault, they are not at fault. In fact, it is just one of those physical things that our very complex brain has used more of certain chemicals and they are short. But don't worry, this prescription of Ritalin will make everything all better.

Now what has happened. We have a secular pastor who has become a disciple of a certain doctrine that says that the brain can become depleted of chemicals. He has proselytized his parishioners to accept his gospel. They have converted and accept and apply his belief system. After all, he is the expert.

But what is wrong with this picture? There is no blood test for a chemical imbalance in the brain. Brain chemicals cannot be measured. What has been diagnosed is done with a set of 14 characteristics with the child having a certain number of them. The diagnosis and prescription is based on purely subjective information. And yet, it is believed by faith to be true.

In 1994, the latest figures that I have, the amount of Ritalin produced worldwide was 8.5 metric tons with the U.S. consuming about 90% of it. It seems that ADHD is an American malady. Never mind that Ritalin is classified by the Food and Drug Administration as a Class II controlled substance, along with opium, morphine and cocaine. Never mind that there has never been a study on the long-term effects of Ritalin use done. Never mind that in 1995, every public school system in the United States received an additional \$12,500 from the Department of Education for every child that was diagnosed as ADHD, which is classed as a disability and eligible for public funds for disabilities. These were figures in 1995. I do not know what those figures are now. Of course, we do have new medications for ADHD now. I suspect that the

patents on Ritalin expired and that is why we have new, safer, drugs for the replenishment of brain chemicals in these active boys.

What about “Christian psychologists”?

You may be thinking, “Greg, I can see your point about the unbelievers who do not have any idea about God and the Bible. But surely you aren’t putting the Christians who practice psychology and psychotherapy in the same category, are you?”

They are “secular pastors” as well

I am sorry to say that yes, I am classifying them as secular pastors, as well. It is these folks who have the hardest job in the counseling arena. They are Christians. That is not the question, nor the point. The problem for these folks is that they have been converted to the secular pastoral care doctrine and have chosen to place their faith in one or more of these psychologies that exclude God and His Word from their worldview.

They do not have a sufficient Savior or sufficient Scriptures

They have a Bible, they have a Savior, but somehow this is not sufficient for the problems of mankind. If their Bible is in their office, it is not the source for the care and cure of souls. It just sits there, unopened and irrelevant to life. In fact, it is my opinion that their belief in the assumptions of their religion of psychology keep them from even considering that there is any hope or help found in the Bible. In a previous church in which I was a member, there was a Christian psychologist in the congregation. During a Sunday school class, the teacher was giving the Biblical view of anger. This secular pastor raised their hand and corrected the teacher that the Bible was not correct in that teaching because that is contrary to what is now known about anger and its treatment. In what do they place their faith? When asked if they believe that the Bible is the Word of God, they would answer very strongly that they do. Yet, when it comes to the care and cure of souls, it is not sufficient. Only the religion of psychology is sufficient.

What is so different about Biblical counseling?

What essentially happens in the world of the secular pastor is a form of success. They seem to make a difference in the lives of their patients. Yet, how do you measure success?

Secular Pastors’ “success” is not the solution

We as Christians know that the success that is touted is not the solution. These secular pastors can have all the education and the finest supervision in all the world and never understand what counseling is really about. They can be expertly disciplined into the wrong worldview. They can very skillfully and unwittingly mislead the people they counsel. The problems that people face are not due to chemical imbalances, poor gene pools, predispositions, or any of the other myriad of explanations. What is being dealt with is sin and misery, the darkness of life on a planet that lives in darkness. They are nothing more than blind pastors leading blind sheep to slaughter. The gospel of salvation preached by the secular pastors is Godless, Saviorless, Spiritless,

and Wordless. They operate in an alternative church, with an alternative savior, and an alternative gospel.

The rich, complete, and all-sufficient Biblical worldview

There is only one answer to sin and misery and that is Christ and His redeeming work on the cross. Counseling is a theological matter. Always. All counselors deal with the same common problems in life. And the Bible speaks to every issue of life.

What we have as Biblical pastors is a worldview that is rich, complete, and all-encompassing in its scope. We have the basic facts about human existence from the Creator of our existence.

We know that God sovereignly controls all circumstances. We know that God is man's environment. We know that God is up to something in every situation. We know that every human being is dependent on God and is continually interacting with the one true God.

We know that God has spoken to, has noticed, and has evaluated every aspect of human life and has interpreted that life for us.

We know that sin inhabits and perverts every aspect of human functioning, not just the really bad things.

We know that sufferings, difficulties, deceptions, and temptations in all their forms exist within and for God's purposes. He works to bring good out of things that were meant for evil and were experienced as painful.

We know that redemption is as far reaching as sin and misery. Christ works change over the long haul and progressively. The change that lasts the longest and matters the most is the change into the image of His Son. Such change affects how we think, how we feel, how we converse, how we treat people, how we choose.

We know that God's Word and the Holy Spirit are the prime agents for change. He also uses everything else as part of His plan for change.

We know that real Biblical pastoral ministry is an activity that incarnates and applies God's truth in love to real people.

We know that we have a more radical analysis of the problems of life because they are problems between a person and God.

We know we have a wonderful solution because we have a wonderful Savior who resolved that problem, who bore the wrath of God on our behalf, and now gives the Holy Spirit to change us into the image of His dear Son.

Biblical counseling is not something new. It began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. In Genesis chapter 1 verses 28-31, God counseled the man and the woman, defining and interpreting life to them. <Read text> They were created for counsel from God. Ever since the fall, recorded in Genesis chapter 3, man has been seeking ways to interpret life and the problems of living, without God and opposed to His plan and word.

Conclusion My brothers and sisters, why would we go to secular pastors for the care and cure of our souls when they do not have the truth, do not know where to find the truth, intentionally suppress the truth, preach a false gospel, and are counterfeit shepherds?

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Cor. 1:22-25 (ESV)