

19. Counsel

February 14, 2010

Christian psychology and counseling became a fad in 1990s with the influence of Dr. James Dobson from the Focus on the Family and Kevin Leman. Even many churches jumped on the band wagon of this new wind rather than faithfully teaching the Word of God.

Don't get me wrong, I am not against Christian counseling. As a matter of fact, I strongly believe that there are definite needs for biblical counselings for those who need godly guidelines whether it is for their marriages, finance, raising children and other issues.

With this new fad, a couple of old phrases started to float around among the believers as if they were from the Bible:

"Heaven helps those who help themselves." and "This, too, shall pass."

According to a Christian research group, George Barna, they report that eight out of ten Americans believe that the statement are from the Bible. For the record, neither is in the Bible. You may find them somewhere in New Age books, not in ours.

English poet John Donne said simply, "No man is an island." We need each other and we can help one another with encouragement and advices. The Bible is full of wise words from the Holy Spirit to us. But many times we don't follow it because of our stubbornness or we don't know where to look for guidance from it. That is where a biblical counsel comes in.

In this last study of the Book of Proverbs, we are going to study about counsel since the Book itself is about counsel.

A. WHAT IS MEANT BY COUNSELING IN THE OT?

There are several different meanings in Hebrew for counseling. We are going to look at three definitions:

1) Sod

Proverbs 15:22 Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

The word 'counsel' is "sod" in Hebrews. It means "being brought close together for the purpose of secret communication and counsel. It has ingredient of confidentiality which is one of the very important parts of counseling. We will talk more about this later.

2) Tachbulah

Proverbs 1:5 A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel

The word Solomon uses for 'counsel' comes from the root term "tachbulah", meaning "to bind or to pledge." Originally, this word was used of "rope-pulling, such as, steering, directing a ship." It's the idea of giving specific direction to someone to correct his or her course.

3) Yaats

Proverbs 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.

A popular counseling technique today defines the counselor's role as one of neutral observation, someone who simply listens and reflects what the other person is saying – without making any judgments or offering any advice.

I can understand that counselors need to listen and gather information at the beginning. But then to sit there, knowing the help this other person needs but not telling him or her is completely foreign to the biblical view of counseling. To give wise "yaats" means sharing godly, direct, objective information.

B. WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING?

1) To help heal and relieve anxiety

Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.

Proverbs 12:25 Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad.

No one escape the bumps and bruises that come from living in a fallen world. But the tongue of the wise can act like soothing and therapeutic medicines because the truth and healing come from the Word of God. It strengthens our inner spirits to fight the infection of anxiety.

2) To help us find maximum fulfillment in life

Proverbs 11:14 Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

It doesn't matter how wise or smart one person can be. Wise counsel from a variety of viewpoints provides a fuller, more accurate picture of the options available in our lives.

3) To help us plan correctly

Proverbs 15:22 Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

Proverbs 20:18 Plans are established by counsel; By wise counsel wage war.

When I talk with some Christians, they tell me about their future life plans – getting new jobs, moving to new locations, getting married, etc. I ask them if they know that that is what the Lord wants. In many occasions, they have not consulted with the Lord. They just assume that since it is what they want, they assume that it must be God's will as well. Not so. We need to seek His will for us in every aspect of our lives.

This brings us to the next benefit.

4) To help us become wise, to see life through the lens of God's divine viewpoint

The world's idea of confidence and the best option are often far from God's will. When believers take cues from the worldly ways, their lives become scarred and circumvented by their own foolish things and choices. Eventually frustration and bitterness batter their spirits. Then, they start to blame God for allowing this kind of disaster to happen to them.

C. WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS TO BE A COUNSELOR?

A good and godly counselor should have the following five traits as an effective counselor according to the Book of Proverbs.

1) Purity of Life

Proverbs 4:18-19 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.

If your life is full of contradictions and sins, the people who seek counsels will not see you as an example to follow. I am not saying that you ought to have a perfect life. Nobody does. But you must back up what you say with your godly life.

2) Confidentiality

Proverbs 11:13 A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

One of the most basic requirements of a good counselor is a closed mouth. Confidentiality brings forth security and trust which open up freedom in communicating. An effective counselor respects the power of information and handles it with extreme discretion.

3) Timing and Tact

Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.

A competent counselor is patient, slow to speak and quick to listen. At the appropriate moment, the counselor gives precisely and carefully crafted words of counsel instead of insensitively dumping everything without knowing how the counselee can handle it.

4) Honesty

Proverbs 24:23-26 These things also belong to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment. 24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," Him the people will curse; Nations will abhor him. 25 But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, And a good blessing will come upon them. 26 He who gives a right answer kisses the lips.

The people who really want help and want to change their lives with God's guidance will appreciate your telling them the truth even though they may not like it when they hear what you said.

5) Genuine interest and love

Proverbs 27:9 Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel.

Each time we apply the four traits I mentioned just now in our counseling, the counselee can see our genuine interest and love for them and it will make an impact in their lives.

D. WHY DO I NEED TO GET COUNSELLED BY A CHRISTIAN?

Proverbs 19:21 There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel--that will stand.

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

Proverbs 12:5 The thoughts of the righteous are right, But the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.

It is so important for a Christian to receive a sound biblical counsel from a godly counselor, not from an unbeliever. It doesn't matter how many doctorate degrees that counselor might have. He or she can not impart a godly counsel to you which you need desperately.

If you are in need of marriage counselings and you contact a secular marriage counselor, you will get worldly counselings which would bring worse problems into your marriage and life, not to mention that they would recommend a divorce or separation as an easy way out.

Psychologists and psychotherapists insist that they are the ones who know all things and they are the ones who have authority in human minds. But God is the One who really knows the deepest things of men. Rather than depending on another sinful human's theories about humans, we should consult the Creator's Handbook, our Bible. True biblical counseling should be based on what the Lord teaches us through His Word.

In our church, we have a group of godly people who are qualified to give you good sound and godly counsels:

- Pastor Jack Laverty whom I've known for about twenty years, has a great deal of wisdom and insights in just about any area of lives.
- Pastor Merrill and his wife Cindy. They have done several premarital counselings and they are very wise in many things.
- Elder Jerry Hamby and his wife Ranae can help you with marriage, finance and other spiritual counsels.
- Mike Soldwisch can also provide you with an excellent and much needed financial counsels.
- My wife Karen is also available for you ladies to come along side of you with godly wisdom.

We have many more people who are available to serve you and help you with their wisdom.

E. IS COUNSELING ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL?

There is absolutely no counselor who can guarantee the outcome of counseling in a positive way every time. Because even at their best, people still make mistakes. A missed clue or wrong conclusion is all it takes. If the root problem is involved in medical issue, the situation just become harder than ever before.

Even if everything is done properly and the medical issue is not involved, the result of the counseling can still not be right. The Book of Proverbs tells us why:

1) The counsel is ignored

Proverbs 10:17 He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, But he who refuses correction goes astray.

The results of any counseling situation ultimately rest in the hands of the counselees. They may be given the best advice, but if they choose to disregard it, nothing will change. This happens very often.

2) They only want to talk

Proverbs 18:2 A fool has no delight in understanding, But in expressing his own heart.

Like the fool, many seek counseling not because they desire insight, direction or reproof, but because they simply enjoy telling others about their woes. Or they want you to agree with what they are about to do no matter what the counselor tells them.

3) They don't desire to change

Proverbs 19:19 A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; For if you rescue

him, you will have to do it again.

Desire, the will to change and give up old habits to take on new, must be present before lasting change can occur. This is the reason why I do not allow any counselor to make an initiation to a counselee to start a counseling session. Until they have a desire to change, nothing will be changed.

4) Some cover up and defend

Proverbs 29:9 If a wise man contends with a foolish man, Whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace.

When the counseling hits too close to home, some counselees will attempt to back you off with angry outbursts punctuated with pounding fists and threatening words. Others may laugh inappropriately, as if you had just told the world's funniest joke. All to make you think your advice is nonsense and they can't possibly take it seriously.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) If you are seeking counsel, look for godly counselors from the church.
- 2) If you are going to give counsel, do not base your counsel on anything else other than the Bible.
- 3) Before each counseling session starts, ask the Lord to guide your time in prayer.