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Confessions From A Biblical Counselor

By Johnny Kicklighter

My views of counseling when I became a Christian back in the late 1960's was the same as everyone else, i.e., if you need help, you get out the yellow pages of the telephone book, look up a counselor and make an appointment. Little or no regard was given to the type of counseling or the counselor's credentials. It wasn't until the early 1970's when I was introduced to Jay Adams that I begin to see that there was a great distinction between counseling and honest to goodness biblical counseling.

In 1986 I enrolled in Liberty University's School of Lifelong Learning to complete my degree program via a genuine Christian school. I remember how excited I was when I opened my first set of materials and tapes and sat down to take Psychology 101. Soon thereafter I remember my heart sank as the instructor began to teach Freud, Skinner, & Rogers under the guise, "All truth is God's truth." I felt betrayed as all Liberty could offer me was baptized humanism. Liberty University was operating from a faulty presupposition, i.e., all truth is God's truth. They failed to understand "truth" that doesn't pass examination by scripture isn't truth. Liberty doomed themselves when their leaders attempted to accommodate the secular world's theories thereby producing a "theistic psychology."

The success or failure of biblical counseling begins with its presuppositions. Cornelius Van Til defined presuppositionalism as "an insistence on an ultimate category of thought or a conceptual framework which one must assume in order to make a sensible interpretation of reality." In other words, it accepts on faith that God exists and the Bible is true, and understands the implications of adhering to it.

What are some of the key presuppositions in biblical counseling? To start, counseling issues are theological issues because our life is lived before God. That is the antithesis of psychology's main presupposition of there is no God. If there is one single difference that makes the two models stand out it's the fact that one acknowledges God and the other does not. Also, the heart drives behavior and all counseling issues are heart issues. This establishes that all behavior is righteous or unrighteous, not healthy or unhealthy; and certainly not the psychological heresy "feelings are neither good nor bad, they just exist." Furthermore, one's view on the nature of man is critical in understanding behavior and offering biblical solutions. If man is depraved and his behavior is the result of sin, the biblical counselor can offer solutions, hope, and a cure. If there is no sin, reductionism becomes the presupposition and all behavior is reduced to chemical imbalances, diseases or other ambiguous impulses.

Biblical counseling teaches man's heart is at the center of his feelings and behavior. Jeremiah 17:9–10, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." The heart affects the body because of the union between the heart and the body. This is referred to as duplexity, a union of material and immaterial; hence the origin of psychosomatic illnesses. The body may also affect the heart by imposing restrictions on the heart (Matthew 26:41). Sin, of course, has affected us all with some degree of abnormality.

Fundamental to understand man's behavior is the construct of habit. Habit is simply a pattern of behavior acquired through frequent repetition. God has blessed us all with the capability for habit. Habits can be both learned and unlearned behavior. Consequently, sinful habit patterns are easily

developed because man is a habitual sinner. Breaking sinful habits can only be accomplished by using the put-off/put-on dynamic. The counselee must replace sinful habits with Godly behavior. Some sinful habits can become a consuming lifestyle for people. Some of the following sinful habit patterns are common in counselees:

1. Grief: Grief can sometimes immobilize a counselee to where they are unable to function normally. I Samuel 15:35–16:1 gives a good example of a godly man being overcome with grief: "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel. And the Lord said unto Samuel, how long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go...." Teaching the counselee to not live by feelings is important to someone suffering from prolonged grief. A simple put-on of go and do is often required.

2. Depression: People who frequently experience trials in life will encounter depression. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed," II Corinthians 4:8–9. It's important to distinguish between presentation, performance, and preconditioning problems when dealing with depression. You need to pay close attention to what the person has been doing instead of how they are feeling. Everyone will occasionally feel "down," so it's imperative for the counselor not to be led astray.

3. ADD/ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a widely diagnosed illness that has no basis in science. It's simply a subjective diagnosis using empirical observations of bad behavior. Obedience is the core issue regarding ADD/ADHD and it's important to label the counselee's behavior using biblical terminology. Making a list of sinful practices, replacing them with godly ones coupled with accountability is helpful with this kind of person.

4. Fear: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a repetitive thought pattern that has its roots in fear. Fear is an emotion given to us by God for us to experience in anticipation of some specific pain or danger. Godly fear keeps us safe from danger. However, becoming afraid or feeling anxious about a situation where there is no danger is sin. Ungodly fear may take many forms in a counselee's life and is always self-oriented and suspicious. Replacing fear with love, having the counselee focus on doing the loving thing, plus breaking the victim mentality, helps the person overcome the practice of irrational

fear.

Using the biblical doctrine and practice of forgiveness is instrumental to effective counseling in many cases. Frequently counselees harbor deep-seated bitterness and refuse to follow the scriptural process to obtain or grant forgiveness. Romans 12:18–19, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord." Jay Adams in "A Theology of Christian Counseling" said man's greatest need is forgiveness, and he could not think of a more important subject for counselors to understand. Indeed, he spent nearly 50 pages discussing the subject; far more than any other topic. Cultivating a forgiving attitude in counselees is vitally important in freeing them from guilt and bitterness.

Adams speaks of the heart forgiveness Paul has in II Timothy 4:16, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Jesus spoke of it in Mark 11:15, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Stephen demonstrated it in Acts 7:60, "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." This was an excellent

example of the words of Jesus in Luke 6:28, "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." Teaching counselees the concept of heart forgiveness helps the offended party turn the matter over to God according to Romans 12:19. This is especially important when reconciliation between the offended parties is not possible.

It's important for the biblical counselor to understand that truth and godliness are hand-in-hand and it's not possible to divorce the two. Consequently, biblical counselors must become theologians if their goal is to have counselees please God.

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How To Choose A Christian Counselor

By Dave Lloyd

Christian therapy as a profession is relatively new, having been practiced only over the last few decades. While many in the Christian community adhere to a strict code of Bible-based, scriptural, prayer-focused means of helping individuals, additional methods have proven beneficial. The fear many have who are consider Christian counseling is that they would jeopardize their faith or somehow be disobedient to God or contradict the Bible. Yet through the wise choosing of a Christian therapist,

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one can find the help they need while still maintaining a Biblical basis for faith and incorporating Scripture and prayer into their personal growth process.

Christian counseling is best done by someone with an advanced (Master's) degree trained in the principles of psychotherapy and grounded in the essentials of Christian teaching. Through this combination, they will be able to discern behavioral or relational patterns that are both consistent with the Bible and lead to healthy spiritual and emotional growth. What many Christian counselors have come to believe over time is that emotional and spiritual growth are not mutually exclusive. In other words, one cannot be spiritual growing while emotionally bankrupt or relationally out of integrity. So while much of the time spent in the therapy room discussing your particular issue will focus on how to solve the primary issue you're facing, the ultimate goal of most Christian therapists is to lead you to a greater aware of tools you can develop to increase both your spiritual and emotional health.

In order to choose the right Christian therapy professional for you, it's best to focus on:

– their education and training – the role they believe therapy plays in the lives of their clients – the way they plan to integrate biblical and relational truths into therapy – their personal Statement of Faith or statement of a relationship with Christ – whether you feel a connection with them – how much you believe their expertise and personal character will help them in the practice of therapy

Choosing the right Christian counselor is an important consideration on your way to continued emotional and spiritual growth.

Dave Lloyd has created the online guide to Christian therapy and counseling at

<http://www.christiantherapy.org>



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