Counseling God’s Way

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Counseling God’s Way
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Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 1
Introduction-The Lord as Counselor

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Lord, we give You thanks for this first convening session of the Counseling God’s Way course. I thank You for each one of the lives who will share in this course with us, for You bless, and touch, and teach, and mold, and shape, and speak to all of us. We consecrate this time to Your work in our lives, Your will, Your honor, and for Your glory. We ask You to make it a part of Your great promise when You said You would build Your church. Use these times and use our lives. Lord, we thank You for the Scriptures. We treasure them. They’re such a great gift from You. And even more, we treasure the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the One who receives us, guides us into all the truth, and takes the things of Jesus Christ and makes them ours. We ask You to enlighten us, convict us, encourage us, comfort us, sort things out for us, and equip us to do the things that are pleasing in Your sight. We open up to You and cry out for a mighty outpouring of Your Holy Spirit throughout this course. May it be grace upon grace. And as the Word goes forth and we receive it, may there be great grace upon us that we might obtain a great proclamation of the things of the Jesus Christ. We ask this in His mighty name. Amen.

Introduction

Here are a few introductory thoughts to Counseling God’s Way from the introduction on page one, let’s use that, not for just the study in this visit, but for the entire course. The three-fold purpose of this course is number one, to let God counsel us His way. Every believer needs the counsel of God regularly. Don’t buy into the thinking of man that counseling is for the weirdoes, the psychotic, or the seriously troubled, and that it is not for us, who are only half weird. Don’t buy it. We all need God’s counsel regularly. As I have taught on this subject across the country now for a few years and overseas a lot, I have found that the biggest thing God does, as we study this subject of counseling God’s way, is that He counsels us! And what greater thing is there than that? What greater thing to ask out of this course but that God would counsel us along the way!

The second purpose of the class is to allow God to equip us a bit to give counsel His way. Another great Biblical truth is that all of us, every Christian, we’re all called on to give God’s counsel periodically. Don’t buy into the humanistic thinking of the world that counseling is just for the human experts. No, we’re all called in the kingdom of God. Every Christian is called to be involved in giving and receiving of counsel.

So, because we’ll be needing counsel regularly, let’s ask the Lord to give us counsel. Because God wants to use us to counsel others periodically, let’s ask God to equip us to counsel a bit His way. So the first two general purposes of the course are to let God counsel us a bit, number one; number two is to allow God to equip us a bit to give counsel. And then number three, to have God warn us concerning counseling man’s way.
Counseling God’s Way

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“Introduction - The Lord as Counselor” Lesson 01

All of us face that continually. Sometimes we notice it, sometimes we don’t. The world has its way to counsel and God has His way to counsel.

The amazing thing that has been going on in the church for some years now is the church is trying to learn the ways of man’s counseling and bring it into the church. And it’s changing radically the counseling ministry of the church and how Christians view counseling—what it is, where to get it, what to do with it, what it should look like. And we need to be warned concerning counseling man’s way. It’s one of the deadening influences, not only in the American church, but in the Church worldwide. And I run into this issue all over the place. I mean whether it’s Kiev, Moscow, Sydney, Australia or off in the wild, wild west of the Philippine Islands like Mindanao Island. Counseling man’s way is coming into the church and the Lord wants to warn us.

We want to approach the subject this way: first, get counsel and get equipped, because that’s the way the Word approaches every issue, really. It gives us the truth we need and equips us to share it with others. But the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation give a constant warning theme about what isn’t right, but maybe looks and sounds right.

A classic example of that is when Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). That’s the truth. That’s what we need to hear. It touches us and then we can touch others with that truth. But not too long after this Lord Jesus said, “Beware of the leaven of the Sadducees and the Pharisees” (Matthew 16:6). These were the two major religious leadership groups in the nation, in the chosen nation of Israel. And their teaching had a leaven in it, a corrupting influence. And Jesus didn’t just say, “Here’s the truth. Now watch out. Everything you hear isn’t true.” That’s a good warning too. We need to hear that just to be on the alert. He went far beyond that. He was saying, “Here’s the truth and watch those two groups out there, the major authoritative groups with the biggest following in all of Judaism. Watch out for them; they’ve got a leaven in their teaching that corrupts.”

And we’ll be doing that along the way too. Not in any way to try and take on some self-righteous air like we know everything and somebody else knows nothing. No way. Only God knows everything and man needs always to learn more no matter what God has taught him. We want to be true to the Word, to the way the Lord deals with truth and the way He touches our lives.

In my own history of involvement in this arena of ministry, the Lord has let me teach His Word now for twenty-nine years. And the first year I was a Sunday school teacher, then a youth pastor, and then the third year of teaching the Word I was pastoring. And then the Lord let me pastor in Dallas, Texas for fourteen years and then at Calvary Chapel Irvine in Orange County for eleven years. And in twenty-five years of pastoral ministry, through thousands and thousands of counseling situations, God gave me a heart for the counseling ministry. I saw in the practical experience of the people of God how important it was. I saw in the Word of God, increasingly, how God had ordained it. It’s just part of church life. God’s put it there and it’s critical.
Then about fifteen or twenty years ago, I began to notice counseling approaches coming into the church of Jesus Christ that were undermining the way God had always ordained to do it. And before I knew it, I was doing a lot of study and teaching on this subject.

Five years ago we did a series of Bible studies. And I often did some book studies through the Word, and then interspersed it with topical studies. We had done a long expositional, verse-by-verse study and we were going to do an expositional, topical Bible study. And the subject was going to be Biblical counseling. And I told the folks, “I don’t know how long this study is going to take. I think it’s going to be one of the longer ones. I usually did the topical studies, eight, ten, or twelve units of study on things all the way from the Holy Spirit to the grace of God, to the Word of God, the law of God, you name it. And I said, “This might be one of the longer ones, you know, maybe twelve, fifteen, maybe even eighteen studies. And all I had before me was a mountain, a literal mountain of Scripture verses. God laid on my heart strongly not to make this a research project. There are a lot of great researchers out there. Some are worldly, some are godly. And the world is doing it their way, and there are some godly researchers.

Now I had read through the years a few books by Jay Adams, whom I respect greatly. I had read some other books that troubled me greatly. But basically I’m not a researcher. I love to read, but as the years have gone on I have read other things less and less, and the Word of God more and more. And this was not a research project. It was a Bible study teaching project. And all that was in front of me were just mountains of Scripture that the Lord had led me to through the years And I just went before the Lord in prayer with just the Word of God and prayer and God’s faithfulness and the work of His Spirit, and actually the outline you have for this course came out of that study and those days of prayer.

The Lord literally counseled me through the study step-by-step. I didn’t have a clue where to begin, let alone where to go next or that it was going to end up being twenty-two one-hour studies. It was an hour Sunday morning, and an hour Wednesday night for eleven straight weeks. And I didn’t know that it would fall into five or six segments and this would be part of that. But step-by-step it unfolded. And when it was all done I looked back and I was almost overwhelmed by the Biblical, spiritual logic of it all. It was like, wow Lord! You’ve been speaking to us, haven’t You? You said You are the Wonderful Counselor and my goodness, if anyone needed it I did. I know this is an important arena, Lord, but where to begin and where to go and let it stand just on what You say and not a lot of human experts good, bad or indifferent, but just what You have to say.

I sent out a letter, at the suggestion of one of our elders, to every pastor I knew in the world and offered to give them a gift of those twenty-two tapes if they could use them in their ministry. Well, we were not quite prepared for what happened. For twenty some years Living in Christ Ministries, which had grown out of the first church I pastored in Dallas, was on radio and having meetings and now and then a conference and sending out tapes. And we were sending them out by the thousands year by year. Well, overnight we were sending them out by the tens of thousands. I mean, overnight. And so many multiplied times more tapes went out on that than anything I had ever taught up to that
point in twenty some years of ministry. So it was really like the Lord was ringing a bell saying “yes,” this was important as a pastor to your flock.

As an under shepherd I had to do it to be faithful to the Chief Shepherd, but I’ve had some other things in mind here too. The Lord knew I had a heart for pastors. Pastors have been on my heart more and more through the years. I loved being a pastor in two churches those twenty-five years. I’ve loved even more now traveling among the churches and helping and encouraging pastors. People ask if I take counseling appointments anymore? Basically, no! I still counsel a lot, but it is almost always with pastors and their families or their leaders when I am out on the road and staying in their homes and all. Most of the time I am teaching about this subject, which is kind of a shift from counseling to equipping counselors, from being a pastor to equipping pastors and helping them. I’ve had a heart for pastors. I don’t even know how to express what pastors face and go through. I mean if I got real specific you’d think I have quite an imagination—that it couldn’t be all like that. What pastors face is just phenomenal—the impossibilities! The joys, the blessings are also beyond measure. But the warfare, the perplexity, and the day-to-day surprises can turn you from a tranquil Sea of Galilee to an absolute hurricane in fifteen minutes or less. And my heart has been building for pastors through the years.

When we sent the letter offering the study tapes to the pastors, I was overwhelmed at the response! But then I began to see, it was the Lord’s answer to my prayer. Years before I had asked the Lord if there was any way I could somehow encourage and help pastors and those in ministry or those who are preparing for ministry or want to minister more. This changed the entire course of the ministry God has given to me and my dear wife. Brian was the first one on the phone to order those tapes. He wanted all those tapes at their church in Vista. And the next thing I knew he asked me to a pastors’ conference to take those twenty-two hours and do like hour and a half every day at camp, kind of as an overview of the study. And I said, “Let’s do it. Let’s be praying and see what God does.”

Next thing I knew, “You’ve got to do that for the whole congregation” and we did that. And we were still broadcasting on KWVE at that time, so we announced the study and people came to that all-day Saturday overview from all over Southern California. Some folks came from as far away as Modesto. And it was another wake-up call. And it was like, “oh my goodness, Lord, what is going on?” I knew this was important. I know there is a hunger and a need, but I underestimated the dimensions of it. And then the next thing I knew pastors were calling from near and far.

And before I knew it in four steps in the ministry at a time, I passed on over a year and a half period of time, I my ministry on to my dear, dear friend and associate, John “not the radio host” Stewart. I was spending hours every week with John praying with him and for him; comforting him as he was soon to be the pastor. Since then I have traveled near and far teaching a lot on this subject, sometimes on related pieces of the heart of it, like the “Growing in the Grace of God” class. And sometimes “Contending for the Faith,” which takes these issues and extends them out beyond counseling to many other arenas.
That is the story behind this course on counseling. Basically it’s kind of, in my own heart and life, a culmination of twenty plus years of study and living in counseling. I know I don’t have all the answers that God has for our lives or for how He wants to counsel. But I sure have more than I did twenty some years ago because God is faithful to speak when we cry out. And you’ll see probably as we go along, that I’m noticeably convinced that God does have all the answers. I love to let the Word speak to us and think out loud together of the implications of that, both for God’s way and warning about man’s way.

So that’s kind of a perspective on where we are, where we are going, who God is making of me and what He is laying on my heart and why a class like this. I praise God for this opportunity. So, with that in mind let’s plunge into the Word. That kind of gives a framework of thinking and preparation for direction.

**What Counseling Is**

The first arena of study has to do with What Counseling Is. This is a perfect Biblical place to begin. The reason being, if we’re going to study counseling God’s way, let’s get God’s definition. I mean, if we’re going to study about how to counsel God’s way, let’s ask God to tell us what this is about. What the whole subject is—counseling God’s way. What Counseling Is, and we’ll look at three aspects of it: the issue of the Lord as Counselor, and then Counseling and Discipleship, and then Counseling and Sanctification. Then we will have a very strong Biblical understanding, a starting point for what counseling is.

We’ll do some Old Testament verses on the Lord as Counselor. And then some New Testament verses. You can just jot at the top of the Old Testament list Isaiah 9:6, where the prophetic title is given to Messiah…“and His name shall be Wonderful, Counselor”.

One of the titles of the Lord, one of the names of the Lord Jesus Christ is Wonderful Counselor. That’s a great place to anchor our thinking because I really believe Biblically that the critical truth where we want to anchor our thinking is right here. The Lord is the Counselor. In fact, it’s His name—His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor.

Here’s the great issue and this is the great divide; this is what begins to change everything when you consider counseling God’s way. In the kingdom of man, man counsels man. In the kingdom of God, God counsels man. That’s the ultimate radical difference. Everything we’re going to look at in this course is somehow related to that. We’ll be looking at what it is and how to do it, as well as watching out for what is being substituted for what it is and how to do it. This is the critical issue. And we’ll elaborate on this in dozens of directions. But if we don’t anchor our thinking here, we are drifting off course all the rest of the way. “And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor.”

What is counseling from God’s perspective? Here’s what it’s all about. It’s about this truth—the Lord being the Counselor.

Let’s think in the Old Testament for a while about the Lord as Counselor. In Psalm 32:8 God is speaking to His people through His servant David here. And God says,
God has taken upon Himself the role of being our instructor, our teacher, our guide, our counselor. I will do it. I’ll instruct you. I’ll teach you. I’ll guide you. Or that word is often translated in many versions, counsel you. I will do it. God has taken this role upon Himself. It’s not something man does. It’s something God does. I will guide you. That is, I will counsel you.

And the Lord instructs us and teaches us in the way we should go. Man counsels to find a way that works for you. Hey, find something that works for me. Hey, give me a way to walk that works for me, something that is true for me and good for me. Maybe others won’t accept it, but show me the way that works for me. That’s not how God counsels. God counsels in the way we must go. He knows the path that carries divine necessity with it. The way we should go. The way we’ve got to go or it is a disaster. He’s not just counseling us to find something that kind of experientially works. He’s counseling us in the way we must go—the way of life.

Then in Psalm 73:24 the psalmist confesses a great truth:

You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

This is to be our confidence for time and eternity. Throughout time God will guide us with His counsel, if we let Him, if we look to Him, and if we trust Him to do so. And afterward, what will He do? As we’re walking along that path of His counsel, He’ll just receive us right into glory. He’ll just continue it in heaven forever. The Lord is our Counselor.

Psalm 33:18-22 and 25:12-15 sort of restates what we have just looked at. Psalm 23 takes a little bit different direction for a while. There are many other places, like the verses we’ve listed, where the Lord in the Old Testament says, “I will counsel you.” He basically takes the counseling responsibility upon His own shoulders. But there are a lot of other Old Testament verses that have significant counseling implications in light of this truth. The truth being, the Lord is the Counselor. Now with that truth as a given, which the Scriptures make very bold and clear in many places, there are a lot of other Old Testament Scriptures, and in the New Testament ones, that have very significant counseling implication and application, given this truth that the Lord is the Counselor.

For example Psalm 23. The Lord is the Counselor, but the One who is the Wonderful Counselor is also the Good Shepherd. The One who wants to counsel us, look what He is and is able to do, as He counsels.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
   He leads me beside the still waters.
3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

I’m glad the church of Jesus Christ has shown such great interest in giving attention to
this psalm at the death and passing and funerals. Praise God, that’s a great time for it. But
it was designed especially for the living. I mean it’s great at that time. I’ve taught out of
that at moments like that too, and been comforted at moments like that. But this is a
psalm for everyday living. We’re the sheep, He’s the shepherd. That day is now. The One
who is our Wonderful Counselor, He’s also our shepherd, our guarder, our provider, our
caretaker, our helper, our protector.

And because the Lord is our shepherd we shall not want. We’ll have everything we need
if we walk under His shepherding care. So many people out seeking counsel and do you
know what they really need to be reconsidering? Who is their shepherd? Therefore where
and how are they going to get everything they need? It’s right here in Psalm 23. Our
Wonderful Counselor is also our shepherd, therefore we shall not want. We shall have
what we need.

He who is our Wonderful Counselor, if we let Him counsel us as He counsels, then He
will shepherd, provide, and care for us. He’ll make us lie down in green pastures. A lot of
people seeking counsel, you know what they really need to be reconsidering?—just to lie down for a while,
spiritually speaking, in green pastures. Just slow down, lie down, and let the Lord feed
you for a while. A lot of people seeking counsel, they’re just in a frantic frenzy,
undernourished, weak and on the edge of a panic. Now the Lord understands and He
cares. And many of them can have the deepest of their needs met just slowing down,
lying down as it were, just resting a while with the Lord in green pastures. I mean,
spiritually speaking, here are the green pastures.

There are a lot of weed fields out there. Not wheat fields, weed fields. You know, with a
lot of humanistic thinking, you know. Not fields of grain but just fields of weeds. You
know, wild things, non-productive things. Not nurturing, just growing but not helping.
The Lord loves us to lie down in green pastures. Just rest a while and get fed.

Our wonderful counselor who is also our shepherd, He leads us beside the still waters. A
lot of people seeking counsel, they just need some quiet times of refreshment. They need
quiet times of refreshment with the Lord or with another brother or sister, depending on
the situation. Brother getting with brother, sister with sister, being refreshed with the still
waters, the peaceful work of the Holy Spirit in our lives; abiding in Christ, walking in the Spirit. Considering again what the Christian life is all about.

Verse three says, “He restores my soul.” Is it God’s restoration projects or man’s recovery programs? Oh, they’re popular these days. You know, restore my soul. Recover me. Put me back into what I should be. Hey, how about the Good Shepherd? He restores my soul. He can put our soul, our inner life back into the state it ought to be in. No one can do it like He can do it.

And He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. How many people seeking counsel—are just driven with a passion or a panic, they’ve got to find the right path to take in life. Decisions. Choices. Options. And, here it is in the Bible. He leads me in the paths of righteousness, the right paths are the righteous paths. And not just for a feel-good experience for me or a, “Whew, that takes care of that decision!” It is much bigger than that, it is for His name’s sake. He’ll put us on the right paths and it will end up honoring His name. Boy, how’s that for counsel? We’re not talking about a quick fix here. We’re talking about a life path that the Shepherd is leading us on.

This is the same One who is our wonderful counselor. How about just hanging out with Him? You say, “Yeah, but I need help in that.” He knows that, that’s why we are to counsel one another, as we’ll see later down the road. He uses instruments of sheep ministering to sheep. But sheep only have to give what the Shepherd gives them. How can a sheep help another sheep? Here comes a wolf! Hey, no problem, I’ll take care of you. Bahh! Why am I not comforted? But the Good Shepherd, oh hey that’s another matter!

Verse four says, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Many people are in the deep valley of darkness, the shadow of death. It’s like death is casting a shadow over them. Many people live daily in what you could call the valley of the shadow of death. Just in a deep place of darkness, confusion, fear, apprehension. Here’s the great thing—“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”—and we all get our treks through there. I know that from the Word of God. I know that from watching Jesus in the Scriptures. I know that from watching great men of God like Moses and Paul and others. And I can bear witness by my own testimony. We all get our treks through the valley of the shadow of death. Where everything just looks like it’s dark and dying and impossible, with no way through. And fear threatens from every side.

I’ve been there and I may be there again. But praise God, the more we walk with our Shepherd, we can say this—“Yea, though I walk through that valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” I’m not going to dread all the evil that lies around me. Why? “For You are with me.” This is not whistling by the graveyard. This is not the “unpower” of positive thinking. This is faith based on fact. I will fear no evil. Why?—because “You are with me.” Because the Lord’s there! Not because we’re somebody. Not just because we just refuse to be afraid. All those things will run out sooner or later. Someone big enough, with a big enough “Boo” will just bring that to the end. No, I need more than
that. I’ll fear no evil right in the valley of the shadow of death, when all looks like
darkness and dying. Why?—“For You are with me.” And He is with us, as a Shepherd.
“Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.” The rod is to beat off the enemy, the wolf.
The staff with the crook is to pull us out of the pits, out of the mess.

Verse five says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Yes, in
this world we have a vicious enemy. Whipped at the cross and by the resurrection, but he
won’t stop fighting until he’s thrown in the pit. But right in the presence of our enemies,
the enemy and all those who are cooperating with him, wittingly or unwittingly, the Lord
prepares a table before us right there. All the way from food to eat to spiritual
nourishment when all around is the enemy.

“You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.” Of course, this is the picture of a
shepherd anointing the injured or needy sheep. But it is done in such a way that there’s
just overflowing blessings. Apply this to New Testament believers who could walk in the
fullness of the Spirit. The Lord anoints us, the Spirit upon us, until the cup of our life just
overflows.

A lot of Christians that are seeking counsel, really need nothing other than just letting the
Wonderful Counselor, who is also their Shepherd, just anoint their head with oil. That is,
pour out the Spirit upon them until the cup of their life just overflows with His presence
and His work. Boy, I’ll tell you, when the Lord is doing that, you can have a hundred
counseling problems being dealt with simultaneously by one work of God, by the filling
of the Holy Spirit.

And look at the assurance we can walk in as we walk with our Shepherd. “Surely
goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house
of the Lord forever.” What a great assurance that all the way through this life, we have
this assurance, that God’s goodness and God’s mercy will be right there with us. In His
goodness to supply what’s needed, it is with a loving intention. And His mercy—to be
sure we don’t get what we deserve! What a Shepherd.

And He’ll do it all the days of our lives. Yes, even today! He’ll also do it all those other
dreaded days. Yesterday He was doing it, whether we saw it or not. And tomorrow He’ll
do it. And then when that’s all done we’ll just live in God’s house forever. That’s the
path of walking with the Good Shepherd. Who also is our Wonderful Counselor. If the
sheep of God’s pasture would just, as it were, cuddle up close to their Wonderful
Counselor and find out He is their Good Shepherd and walk with Him day by day, I think
we would be blown away at what a Wonderful Counselor He truly is.

Oh I love these Old Testament verses that have such mighty implications in light of this
truth—the Lord is the Counselor.

Well, if we spend that much time on every passage, we’ll be here twelve months. Let’s
hop onto the next page to Psalm 34:18. Oh, this is a great one! Think of the implications
of this truth in light of the fact that the Lord is the Counselor.
Psalm 34:18,

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Some versions translate that last part, “And saves such as are crushed in spirit.” Life comes like a stone sometimes, crushing us and breaking our hearts. No one, no one is likely to go through life without a broken heart. Think of that. What a vain dream to think that we can go through life without a broken heart. Look at the Lord Jesus. He died of a broken heart. And look at His saints of old, the ones He used. It seems the more their hearts were broken, the more God used them.

I don’t know if God’s through with breaking my heart. If He is, that’s fine. But I doubt it. I used to run and hide from a broken heart. Don’t get in those places where your heart can get broken. How do you hide from God? You can’t even hide from the devil. He’s quite a heart breaker too, but never for a good reason. Even if the enemy breaks our heart, as God puts it back together, it’s as good as if God had broken it. He gets the same purpose out of it, the same use.

Sometimes folks say, “I’ll never find the counsel I need. My heart is so broken, so shattered.” Or crushed, this one phrase could be rendered. “I’ll never find the counsel I need.” Listen, God specializes in the broken heart and the crushed spirit. It’s like those are the ones He does His greatest work in and ultimately then through.

See, the Lord is near to those who have a broken heart. The brokenhearted feel like they are totally cast off, isolated, rejected and even out of God's love. The truth is the Lord is never nearer than when the heart is broken. He’s never more available to be more intimately known than when the heart is broken. What a Counselor that is, huh? The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.

And He saves, He rescues, He delivers such as have a crushed spirit. What a wonderful counselor. So many that are seeking counsel need just this kind of ministry from the Lord and no one can offer it like the Lord Himself.

Psalm 46:1-3,

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. SELAH

What a great truth this is. See, the Lord is our Counselor. Now add this truth—The Lord who is our Counselor, He also is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Yes, even if the world is falling apart and shaking, He’s still our refuge and our strength. He’s a very present help in trouble.

Does it ever seem like the only thing that will be appropriate that could possibly help is a perfect place to hide in safety? Well, God is our refuge. We can seek refuge in Him. We can do it any time, any place, whether we’re alone or with multitudes. We can hide in the Lord, as it were, by faith. Seek refuge in Him, He is a protecting, sheltering, hiding place. He’s a refuge, a place of safety.

Do you ever feel like, if God doesn’t give strength, you’ll never have any? Well, God is our strength. Oh so many seeking counsel are asking, “How can I be strong?” The world has its ways. Well, you look in the mirror and you tell yourself, you’re strong. I am strong! I’m getting stronger every day! That’s very weak. Someday that mirror will look back and say, “Who are you kidding?”

But God is our strength. How many people seeking counsel, if they would just consider—if God would just use us to share with them. Or if we ourselves need to hear this, here it is! God is our strength. The life in Christ is designed to be lived, not by human strength, not even religious consecrated zeal. It’s designed to be lived by the strength of God at work in us.

This One who is our Counselor, who is our Shepherd, He’s our refuge and our strength. I mean, we’re talking about some Counselor here.

The more I study the Word of God regarding who the Lord is and in light of it Him being the Counselor and being all those things, the more I look at what man offers. Oh my goodness! We’re back to shooting BBs at dragons to try and help people. With man, using man’s theories to help man, why that’s anemic next to this. What person can you go and hide in? What person can you go to and say, he’s my strength? We try to lean on people like that, but they can’t help. They can’t take it. Why?—because they’re not God! One of the best ways to wipe someone out is to treat them like they are God. A lot of husbands and wives wipe each other out, putting all their hope in each other. Well, I know what that’s going to come down to—somebody is going to be disappointed.

God is our refuge and strength. Someone might say, “Yeah, but you don’t get it. I’m in trouble!” He is a very present help in trouble. The more the trouble, the more is His very presence. You just know that He is there for you, very present. It is not like He is just hanging around sometimes and you might get His attention if it really was that urgent. No, He’s a very present help. He’s right there on the job when the troubles come. And He’s our Counselor.

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.
That is, shaken until they’re just wiped out, moved aside. Again, how many seeking a word of counsel are doing it because they are so burdened down? Let’s face it, the loads of life get heavy. Responsibilities, demands, expectations of people, duties, needs, hopes, dreams, relationships, heartaches over what was done wrong and apprehension over what yet needs to be done right. I mean, the burdens just come in a thousand directions.

Here’s what we’re called to do, “Cast your burden on the Lord.” It’s a picture of rolling it over off our shoulders. Just kind of tipping, letting it dump on the Lord. And He shall sustain you. He’ll carry us through. He won’t permit His righteous ones, His children to be moved. That is, shoved aside, out of His path, wiped out, or shaken to destruction. He won’t. He’s faithful.

One more and then we’ll take a break. Psalm 62. When we were broadcasting, Living in Christ Ministries which was broadcast in Dallas, Texas for many of the years. We were going to go on this big 100,000 watt station, when there was an opportunity to move from the station we were on. And they agreed to pray about putting us on, and they wanted one of our tapes to hear what the teaching was like. And I asked our radio engineer and dear friend, to send them the tape on Psalm 62, which was titled, “Jesus Only.” They got the tape. We got a phone call a couple of days later, “Are you some of those “Jesus Only” Pentecostal groups? You know there’s no Father, no Son, it’s all Jesus.” I said, “No, no! That is not the point of the message title.” “Okay, then we’ll go ahead and listen to it.” And they listened to it and we did end up broadcasting on their station for years.

But this is a psalm about all that we need is Jesus. Jesus only is all we need. Kind of taking this psalm, bringing it up into the New Testament age in which we walk. Psalm 62:5-8, “My soul, wait silently for God alone.”

Oh if we would learn that. What a great part of counseling, to encourage and help people to wait on God alone. Not wait on man. But wait on God. That is, hope in God. And sometimes it’s good to do it silently. Not that it’s wrong to share and speak, but sometimes it’s good to just silently put our expectations in God.

For my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation…. (Psalm 62:5-6)

That’s right. Not someone else. Not some church group. Not some church leader. Not some famous Christian example. Not some great author. Not some human Christian psychological counseling expert. But He only is my rock and my salvation. He only is that solid rock I stand on. He only is my salvation, that is, my rescue from and through and unto all that He wants to save me from and save me through and save me for.

…He is my defense; I shall not be moved. I shall not be moved [shaken]. In God is my salvation and my glory. (Psalm 62:6-7)
If I’m going to be saved or rescued, if I’m going to see anything glorious, it’s in God the rock of my strength and my refuge. My hiding place is in God.

“Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him.”
God is a refuge for us.” (Psalm 62:8)

Do you know how many multiplied kinds of counseling needs just those four verses speak into right there? If we just let God counsel us with those four little verses of truth and started passing those on to others as well, we’d probably be part of a little mini-revival, you know.

God alone! Oh, it’s the ultimate counseling word. To teach folks to trust in, stand on, hide in, walk with, expect of God alone. He is our salvation.

The implications of these verses in light of the fact that the Lord is our Wonderful Counselor are enormous. They let us know what He can do if we let Him counsel us. What He can do through us to others if we’ll let Him use us as an instrument of His counsel.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 2
The Lord as Counselor, Part 2

By
Bob Hoekstra

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What Counseling Is

All right, let’s continue in our study of What Counseling Is. We are looking at Old Testament passages that remind us of this great truth, the Lord is the counselor. This is the anchor truth of our entire course.

Isaiah 9:6 we look at now. We’ve touched upon it. Let’s just read it.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God…

The prophetic title of the Messiah, who we know now is the Lord Jesus Christ, is Wonderful Counselor. Jesus is our Counselor. He is the Wonderful Counselor. In the family of God, in the kingdom of God, in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One, innate Counselor—the One who is by His very nature, person and gifts and work and ability, the Counselor. Not an instrument of His counsel, but the Counselor. That’s the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can call Christians counselors in a sense, if they are an instrument of His counsel. But it is a derived issue. It is the Lord counseling through them. He is The Counselor and He is a Wonderful Counselor.

If you want to add to your notes right here, Colossians 2:3, then we will come back to Isaiah. Colossians 2:3. How wonderful is this counselor, the Lord Jesus Christ? Just how wonderful is He? Well, Colossians 2:3 answers it powerfully. Speaking of Christ, that verse says, “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

In the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our wonderful counselor, there are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Heaven is, as it were, a divine spiritual treasury of wisdom and knowledge. Counseling has so much to do with the ministry of getting the knowledge you need and the wisdom to use the knowledge you have. So much of counseling is just people out to get the knowledge they need or if they have knowledge, the wisdom to use it.

Well, how do we access this treasury of heaven? They are hidden in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. We access the treasury of wisdom and knowledge through the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Heaven’s treasury is infinitely rich with wisdom and knowledge. We need it and God has it. Where is it?—in a person, the Lord Jesus. How much of the wisdom and knowledge is there? Look at the word, “In whom are hidden ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” It doesn’t say, many of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden there. It doesn’t say most of them. It doesn’t say a lot of them. It doesn’t say all but three or four biggies are there. It doesn’t say they are all hidden there except for that rare collection brought to us by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Alfred Adler, Eric Fromm, William James, B. F. Skinner, you name it. They are not upon this earth to fill in the gaps in God’s knowledge and wisdom.

The tragedy is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has been behaving for maybe twenty or thirty years like—oh, there are the missing gems in the treasury house! Now, we are rich with the answers we need! The church has been, for three decades at least, the number one referral agency
of troubled people seeking help out into the psychological clinics and psychotherapeutic offices of the world.

It began to turn some years ago, instead of sending them out there, “We have trained our own people in their wisdom. We will kind of do it in-house, thank you.” In other words, now we have the world training the church how to counsel the people of God. And of course some believe this is the height of wisdom and knowledge. They call it the integrated path of counseling, where the absolute perfect, pure, sufficient life-changing truth of the Word of God is going to be integrated by the guesses, theories, and knowledge and wisdom of godless heathen—even anti-Christ geniuses like Freud and Jung and Maslow. And if I could find a stronger way to put it, I would.

It looks like the church is going insane! We are turning from our wonderful counselor, who is our shepherd, our refuge, our strength, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And we’re asking these godless geniuses to fill in the gaps for us. I think we are losing our mind as the church. We’re losing our spiritual mind. We’re losing our mooring. We’re losing our direction. We are off course. We are not anchored into this truth—the Lord is the Counselor.

Many of these theoreticians purposely were trying to create a philosophy of life, to explain who man is, how he got here, why he is here, how to help him get there, with God left totally out. That is what motivated a lot of these men to think. God was out of the picture. They were thinking up a way where they could live, not being accountable to God, maybe even explaining away any possibility that He even existed. And now we are integrating that with the Word of God? We are taking geniuses who are anti-God and they are going to help us grow in godliness? We’re taking men who rejected Christ and they’re going to help us become like Christ? Oh, I think not at all! Not at all!

It is deadly. It is a denial, a total rejection of the truth that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And notice that they are hidden there. They are not lying around any place to be bought for ninety dollars an hour. They are not even tucked into the church bulletin on Sunday, so if you just show up once or twice a month you’ll have your list of them. They are hidden in a Person.

They are not hidden there, though, so we can’t find them because we are told right where they are. They are hidden there so in order to find them we have to dig into the only place where they can be found. And that is in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are willing to do that, God is willing to reveal all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that we need for life and godliness, to take Peter’s phrase. They are not in a place. They are not in a program. They are not in a procedure. They’re not in psychotherapy. They are in a Person. It is critical in the counseling ministry. If we need counseling, we need to dig into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If we want to be used as God’s counselors, we’ve got to be digging into and developing a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is critical. There is no other option. Because everything we need is hidden in that person, the Lord Jesus.

Consider the implications of Isaiah 61:1-3, in light of the truth that the Lord is the Counselor.

Isaiah 61:1-3,

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees [or oaks] of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

This is the prophetic Word of the ministry of Messiah. This is how Jesus ministered. This is how our Wonderful Counselor ministered, by the Spirit. And these are ends to which He ministered, good tidings to the poor. That is the Gospel to the spiritually bankrupt and wholeness for the brokenhearted. It is liberty for captives, opening up the binding prison door to those who are in bondage.

Oh my goodness, we are covering now so much territory concerning which people are scrambling for a word of counseling. How many people seeking counsel are sensing spiritual bankruptcy but wanting to hear, “I’m okay; you’re okay.” No, I’m broke; you’re broke! We are the same, but we are not okay. We are needy.

How many are brokenhearted? They need to be made whole. How many are captives, locked in bed, thinking about bad relationships, bad goals and bad values? We can proclaim liberty in the name of the Lord. These are things people are seeking counsel for. They are bound and they need the opening of the prison. They are mourning and they need to be comforted and consoled. Their life is like ashes and they need the beauty of the Lord. They are in great sadness and they need the oil of joy. Their spirits are heavy. God can give them the garment of praise. To what end?—that they may become righteous trees, oaks of righteousness. They may become lives that God plants in the river of life, to the end that He might be glorified.

Tie that in with Isaiah 42:3, another messianic prophecy speaking of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus. It says, “A bruised reed He will not break. And smoking flax He will not quench.” Or that could be translated “a flickering wick, or a dimly burning wick, He will not extinguish.”

What a counselor the Lord Jesus is. A lot of people seeking counsel are like a bruised reed. You know a reed that is not strong, which grows by the river. You bruise it, it just flops over. It has no strength there. Well, the Lord does not break the bruised reed. Often the human counselor can just smash those bruised reeds. Already they are hanging over and a human counselor can come stomping in there, especially a self-righteous, legalistic, letter-of-the-law, religious counselor. He may ask, “Boy, what kind of a reed are you, wimp? Do you think God is happy with that, slouching over there in the middle?” The next thing you know, they are just busted off, totally broken. The Lord does not do that. He does not break the bruised reed. He puts it back together and strengthens it to grow again.

And a smoking flax, or a dimly-burning wick He does not extinguish. So often a person’s life can be just like a little flickering wick. You know, the slightest “phew” would blow it out. And that wick goes to some human counselors who say, “What’s the matter with you?” And “phew”—well, it’s all over. Snuffed out and all hope gone, you know. The Lord doesn’t do that. He just fans that, fuels that little flicker. He brings that flickering wick back to a flame, even back to a blaze. He is a fantastic Counselor. He has power and might and glory and wisdom. But He has sensitivity and tenderness. There is no counselor like the Lord Jesus. Wonderful Counselor, it doesn’t overstate it. It is right on target, just like God always speaks.
Think of this. Put Isaiah 42:3 and 61 together. Isaiah 61:3 says that the Lord our Counselor, who can make us oaks of righteousness. But look what He can take to do it, bruised reeds! Who but our Wonderful Counselor can start out with a bruised reed and far from breaking it, when He’s done, can turn it in to an oak of righteousness? It is the planting of the Lord? Who gets the glory for it? “Look, at that tree! I can remember when it was a broken reed! Only God could have done that.” Glory be to God! Not glory be to Sigmund. Glory be to God.

Let’s look at a few Scriptures now in the New Testament. What we are doing is we are looking at passages with significant implications in light of the fact that the Lord is the Counselor.

Here is our Wonderful Counselor in Matthew 11:28-30,

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [Why?] For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

This is our Wonderful Counselor. Oh, how many people are out seeking a word of counsel? They are laboring so hard. They are so heavy laden that they can’t drag their life one more day. And they have already been to twelve different counselors and maybe they are on the edge of bankruptcy. They are really close to healing, though, because their insurance is almost run out, you know. I mean, that is the sad state of affairs.

How about if we short circuit all that procedure? Just learn to come to the Lord Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor. “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden” (Matthew 11:28). Not just those who are somewhat loaded down, but not too seriously. People always want to say, “Don’t you have to send the tough cases to the experts?” Yeah, but the expert is Jesus! Let’s send them there. Let’s keep sending them there. Let’s help them go there.

I know that stirs up a lot of “what abouts?” “What about genetic problems?” “What about chemical imbalances and all that?” We’ll get to that. One thing I do hope we believe though, our Wonderful Counselor is able, if willing, and if we seek Him, to even directly heal those things as well. It’s not like He can’t do that. He can do that too. He does provide in His Word, and we’ll look at some of what you might call common grace remedies, provisions. “The rain falls on the just and unjust alike” (Matthew 5:45). You don’t have to be righteous to have your garden grow, you know. You don’t have to be born again to have an aspirin work. There are some common grace things. And we will see that God’s Word is not, and we are not in Counseling God’s Way, talking about Christian science, conceptually applied to counseling. No way. You will see we are talking about the difference, along the way, between philosophy and true medical science. One we’re forbidden to get caught up in. The other we’re free to take it or leave it. Medical science is not forbidden for Christians. And we will show some places in Scripture on that.

Philosophy of man is forbidden. Psychological theory is primarily philosophical. Only in a very limited arena is it actually medical science. And when it’s actual medical science that is not what we’re warning about in this class. But where it is philosophical in nature, explaining who man is, why he’s here, how he got here, what he is made up of inside, how you help him—that is philosophy. I don’t care if you call it social science, that doesn’t change it by just putting a clinical name on it. It is philosophical to the core and the Scriptures warn us in strong terms not to be influenced by it. How about this? “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Come to the Lord Jesus, our Wonderful Counselor.
John 4:13 is counsel to the thirsty person, spiritually. “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again.’” Whoever looks to earthly thirst quenching will thirst again. Apply that in the spiritual arena, the counseling arena. In human counseling, the wisdom is earthly water. It doesn’t quench the thirst. It leaves people thirsty.

John 4:13-14,

…Whoever drinks of this water [earthly, physical provision] will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.

The Lord is promising here not only to quench our thirst but as we drink, to make that water become a fountain in us. It is not just thirst quenching, but a river flowing.

And that’s what John 7:37-38 speaks of.

On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, ‘If anyone thirst let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’

When thirsty people, that is, people with inner spiritual needs and yearnings, when they take them to the Lord Jesus, it’s like drinking of Him. Verse 38 says, “He who believes in Me.” The one who takes their thirst to Jesus is believing He can meet the need. And he who believes in Jesus, he who comes to Him with those thirsts and needs inside, as the Scripture has said, “out of his heart, out of his innermost being, shall flow rivers of living water.” Our Wonderful Counselor cannot only satisfy the inner thirsts of our lives, but He can do it in a way that begins to build up a spiritual reservoir of living water inside, to such a point that it overflows like a river for others to drink from.

Boy, what a way to get counseled and get equipped to counsel at the same time. Bring our thirsts, our spiritual yearnings, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Drink of living water. Let Him quench it with the work of the Spirit.

Keep doing that and that drinking of the Lord by faith—“Lord, I know You can meet this need”—it’s like drinking living water. It satisfies inside. It fills us up inside eventually. To such a point that which God is doing inside begins to pour out on other lives. So, while God is satisfying our thirst, He is preparing us to share living water with those who are thirsty.

I really believe that God’s way to handle this arena is so profoundly simple, that everywhere I have ever taught this, sooner or later I have heard people say, “That’s too simple!” We’ll spend a lot of time on that very issue on down the road. We’ll look at some Scripture that warns us not to become “unsimple.” It warns us not to complicate it. We’ll look at that down the road. Oh, how simple can it be? Are you thirsty? Come to Him and drink.

A lot of people seeking counsel are seeking it because they’re thirsty inside. They are dry. They are needy. Again, “Come to Me,” Jesus said. Oh, the implications in these verses in light of the fact that the Lord is the Wonderful Counselor!

We won’t look at it now because we’ll spend much time later in the course on the Jeremiah 2:13 passage. But it spoke of Israel forsaking the fountain of living waters to go out and dig up broken
cisterns that can’t hold water. Why forsake the Lord Jesus? He is the fountain of living waters to us now. Why go out looking for worldly systems, cisterns to collect thoughts in to live by? It is polluted water at best. It is not living. And the cisterns are broken anyway, so what is in there keeps leaking out. They have to keep filling up with new ideas. “Yeah, I know that didn’t work quite as well, but listen to this…we’ve added this to it now. We have the new improved 3000th edition of Freud rehashed.” You know, nobody wants to be identified with Freud anymore. He’s passe. But one way or another, multitudes of wise of this age are still linking into him. It is just new language with just a little twist on it. We’ll talk about that too, later on.

John 8:12,

Then Jesus spoke to them again saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’

Look at this in light of the truth that Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. The one who is the Counselor and a wonder of a counselor; there is no one like Him. He is also the light of the world. Again, how many people are seeking a word of counsel because they are staggering around in some measure of darkness?—the darkness of fear, darkness of confusion, darkness of bad habits, darkness of bad thinking and bad values that the world gave them. “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.”

People in darkness need to come to the Lord Jesus, who is the light. Let Him shine His light in. If they come to us for help, we want to point them to the Lord Jesus. Let them know, in that darkness in which they sit, He is the light to shine in to drive away the darkness, to cause it to make sense and to give direction. But notice, He gives the light of life not just the light that clears up issues, but a light that is characterized by life. His light brings with it abundant life. As He clarifies things, as He drives away the darkness and it’s not just, “Oh, now I understand!” It is, “Now I can live! Now I can believe! Now I can share! Now I can serve! Now I can grow! Now I can live!” It is the light of life. It is not just conceptual understanding that comes to us. It is the light of God that unfolds the life of God to walk in. I love that verse. “I am the light of the world.” He can shine in any corner of the world, in any life in the world and everyone who follows Him. That is what discipleship is, following Jesus. We will look at that a lot next session. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness. Why—because He is the light. And following the light, they get the light of life, the life that is related to eternal life. The light that leads to more living! The light that is characterized by life, not just by mental concepts cleared up. But a light that brings more life. What a Counselor!

John 10:10,

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Oh my goodness, how many people are out seeking a word of counsel because the thief has been stealing, killing, and destroying? There are so many people seeking counseling just because they have been getting ripped off by the enemy. And most of them don’t even know it. They are just looking for some technique, some comforting thought, some justifying excuse, some thing. And what has been happening is the enemy has been ripping them off. And as he rips them off, they get motivated to go out and seek help.

Well, he is right there with the referral cards. He knows where to send them. “Hey, come over here. Your problem is you have been getting ripped off. Come over here and we will use some
rip-off theories on you.” The devil’s been hassling you? Let the devil counsel you! That is the way we are doing it today. It is crazy. We’re letting wise men like Freud and Jung and others teach us how to help people. Well, they were totally under the influence of the enemy. The enemy motivated their genius. The enemy gave them ideas to explain man without God. Now the church takes troubled Christians and sends them out there, Christians or maybe just seekers who are getting ripped off by the enemy. He is stealing from them. He is killing them. He is trying to destroy their lives. And we send them off to those who are experts in the rip-off theories of the enemy. What happens? They get in a bigger mess than when they started out. Look at this, “I have come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly.”

What is the answer for lives that are getting ripped off by the enemy? Get them to Jesus Christ and help them stay there and grow there and learn there. Because the enemy came to rip them off, steal joy, steal forgiveness and destroy relationships. Jesus came to give life and He wants us to have it abundantly—growing, overflowing joy. It is to be an increasing, broadening, deepening peace, with more and more insight and understanding. It will be a faith that matures year by year, the abundant life. I mean this John 10:10 explains why people need counsel and where to get it. It is amazing how many verses in the Scriptures just wrap it all up in just a few statements.

Then lastly one more verse, John 14:6, Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Again, how many people are out there seeking counsel, they just want to find a way to make a life or just the way to walk. You know, what is it about? How do you explain this existence? What is the path? Jesus is the way. Follow Him and you will be on the path.

People are out trying to find truth, but no longer are they trying to find the truth. They are trying to find their truth. And you tell me truth and they go, “Well, that may be true for you, but it is not true for me.” Listen, it is either true or not true, as far as God is concerned. We have forgotten, we have lost the reality of absolute truth. It is truth for you or truth for me. No, if it is God’s truth, that’s what we need. And Jesus is the truth, the absolute reality of existence. If you want to know what is real and what isn’t? What matters, what doesn’t? What is genuine and what is phony? Look at Jesus. It’s all sorted out by Him. He is the truth. Oh, it’s so great to be able to find the truth. A lot of people in counseling are just finding where the truth is and where to anchor in and just keep finding all they need, their lives are ever after changed in a path of growth.

And lastly—“I am the life.” There are a lot of people out seeking counseling and you get right down to it, they explain, “I’m trying to find a life. I got tired of hearing people say, ‘Go find a life!’ I’m out there finding one, you know.” And a lot of people, whether they say it or not that is what they are trying to do. They are trying to find somebody to help them make a life. They are tired of dying daily. Not the way Paul did and not the way Jesus did, but the way the lifeless do with hopelessness and despair increasing every day. Going nowhere!

Jesus is the life. When we meet Him, He shares His life. Walking with Him, we live the life. Oh, the implications of these “I AM” statements of Jesus in light of the fact that He is also the Wonderful Counselor! The one who is the Counselor is also the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd that came to give abundant life, and He is the way, the truth, and the life and on and on and on it goes!

In conclusion, I have just two quick thoughts. In light of this great truth that anchors what counseling is, that is, the Lord as the Counselor, there are two great implications here. Number one, when you and I need counseling, we need to be looking to the Lord. Second, when others come to us for counseling, we must be pointing them to the Lord. And this is true with or without
instrumentality. Sometimes this will happen alone personally with God. Sometimes it is through the instrumentation of another life. And that is fine. Either way it is still the same truth. When we need counsel we need to be looking to the Lord. When others come to us for a word of counsel we must be pointing them to the Lord. Why?—because the Lord is the Counselor. It is fundamental. It is essential. It is foundational to what counseling is.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You that Your Word has spoken so much on such basic issues of biblical counseling. And Lord Jesus, as our Wonderful Counselor, thank You for reminding us that with the yearnings, the hopes, the dreams, the heartaches, the brokenness, the thirst within, we just need to keep coming to You. Lord, unfold Your vast, sufficient treasures of wisdom and knowledge. May we walk in them, abound in them, and share them with others. And may the Church of Jesus Christ have a wonderful, reviving, reforming turnaround, that You again might be our one-and-only, perfect Counselor. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 3
Counseling and Discipleship

By
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Lord, we give You great thanks again for the wonderful salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. We thank You, Lord, that You are a Wonderful Counselor and we thank You for the way You are going to counsel us even in this time of study. We seek You, Lord. We look to You. We ask You to do a great and mighty work. Speak to us. Shed Your light upon our hearts and our path. Show each of us in this time in the Word what You have for us as You counsel us, as You equip us to counsel and as You warn us of the dangerous paths of man in counseling. We just trust in You now, Lord, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

What Counseling Is

In this study in Counseling God’s Way, this is just a quick reminder by way of introduction. Our study last time was “What Counseling Is.” We started out with the issue we are going to continue with now. But we looked at what the first issue is, and that is the Lord as Counselor. Seeing the Lord as the Counselor is the bedrock issue in Counseling God’s Way. It is knowing that the Lord is the Counselor. Not man, but the Lord God Himself.

…And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor… (Isaiah 9:6).

And the big issue in that is when we need counsel we should be looking to the Lord and when others come to us for counsel we need to be pointing them to the Lord, because He is the Counselor. We can certainly be His instruments. But the only way we can be His instruments is to the extent that we are committed to this truth—that He is the Counselor.

Now to continue in “What Counseling Is.” Counseling, from God’s perspective—and we need a good definition from God right at the beginning of our course of study, so we are kind of honed in on the Lord’s perspective and protected from man’s. There are so many crazy ideas about what counseling is in the world and even in the church world. Counseling and discipleship must be considered. When the Lord counsels, He counsels unto discipleship. True counseling, Biblical counseling, must be a part of the discipleship process.

In Counseling God’s Way, the Lord is not merely aiming at removing needs or just meeting needs. But far bigger than that, the Lord wants to use the needs in people’s lives to either bring us onto the path of discipleship, if we don’t know the Lord, or if we have met the Lord, to move us along the path of discipleship. Really one verse is sufficient to set that perspective, though we will look at many. And that is Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”

This is often called the Great Commission. I think it is rightly named. It is the grand one, the great one, the overarching, overriding, all-encompassing instruction of the Lord. He came to call out disciples to follow Him. As He was about to leave to go back to the Father, He said to them, “Go make disciples.” And everything that the church is to be involved in is to be a part of the discipleship process. Everything. This includes: worship, prayer, study, serving, giving, receiving, growing, learning, and sacrificing. You name it, it is part of following the Lord.

Going to all the world. Whatever you are doing, where ever you are going, all the time, be making disciples of all the nations. This is Jesus’ basic instruction to the church.

We must not view counseling as something that is done in this way and this arena. And then think that discipleship is something done that way over in another arena. They are totally tied together.
One is bigger and greater than the other. The greater is discipling and counseling is just one way to disciple. In fact, you could say Biblical counseling is discipling around someone’s felt need or desire or motivation or search or quest. Someone is stirred with a need or vision, a concept of service and a path of walking with the Lord, and they are crying out, “Help me! I need a word of counsel.” Well what we do in that situation is ask the Lord to use us to help disciple that person, help make more of a follower of the Lord of that person right in the arena where they are struggling or seeking or hungry and ready to move on.

What counseling is from God’s perspective, it is first, the Lord as Counselor. Then it is relating counseling to discipleship. Because when the Lord counsels, He is counseling unto discipleship. The Lord did not leave heaven above, come to a sin-scarred dead and dying world and be misunderstood, rejected, lied about, spit upon, beaten, crucified just in order that Christians might have some way to get relatively a bit more well-adjusted as American religious citizens. He came to make disciples, nothing less. And we do not want our counseling to aim at anything less than that.

And you might think, “Well, what is the point of all this?” The point of all this is the preponderance of counseling in the church world has nothing to do with discipleship. In fact it is worse than that. The major emphasis in counseling in the churches today and in the so-called Christian counseling clinics gets in the way of discipleship—let alone contribute to it. That is the point of this. And I think we will see that more and more, as we think of what is going on around us and what the Lord has said in His Word.

Now that is all by way of introduction to the subject of counseling and discipleship. Now let’s get into a few Biblical headings that elaborate upon that. Counseling and discipleship can be examined under this perspective—following Jesus and denying self. It may be best to put it in reverse order—denying self and following Jesus.

Matthew 4:19. “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.’” The call to discipleship was “Come, follow Me.” Jesus went about giving that invitation. “Come follow Me.” Discipleship is following Jesus. Jesus came to make disciples, followers of Him. He went about saying, “Come follow Me.”

Discipleship is a lifelong, life-giving, life-changing, life-filling, life-developing relationship with a Person. And the Person is the Wonderful Counselor, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Lord of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this One who is the Wonderful Counselor has called us to come and follow Him. We will learn to counsel as we follow Him. We will get the counsel we need as we follow Him. And we need to be, in our counseling, calling others to follow and helping others to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not just a religious procedure or a religious regimen, or a list of dos and don’ts. It is a living relationship between us and our Master. Again, it is a lifelong, life-giving, life-changing, life-filling, life-developing relationship with a Person. And the Person is God the Son.

Jesus says, “Come follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” There are many things the Lord wants to make of us. One of them is a fisher of men. He used that phrase here because these had been fishermen of fish and He was going to change their lives and make those who were in His hands, nets, instruments to catch men for the kingdom. But there are many things the Lord wants to make of us. But oh, what an insight here as to how it happens! Come follow Me. I will make you… Oh, that is glorious. That is powerful. That is life-changing.
How do we become what the Lord wants us to be? We become that by following Him. We pursue Him. We keep seeking and learning of Him. We develop a relationship with Him and while we are giving our attention to following Him, He is giving His attention to remaking us.

Oh, this is so different from the counseling of the world! The counseling of the world is, “Get a grip on yourself.” Or “Find a life.” Or “Let’s get a program and see if it works.” It is man, changing man or self, changing self. It is so anemic. It is so low. It is so earthbound.

Now I am not questioning the motives of everyone trying to help people through all the sociological, anthropological, psychological systems and theories of man. Some are in it for scheming bucks, sure. But a lot are well intended, but it doesn’t matter whether it is a con-artist, or an absolute true-hearted servant wanting to help people, if we don’t use God’s means we cannot do it.

“Come follow Me, I will make you…” that should be right at the heart of Counseling God’s Way. We call people to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And as they are following Him, He will be changing them. We do not have to change them. And we are not there to show them how to change themselves. We are telling them Who to follow and what to expect. If they will follow Him, He will remake them.

I love to meditate on the implications of this simple statement, “Come follow Me, I will make you....” It is glorious. It simplifies the whole thing. Plus it gives such enormous hope. You mean if I just follow after the Lord Jesus, get to know Him, seek Him, find out where He is going and where He wants to take me and just be willing to go there and walk His path, then He will be making me what He wants me to be? Wow! This is almost too good to be true. And yet the more the Lord tells us this, the more we believe it, and the more we see He is reliable and faithful and able, the more we count on it. And He does it.

Denying self and following Jesus; denying self is definitely involved. Counseling should be marked by the flavor of discipleship. If our counseling isn’t unto discipleship, we are not counseling God’s way. We have drifted somehow into man’s way.

Luke 9:23 gives us a very beautiful perspective and a very succinct fashion of what discipleship is about. This should flavor our counseling and give it a simple overview statement as we read it. Our counseling should help, assist, allow, enable and direct people to see ‘self’ dealt with that they might follow Jesus more effectively “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’”

Jesus was saying this to everyone. This is the word for everyone no matter where they are in the spiritual spectrum. Everyone in the crowd that day heard the same thing; the seekers and those who were curious, those who thought they were committed or those who needed to be. Those who had met Him before and those who just, as they thought, stumbled across Him that day. He said to the multitude, in one of the passages that says the disciples and the multitude were following Him and this is what He turned and said to them all—this is a word for everyone.

Too many churches kind of hide this for some moment down the road, thinking this is kind of radical to put up front, we’ve got to kind of inch people into this. This is not very user friendly here. It does not fit the American church growth movement, which is built on the premise not to ever say or do anything to offend anyone or to put them into the risky position of maybe not coming back to your meetings. Boy, the Lord didn’t read that manual!
Look at this. He said to them all. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” “Come after Me.” If anyone wants to follow Me, if anyone wants to walk through life with Me, if anyone wants to be My disciple in answering the call to discipleship, here is what’s involved.” First, let him deny himself. The first aspect of discipleship is saying ‘no’ to the self-life. It involves disowning self-hope, self-help, self-centered way of living. It says “no” to the independent self-life and its sins of self-righteousness, self-sufficiency and self-exaltation. It is really saying no to all that we would be and do, including how we would do it and even why we would do it, apart from Christ in us, our hope of glory. It is finding a whole new way to live other than self-resource, self-will, self-glory, self-confidence. It is no to all that stuff.

All that stuff—in that little simple phrase I’m laying aside almost all of American culture, you know. We are self-made people getting stronger every day in self-confidence. And Jesus says, “You want to follow Me? Deny self.” That is right where the issue is. The second aspect goes from what the flesh would call “from bad to worse.” It goes from “no to self” to “death to self.” First let him deny himself—no to self, then take up his cross. Remember what the cross was in the first century.

Where I was ministering over the weekend, the worship team led us in the singing of “The Old Rugged Cross,” and oh, I was blessed. You don’t get many opportunities to do that these days, even in good cross-preaching, Bible-teaching, Christ-centered churches. It just isn’t sung that often. And that is all right, there are plenty of other great songs to sing instead. But it was a real blessing. But “The Old Rugged Cross” isn’t just something to get kind of mushy and emotional about. Oh, it can do that to your heart, but it’s more than that. It is not just a nice sentimental theme song of the faith. The cross is not just something to stick on top of the church building, or hang in the sanctuary, or put on a lapel, or paste on a bumper. And surely if a person knows the message of the cross and wants to use it any of those ways, God will be pleased and probably praised as well. But the cross is not for those purposes primarily. That is sort of a secondary, derived use out of it.

Remember what the cross was in the first century. It was an instrument of death, an instrument of execution. It was where the worst kind of criminals got the most complete kind of justice. It was an execution instrument. To bring it more in a contemporary term, if Jesus had arrived during our lifetimes He might have said something like, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his electric chair and follow Me.” It sounds so strange to hear it, but that is exactly what it sounded like to everyone in the first century. Take up the cross to follow You? The cross? Death! My cross? My death? Yes, those are the terms of discipleship.

No to self! Just to remind us that self is not the hope. Whether it is our righteousness—they are filthy rags. Or whether it is resources for living—it is inadequate. And once self is brought to attention with that, it is okay. Now to the cross!

It is not only no to self, but death to self. Basically by faith we take up the cross of Jesus Christ. And believe the Word of God that tells us elsewhere, Romans 6 and other places, which we will get to later in the course, but believe that when Christ died on that cross, He was dying where we should die. We deserve that. That cross should have been ours. We should have been the ones judged and separated from the Father. But instead He went in our place. And not only were our sins paid for, but there was death to self. It was a place for self to come to an end, embracing by faith the purpose and the full work of the cross of Jesus Christ.
And as we take up the cross daily it can be increasingly an end of my will, my resources, my life, my glory. And notice it is daily. Take up his cross daily is saying no to self. Take up the cross daily. This is not just a crisis moment, where we meet Jesus and this is how we get started. After that we kind of lighten-up a little. Oh they are great things to lighten up the load and lighten-up life. But the terms do not lighten up, just the implication of what happens after that. It shines brighter and brighter. Day by day it is no to self and death to self.

Now think of this for a moment. In light of humankind in general, your own life perhaps in particular, and our very culture as an example, it is right at this point that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the call to discipleship collides head-on with man and culture. We look here, right now, at the first of a number of umbrella clichés. A cliché is a saying used by people that generally captures the significant truth of a matter and just settles all issues. Again I think of the classic American religious cliché—“God helps those who help themselves.” How many religious debates in America have foolishly been settled with that cliché? I think you must do this. I think you must do that. Oh, I think you ought to do this then. Then somebody pipes up, “Listen, remember, God helps those who help themselves.” And virtually everybody will go, “Oh yeah, yeah.” Okay, next subject.

I love to think of someone coming to the Lord, learning enough of the Gospel of salvation that they humble themselves before the Lord and cry out for forgiveness of sins and in repentance believe in the Lord Jesus. They are born again and babe in Christ, but they are not totally ignorant. They have this one Bible verse already to start off on. God helps those who help themselves. Can’t you just see them, you know... “I’ll start there. Where is it, now? Where is it?” Months go by, maybe a year or two. “I could have sworn it was in there.” In fact, I’ve run across people in the last six months in as diverse places as Hungary and California, relatives arguing with Christian relatives—that’s in the Bible. I know it’s there! Including a priest over in Hungary who was convinced it was there. He was trying to tell a Christian worker that they were way off base. And praise God, this young person gave that priest some time to find it and he couldn’t. It is not there.

What I like to picture too is the dawning of understanding and even the countenance that might respond, “Oh my goodness! Not only is it not there, the opposite is there!” God helps those who finally admit they cannot help themselves. See God is opposed to the proud. Those who think they can help themselves—“Hey, I can handle it. Thank You, Lord.” God is opposed to that. He not only doesn’t help, He is in opposition to that path of life. No way to progress that way.

On the other hand, He gives grace to the humble. Those who admit they cannot help themselves. Those He forgives and assists, both.

Well, in the Christian counseling field, in the counseling life of the church world, there are all kinds of clichés about counseling and what is right and what is wrong and how to do it and how not to do it. We are going to look through this course at a long string of umbrella clichés, I’ve called them, because an umbrella provides shelter and protection. And all of these clichés seem to provide—though it seems to me totally meager and ineffective shelter—it seems to offer enough protection for tons and tons of humanistic, self-centered, psychological thinking in the counseling mentality and ministry of the American church. We are going to compare all these umbrella clichés. You have probably heard all of them. In fact I would be amazed if you haven’t used most of them. I did. I’m just guessing you are kind of the same. But when we shine the light of the Word of God on these umbrella clichés, much to our amazement they are so full of holes, how can you hide any thinking like this underneath them?
Here is one—now we all know, they say, that everyone’s problems are all related to low self-esteem. So if you’re going to help someone get out of their problems, you’ve got to help them raise their self-esteem level.

The world is pretty much sold on that, though here and there you see a crack in their armor. No shocker there though. Where else is the world going to turn? They mostly don’t believe in God or they think that God helps those who help themselves.

But here is the shocker, the church of Jesus Christ has bought into it heavily over the last ten or twenty years. Thirty years ago, Dr. J. Vernon McGee warned us heavy-duty about psychological teaching. He was the first one from whom I heard the phrase, “the psychologizing of the faith,” which became the title of one of our books, the one that I wrote last year. The first time I ever heard that phrase was by Dr. McGee not long after I was a Christian.

The shocker is that the church has bought into it. He warned and said if we don’t watch out, so-called psychological thinking and counseling and teaching will displace Bible teaching in our pulpits and on Christian radio. It has almost totally happened on Christian radio which more and more would have to be called religious radio. And it has seeped into the pulpits almost as far, but not quite praise God, but disastrously too far.

Self-esteem. If you are going to help people, you have to help them raise their self-esteem level because all their problems are related to a low self-esteem. It is almost like the wisdom of the day. Think about it for a moment though. Think about how that cliché and that approach to counseling relates to the basic message of Jesus Christ, what He came to do and what He said. “If anyone would come after Me let him deny himself.” Not esteem himself. Esteem means to hold in high regard. Self-esteem, learn to hold yourself in higher and higher regard. Jesus says, if you want to follow Me, say no to yourself, not yes to yourself. And if you want to “follow Me, take up your cross.” Embrace My cross as your cross, which is your confession that you desire death to your self-life, to any life you could produce on your own through your best effort or best behavior or best religious zeal.

What a collision this is with man, his flesh, and our culture. Now think how serious this issue is. If self-esteem thinking was only five or ten degrees off the path of discipleship, think how serious that would be. What an error that would be. Every year you walked that five or ten degree path off course, every year you are further away from what the Lord called you to. If it were just five or ten degrees off course, it is a path to disaster. But of course the shocker is, it is 180 degrees off course! If the call to discipleship is north, the call to self-esteem is south! Every step is completely in the opposite direction. That’s how serious it is.

This truth of discipleship is the opposite of self-esteem theology and self-esteem counseling. Self-esteem permeates our culture. It is flowing into the church like a flood of polluted water. It came from humanistic psychologists. It did not come from Bible study. We will see along the way some astounding confessions of that. For Counseling God’s Way we’ve got to watch out for this self-esteem approach to counseling.

Some folks have wondered what is left if you say no to self and death to self? Well, what is left is everything God ever intended for us and it is all caught up in three simple words that finish this verse—“and follow Me.” Everything God has for us is in those three simple words. Look how many words it took to clear the roadblock. Why does the Lord pound so hard on self?—no to self, death to self? It is because that’s exactly what prevents people from following Him. They are on their own path.
They are resting in their own righteousness. They are satisfied with their own will. Hey, they are out to get their own glory. That is exactly what keeps people from following Jesus Christ. The obstacle to discipleship is the ugliest four letter word in the world—SELF. And yet we have turned it, in our culture, into something to esteem, not crucify. “There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is destruction.” (Proverb 16:25)

“Follow Me.” Christ, our forgiver, follow Him. Folks say, “Oh, you think it can all be caught up in those three words ‘and follow Me’? If you knew how many wrongs I’d done, how many things I have to make right, how many tons of forgiveness I need, you could never make it that simple.” It doesn’t matter if you need a pound, a ton, or a universe of forgiveness, it is all found in Jesus Christ. Follow Him and find that forgiveness.

Someone else says, “Oh, I’ve made so many mistakes in the past, my thinking was so bad, I need all kinds of education and at least ten or twelve years of therapy.” How about a simpler route? Just say no to self, death to self. Lord, I want nothing left but this one option, following Jesus. Colossian 3:11 says that He is our “all in all.” If we are following Him, we won’t find out we missed something. We will find out we found everything!

“And follow Me,” our Forgiver, our Life Giver. Oh, but I need so much counseling. Oh, you’re blessed! His name is Wonderful Counselor. Get after Him, quick, quick! And you won’t even have to make an appointment and there won’t even be a bill. Wow! This is too good. “And follow Me.” Follow the One who is Christ our hope, our all in all, our life. Colossians 3:4 calls Him, “Christ who is our life.”

People say, “Oh man, I’m so devastated. I’m coming out of the pits, the gutter of humanity. I need a life!” Christ is your life. You want a life? Follow Him.

Discipleship truth must be the counsel we seek and it must be the counsel we give others. Our counseling must be that which deals with self. “No to self or death to self”—it is therefore opening up the path of discipleship by removing the obstacle that keeps people from pursuing after Jesus.

If our counseling is not in that direction, it’s not counseling God’s way. If others are offering counsel to us that is not like that, it is not counseling God’s way.

Someone called us from out of town the other day and wanted us to know about some family counseling ministry. And we sent off for the brochure they were offering and I got a chance to look at it today. It comes highly recommended by some good men. If I mention any of their names you would just about flip and say it has to be right. I opened the thing up and it was just packed with human wisdom and self-indulgent principles, and left brain and right brain and no brain. I couldn’t even believe that a Bible teacher would make half the statements in that article. It was just, well, my blood was boiling in just three or four minutes of glancing through it. It was a heartbreaker.

There is an awful lot of counseling out there. And this man is probably one who really loves the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t question that. And if he didn’t, I’m not his judge anyway. All we are called to do is measure the message with God’s message. Evaluate the methods with God’s methods. We are responsible to do that. We are demanded to do that and in doing it, it was a heartbreaker.
The practical application of this is enormous. I have told this story many times and every time it reminds me of the practical importance of this. I sat with a couple who had been married thirty-five years, and they seemed to have a troubled marriage. I knew the wife was a believer. I didn’t know about the husband. I sat down with them one night after church and they wanted some help. We sat down and before we even hit the seats on the chair, the husband just ripped into his wife. He fully knew why the marriage was a mess. She did this. She failed in that. She could not do this. She always nagged. She, she, she...on and on it went. He was quickly exhausted, praise God, and quieted down. And man, she just counter-punched a knockout blow. She didn’t even bat an eye. She had heard all that before. Who cares…and she just shredded him. Then that moment you dread—not always, but often—they turn and look at you. “Well, come on, help us. Our favorite program is on in fifteen minutes!” Thirty-five years this has been going on.

I was doing a few things I love to do and have learned to do through the years in counseling. It was very Biblical. I was listening and I was praying. And so often, and certainly in this case, if you do one, the other is an automatic. If you listen, you’ll be driven to prayer. And I was listening and praying. And the third thing I was doing is I was asking the Lord to bring to my mind any Scriptures that they needed to hear. We’ll talk much about this down the road. That’s the moment I’m always yearning for, cause that is when the Wonderful Counselor gets in on the conversation. And only one verse came to my mind. It was Luke 9:23, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” You say, “What does that have to do with marriage counseling, especially a thirty-five year disaster.” I’ll tell you what it has to do with it. It hit the issue right on the head. I opened my Bible and I said, “Yeah I’d like to read you something.” I read it and I turned to the man and I said, “Would you mind going back through all of your evaluation of this marriage and its problems, but only do it in light of this verse.” He about choked. Turned kind of pale, you know and started fumbling. I’m thinking, God just shut your mouth!

The point is, in so many troubled marriages, if not all of them the issue isn’t she nags all the time and he won’t share a thing. Or he leaves his clothes everywhere and she never cooks. Big deal with that stuff, and if it needs to change it is not going to change by harping on it with each other. And it certainly is not going to happen in the favorite American Christian counseling approach of going to talk to the pastor and see which one can get him on their side. Just straighten out the wrong person, you know. That’s so typically the approach. It is so vain. It is so self-centered.

The problem in marriages like that is really, I think, as simple as this verse. There is too much self and there is too little discipleship. Let either one of those catch a vision of discipleship—start saying no to self and death to self—that home will start to come alive. Let two troubled partners catch a vision of discipleship—no to self, death to self—you’ll watch a miracle remake of that home by God Himself. Because while they are following Jesus, He is making them what He wants them to be. They are not working on each other. They are not putting their hope in each other. They are following Jesus Christ. And while they follow Him, instead of self, He is changing them into what He wants them to be.

This is a critical issue. The practicality of it, the implications of it are enormous. Years on, early in counseling, I never would have turned to a verse like that. I’d have started out number one on a list of a hundred. Okay, let’s start working some of these things out. You won’t be half done when the Lord comes. No matter if He comes when you are ninety-nine. There is no hope in that direction, especially in a disaster zone.
But here is one thing that can be working on all those issues simultaneously in both people—No to self, death to self. Just get on with what the Christian is all about. Just put all your time, energy, and attention pursuing after Jesus Christ. He will change you. It will bless your mate. It will change your home.

Following Jesus and denying self is what discipleship is. And discipleship must flavor our counseling or it is not counseling God’s way.

Another way to say discipleship is receiving Jesus and being built up in Him. Colossians 2:6-7, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

How did we receive the Lord Jesus Christ? In repentance and saying no to self, death to self, and saying, “I’m wrong, Lord. You’re right. I’m unrighteous; You’re righteous. I’m guilty; Can You forgive me?” No to self. Death to self. Following Jesus! We received Him by faith through His grace at work, with all of our hope in Him, not in us. Well, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him. Live the Christian life the same way you received the Lord. Grace. Faith. No hope in self. All hope in Him. And in that path just get firmly rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith. And trust in Him.

Another way to say that is in 1 Peter 1:23 and then 1 Peter 2:2. “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” We are born again through the seed of the Word of God. The seed of the Gospel got planted in our hearts through a message, a tape, a testimony, a tract. It was watered with prayer and conviction of the Spirit, and it germinated in faith and life as the Word of God was the life-bearing seed of God giving us life in Christ.

Then what? Be built up in the Lord. Grow up. 1 Peter 2:2, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby.” The Word that was seed then with life in it becomes to the newborn milk to nurture that life.

Another way to look at discipleship is living for Jesus and obeying Him as Lord. I think your outline says John 13:13 NLT. And Luke 6:46 NASB. Jesus says, “You call Me Teacher and Lord and that is right because I am.” It is good to call Jesus Lord. But in Luke it says, “Why do call Me Lord and not do what I say?” Why do you say Master, then go off and run your own life? That is not discipleship.

Then Romans 14:7-9 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, basically call us to no longer live for ourselves, but to live for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. You see, living for self that is the problem. Discipleship means no longer living for self, but living for Him. We have seen already and we will see many other places, the living for Him is not by self-effort or self-resource, but still it is a life dedicated to Him. We will see more and more about how that is to be done. But discipleship is not living for self, but living for the Lord Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, here is one more umbrella cliché. Often folks say, “Well at least people are getting some help out there as they go to the clinics and the therapists. And after all, there is some Christian out there doing it.”

When I hear people say at least they are getting some help out there, I always want to ask, “But is it God’s help, God’s way?” Listen, someone can go to a therapist and sit down and talk about
themselves for fifty minutes, hand over ninety dollars and go off feeling great. Why? People love to talk about themselves. They get a perverse encouragement out of it. -
“And so I had to pay ninety dollars, small price!” Minor cost for doing what you like to do.
And many people say, “Oh this is encouraging me.”
“To what, the cross?”
“The cross, no, I’m starting to feel better about myself.”
“Well, I’m so sorry to hear that. You are getting ripped off, you know. You are paying someone to point you south when the Lord is calling you north. That’s how serious it is.”

Is the counsel you are getting strengthening your self-life or nailing it? If it’s strengthening it, it’s diminishing your discipleship. If it’s nailing it and setting you free from it, leaving you where you only have one option more and more: “I’ve got to follow Jesus for everything,” then it is helping you.

When we seek counseling God wants to disciple us in these ways: denying self and following Jesus, receiving Jesus, being built up in Him, living for Jesus, obeying Him as Lord and Master, and receiving life from Him.

When others seek counsel from us, God wants to work these same matters in their own lives, as individuals and churches. Oh, let’s pray that this will be a part of what counseling is for us, that we will see that it is directly tied into discipleship. Amen!

All right, let’s take a break and we’ll come back and continue with “Counseling and Sanctification.”
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 4
Counseling and Sanctification

By
Bob Hoekstra

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What Counseling Is

We’ve been looking in our previous session about counseling and discipleship and saw how it cuts right head-on against the self-esteem counseling movement that dominates the world. This is now by far the preponderant way in the church world that counseling is done. People who should be disciples now go to churches and the counselor gets them more into self, which means less into discipleship. It’s hard to believe that those who name the name of Jesus are now helping guide Christians away from Jesus, not closer to Him! That’s how serious this is.

A brother mentioned at break that they were watching a television program in which the pastor publicly said, “I preach the Gospel of self-esteem.” And at least he’s honest, because he certainly does. But that’s no excuse because that’s deadly; that’s another Gospel. If anyone preaches another Gospel, an angel from heaven—or Paul said, “If I came back with a different Gospel, let him be accursed.”

It’s amazing in our American church world, what we’ll put up with in our desire to be tolerant. A book some years ago, I think it was back in the ‘80s. The title is a chilling one and if we were in the Contending for the Faith class I’d read about twenty or thirty quotes out of it. And the book is called Self-Esteem: the New Reformation. His point in the book is that as much as the reformation of Luther and all those guys was important and used of God in getting us back to the Scriptures and justification by faith, now this reformation, the new one, will be even more important. And it’s all about “every person’s sacred right to self-esteem.” The book is all about that. And it’s been circulated to Christian leaders all around the world.

A major proportion of American Christians don’t even know that book has ever been written, let alone that it influences Christian leaders all over the world where this man conducts his worldwide church leadership seminars. To many of us he is kind of like an anomaly or kind of like an overly dramatic grandfather that’s on TV. He has an interesting flair and an amazing voice and all that and is Mr. Positive himself. But the message that he has put out has been one of the most deadly to the American church in the history of the Church. The self-esteem Gospel, it’s deadly. And that book is deadly.

And again, I don’t know where that man stands with the Lord. You know, I’ll praise God if I look up, shocked in heaven some day and there he is. I’ll say, “Praise God. God is merciful.” I shouldn’t be there either, you know. I’m not going to be upset at that. I hope he is bound for there [heaven]. I know the message that he proclaims does not make disciples. I know there are some believers there. I actually did a wedding and I can tell you a long list of places I’ve done weddings and here’s my conviction on it. If the people are qualified before God to be married, I’ll marry them any place that I have total freedom to preach anything in the Word of God that God lays on my heart. And I tell you, from the first wedding I did in the late 60s up until the last one I did January, my passion has been to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and preach Christ as our hope and our life and the head of the home. To me, a wedding is a place to preach. There is no long line for me to do weddings, but the Lord has blessed the weddings He’s let me do.

I met a staff member who knew and loved the Lord at this and we had a little fellowship. He had a robe for him and a robe for me and he came up and I’m thinking, “Oh Lord, deliver me, please.” And he said, “One of these is for you. Would you like one?” And I said, “Well, you know, not really.” He said, “You know, I really don’t either.” He just kind of threw them down.
I thought, boy, there’s hope here! There’s hope here! Then we talked a while and I could tell this brother knew the Lord and loved the Lord. And I’m a little perplexed why he’s there, you know. But obviously he had freedom and liberty to touch lives.

And he said, “You know what?” He said, “I’m not going to hang around for this wedding.” He said, “I’m just going to introduce you and cut out.” He said, “You know what you’re doing here in the Word of God.”

The self-esteem Gospel, it’s deadly. And that book is deadly.

Our textbook that we’re using, one of them, is Ed Bulkley’s, *Only God Can Heal the Wounded Heart* is a very powerful book. That main story that gets woven in and out of the counseling sessions, some of it sounds so fanciful that you almost think, “Couldn’t you make a better one up?” The amazing thing is that is a totally true story. And I know the husband well and have spent time with him. He’s a tremendous brother. I just love him dearly. He is a very godly man. He would certainly not say that he is perfect, but he did seek the Lord through all that and still is because that story isn’t finished. But that wasn’t made up, that’s a true story. They’re deeply involved in a major counseling clinic on the other side of the country. So none of that is fanciful, that’s all right out of the trials and heartaches of the American church.

All right let’s press on in our study. What counseling Is—number one, it’s the Lord is Counselor. If we don’t anchor our thinking on that, we’re off base. All the rest of the way through, no matter what arena we go to, because either God is the counselor or man is the counselor. Now God loves to use instrumentality. He’ll use us, but only to the degree that we’re committed to the fact that He’s the counselor using us.

And then we saw that when the Lord counsels unto discipleship. Not solving problems. Not just removing needs, but making disciples. Now if the Lord wants a problem solved, disciples find them solved. He wants to meet needs. And He basically does though He allows some problems at times. Ask Paul. Ask Job. He’s aiming at disciples whether the needs are met or not or the problems are solved or not, He’s aiming at disciples. And problems that remain and problems solved, can both contribute to disciple-making because it drives us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ which is what discipleship is all about.

Now here’s another definition of what counseling is from God’s perspective. And that is, sanctification. Psalm 32:8 reminds us who the Counselor is and how He counsels. Psalm 32:8, NIV, God is speaking to His people through this Psalm of David, He says, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with My eye upon you.” He will guide you. This is God as the instructor, teaching as the Counselor. And He does it in the way we should go.

Man wants counseling but finds a way that works for him, something he likes. He finds something he can live with. No, the Lord says, “I’ll find something first you can die with, that you might find new life in Me.” No to self. Death to self. Take up your cross daily and follow Jesus.

The way you should go is the way God counsels and that’s the path of discipleship. God’s counseling is not just for relief of stress or making you comfortable. Praise God, He’s a great comforter. He’s the “God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). But that doesn’t mean every moment in life is comfortable. If we ever doubt that, just take one more look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom we’re following. And if His life was not always comfortable, ours won’t always be either if we’re following His path.
In 1 Corinthians 1:2 it says, “To the church of God which is at Corinth to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus...” We are being sanctified in Christ Jesus. Sanctification has to do with being set apart for God’s intended use, for God’s glory, for God’s purposes. That’s what sanctification is. Set apart for the glory and use and purposes of God.

There are three aspects to it: past, present and future. The past is already accomplished. Some call it positional sanctification. That’s what this is, 1 Corinthians 1:2. To those who are sanctified, it is past tense—an already existing condition. Already set apart. How? In Christ! “Who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Set apart by being in Christ instead of in the world and in Adam. Now in Christ, we are set apart unto God.

Future we will be sanctified fully, which is yet to be. It is also called glorification. The past sanctification is positional, in Christ. The one to come is ultimate and it is where we are headed.

But primarily related to counseling and the counseling ministry is the present process of sanctification. It is on-going sanctification, progressive sanctification. And that’s where we’ll concentrate now and that’s the primary sanctification issue, when it comes to the counseling ministry.

Now sometimes in counseling it’s important to remind a person they have been sanctified. They’re set apart because they’re in Christ. And they’re headed toward ultimate, full glorification. God wants to sanctify us. But so often it’s today, the next step, this issue, my walk. He wants day by day, step by step, more and more to set us apart for the glory of God, for the use of God, for the purposes of God. That is progressive sanctification.

So let’s think for a few minutes in our next heading about progressing in sanctification and the next Scripture you see there. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...” Now are we talking about past, future or present sanctification? “…that you should abstain from sexual immorality...” Well, there’ll be none of that to worry about in heaven, so we’re not talking about future. Past? No. Just being brought out of Adam into Christ doesn’t mean you’ll never be tempted or stumble maybe into sexual immorality. So we’re talking about ongoing, present, progressive sanctification, a sexual purity more and more, day by day.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5,

…that each of you should know to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

This is sexual purity ongoing day by day. In our culture of sexual impurity, this is often a specific issue in ongoing sanctification.

A couple years ago in Ft Lauderdale we did a Counseling God’s Way blitz and had me out there at their church for five days every day Counseling God’s way. We had meetings with the staff, meetings with the leadership, on counseling God’s way—God’s Word in Counseling. And we had fantastic seminar and all other kind of blessed meetings of the Lord on this subject. When we touched on this verse and they told me later that God has done such a revival work there. At that time there were 4,000 adults there. That year just before I came a thousand adults had come to Christ. And they told me, they said, “Bob, you know, a lot of our counseling is with young Christians to come out of the sexually impure world.” And this is one of the big issues they face. Progressive sanctification has increased purity in their sexual thinking and behaving and relating and less of the ways of the world.
“This is the will of God, your sanctification:” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). That’s the broad issue. It’s God’s will that we be set apart more and more, day by day, for His glory, for His use, for His purposes. And here’s one specific application area, sexual purity.

God’s counseling is unto sanctification. Man’s counseling is to make you feel a little better about yourself. God’s counseling is, “No, I want to change your life and let you know I love you and can transform you.”

2 Timothy 2:21, progressing in sanctification,

Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

If anyone cleanses himself from the latter, things of dishonor, things of iniquity, he’ll be a vessel for honor, sanctified, set apart and useful for the Master and prepared for every good work.

Picture of believer’s life being increasingly cleansed from wickedness and iniquity. That is how they are being sanctified, more useful and a more equipped vessel. This is progressing in sanctification day by day.

We have more Scriptures than our hours will allow, but we have left those there for reference for your own reading. Another way to talk about sanctification is to call it developing in godliness.

Titus 2:11-12,

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

Verse 11, speaks of the grace of God that brings salvation. And that grace has appeared to all men. Christ came offering salvation to whosoever will, may come. And that salvation, that rescue from the consequences of sin, that deliverance out of bondage and death to freedom and life, God’s salvation by the grace of God.

But notice these two verses are really pointing, not at the grace of God just for the saving grace of God, but for a new life day by day. This is one of the places in the Growing in the Grace of God class that we kind of land and spend some time, because it’s verses about God’s grace, not for justification only but for sanctification as well. “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” But look what the grace of God does. It does more than bring salvation. It also teaches us. God’s grace teaching us that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly rightly and godly in the present age.”

The grace of God instructing us. A similar Greek word here for instruction or training could be translated, and often is, discipling. The grace of God not only is how we start out as a disciple, the grace of God coming to bear on our lives as a resource, a power, an impact, a work of God in truth and love and change that lets us walk in newness of life. It instructs us, teaches us, to deny ungodliness and worldly things and to live rightly and godly. This is to live God’s way. It’s the grace of God that forgives our ungodliness and calls us away from it and even moves us in a path of godliness.
Developing in godliness is another way to speak of sanctification. And 1 Timothy 4:7-8 also speaks of the same.

But this must be the big picture for Counseling God’s Way. We want to offer a counsel from God that’s in accord with the message and purpose of God, and that is our sanctification. God saved us not just to forgive us, but to set us free from the ways of the past. To let us develop in godliness or we might say, grow in Christlikeness. That’s what sanctification is.

Another way to think about this matter of sanctification is growing in holiness.

1 Peter 1:14-16,

> As obedient children not conforming yourselves to the former lusts as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’

We’re not to be conformed to our former lusts, our former worldly, fleshly, self-centered cravings. Rather we’re to be holy, to be godly. What’s the reason? It’s because our God is holy. We’re to be holy because He is holy. We are to walk with Him as His children, to fellowship with Him. God wants us growing in holiness that we might grow in fellowship and likeness with Him. And it says in all your behavior, in all your conduct. Not just public church life conduct or Bible college conduct or street witnessing conduct, but in all of our behavior.

Then Hebrews 12:9-11 says that God disciplines us that we might share in His holiness. He increasingly disciplines us, He disciplines us. He increasingly disciplines us to this end: that we might share in His holiness. He disciplines us. He works in such ways that He makes us more and more of a disciple. Calls us to say no to self and death to self, and works in us that training. And even, when need be, chastising when we’re unwilling to walk that path. Why? So that we will follow Jesus and find in Him the holy, godly life we need. He disciplines us that we might share in His holiness.

We have no holiness of our own. We looked at that much in the Growing in the Grace of God class. The law says be holy. But the law can’t make you holy. So He disciplines us, disciples us, works on us, in us, with us, that we might share in His holiness, that we will look to Him alone for the holiness we need. If we don’t share in His holiness, we’ll never have any holiness to walk in.

As Paul said in Romans 7:18, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells...” But the Lord works in our lives, on our lives, that we will look to Him to share in His holiness.

And God wants us to grow in holiness. Our counseling should have that flavor in it. A message from God that when it is shared in the name of the Lord, by the work of the Spirit, develops godliness in people’s lives, and calls them to grow in holiness. It lets them see they’re to share in God’s holiness. They’re to live by it, draw upon it, stand in it, and grow in it.

This is part of God’s counsel. Remember Psalm 32:8, “I will instruct you in the way you should go...” What is that way? The path of holiness, the path of godliness, the path of Christlikeness, the path of learning to share in His holiness that we might walk godly, in Christ Jesus.
Now there is another way to look at this matter of developing, growing and progressing in sanctification. We’ll spend a little more time here. This is such a critical one and it really catches up all of the others together.

Philippians 3:10-14 speaks about getting to know God. Sanctification can be related to getting to know the Lord, because it’s getting to know the Lord that makes us like the Himself. Of course, getting to know the Lord can be related also to the other issue we looked at, the path of discipleship, because it’s in following after Jesus that we get acquainted with Jesus. So this is a fitting summation really, of what the Lord’s pointing at when He counsels. He wants His counsel to allow people to get to know Him better. He wants His counsel to make it clear to people what it’s all about is getting know the Lord. Not feeling good about ourselves. Not reestablishing a relative comfort zone. Not being declared no longer dysfunctional, but maybe somewhat well adjusted. No. Those aren’t the goals of the Lord.

We’re seeing the things God talks about, they’re so much higher, so much bigger. Progressing in sanctification is developing in godliness, growing in holiness, that’s what the Lord aims at in His counsel. It’s so heavenly. It’s so lofty. It’s so life changing,

Sadly, there are folks in Christian therapy that have been in it for two, eight, ten years. Now, if it was producing godliness and Christ-likeness and growth, well, okay. There must be something really good there. But in many such situations there’s no evidence of these things taking place.

A situation comes to mind when I was still pastoring up in Irvine, one of the men in the church that seemed to be fruitful in teaching, thought he was not what he needed to be and couldn’t function in the home as he needed to be or in work and all. He was already a young millionaire and the brother was a blessing and his wife was precious and they had godly kids. But no, he seemed to think that therapy was needed. And he started going once a week. He went to one of the two major so-called Christian counseling centers in Orange County. They assigned him to a woman counselor, which flabbergasted me. I pled with him just to find what he needed in church life and discipling. No, this was a professional matter. What a bill of goods that is! I’m not saying God can’t ever use a professional, but to think that God doesn’t have His resources in the Word and His remedy in His church, just totally underestimates what God has said and done. And the counselor suggested that this man separate from his wife because he needed to “find himself.” Well, he didn’t need to find himself except on the cross. He just needed to say no to self, death to self (Luke 9:23), and have one option left, to follow Jesus. No he had to separate from his family to establish his life, then he could get in there and do right in his home. It’s absolutely earthly, worldly, self-centered, a psychological theory unto death.

It wasn’t long before divorce came and he was interested in another woman. You know what’s happened since then? Here’s the thing that’s changed. Instead of getting therapy once a week, he now gets it three times a week. Sure, he probably had some problems, some needs. Who doesn’t? But he traded a little measure of a problem for a gigantic problem. And the gigantic problem was the supposed solution to his minor problem.

Boy, self has an appetite that goes out of sight. There’s no greater addiction than to self. And many people going to so-called Christianized integrative therapy in the Christian counseling clinics, getting self-esteem counseling, self gets fed, fed, fed, pumped up, built up, gets stronger and stronger. And its appetite is insatiable. And what maybe started out a small problem or an insignificant problem, gets displaced by a bondage to self-centered therapy. Some can’t live without it anymore. But they aren’t living with it. They’re dying every day. Not in a healthy way, by death to self that they might live in Christ, but through dying by self-indulgence.
When God counsels, He counsels to these things: discipleship, godliness, Christ-likeness, and holiness. It comes around to this—it’s all about getting to know God.

In Philippians 3:8-14 Paul said, “That I may know Him…”—knowing God, that’s what it’s all about. In verse 8 Paul said, “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord…” The New American Standard here translates it, “…for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord….” There’s one value that surpasses every other one. Everything is subservient to this, and that’s getting to know the Lord, building a relationship, developing a friendship with Him. Jesus did call His followers friends. Not buddy, buddy and the good man upstairs kind of theology. He’s still Creator-God and we’ll always revere Him and walk humbly before Him. But we’re still His friends. And He wants us to build a friendship.

My kids always had a kind of a reverence toward dad. Well at least until they were teenagers. But man, they never hesitated to run and jump on my lap when I held out my arms, you know. We were buddies and still are. They’re at the other side now, they’re in their mid-twenties. Praise God, there’s life after teens.

Knowing God, that’s what it’s all about, “that I may know Him.” How do we get to know Him? Well, obviously the foundational way, the revelation of Himself through His Word by the Spirit. But He applies that to us in our walk day by day. So it comes out like this—“That I may know Him and…” sort of that is to say and this is how you get to know Him. Three ways: “…the power of His resurrection”—certainly spoken of in the Word, but it’s to be experienced. Knowing someone is a relational experience not a catalog of facts. It should be based upon factual reality. We want to know the truth about God, but we want to know Him, get acquainted with Him.

Here’s how it happens. We experience the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, even being conformed to His death. We taste of His resurrection power. That’s the first acquaintanceship really. We’re born again, raised from the dead! When dead in trespasses and sins, we call on the name of the Lord. God raised us to a resurrected new life. That’s where we first meet the Lord. What a way to meet someone! “Hello there, young man. I just raised you from the dead. I’m your Lord.” “Oh Lord! Thank You, thank You, thank You! Oh this is glorious!” And you’re just on hallelujah turf for who knows how long the honeymoon lasts. You’re saying, “Oh isn’t the Lord good?” And we just learn to love Him on that resurrection ground. The power of His resurrection. Boy, everything is just hallelujah for a while.

A lot of us didn’t know that there was another matter coming called, “the fellowship of His sufferings.” Most of us, when that started to hit we thought we’d lost faith or failed God or—isn’t it supposed to always be “glory hallelujah”? There is a smile that wraps around and touches in the back all the time. I must be doing something wrong. I mean, this is starting to hurt. Well, there’s more to God than resurrection power. Sure Jesus was raised from the dead. Take a look at His life though. He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). No one ever suffered on this earth like the Lord Jesus.

If we’re going to get to know Him, there’s going to be some suffering. Not suffering that we cause, but suffering that is caused for doing righteousness, but suffering for His sake. Pleasing Him and others not liking it. Pleasing Him and not a blessing but a cursing comes. Pleasing Him and instead of them giving you a trophy, they want to nail you. “Wow, Lord. This is what You went through, isn’t it? Oh Lord. Whew, thank You! You went through this to come after me? But
Lord You went through it so perfectly. Help me, Lord. Let’s get acquainted together through this, you know. Show me how to do it.” The fellowship of His suffering, that’s part of getting acquainted with the Lord too.

Then here’s the least selected option of the three, when left up to us, “…being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). Sometimes it’s like we’re dying. And we’re not talking about rebellion here, which brings deadness of spiritual walk. We’re talking about getting to know God, conformed to His death, the death of the Son of God. Where our walk gets conformed, shaped to the kind of dying He went through. Committed to pleasing God and all that seems to come is more death from it. This is deadness and impossibility, until you’re just buried maybe in helplessness and hopelessness.

Maybe you’re crying out, “My God, why have You forsaken me?” He hasn’t. But it feels like it. He hadn’t forsaken Jesus really. Yes, He turned from the sin that He knew would raise His Son forevermore. He won’t leave us in that deadness. But oh, how we get to know Him. “Oh Lord! You went through this, didn’t You?—far beyond what I am going through.” Oh, the acquaintanceship that comes from that!

Plus the fact that He ends up keeping us. Pretty soon that conformity to His death, where doing His will just bring us to a dead end it seems, in resource or hope or strength or joy or insight. It’s helpless. It’s like a personal execution. That’s what happened to Him when He obeyed the Father. He had to rest everything on the faithfulness of the Father. “Into Your hands I commit My Spirit.” We get in spots like that too, experientially. We get conformed to His death.

Not for the reason or to the measure that He did. No. He’s God; we aren’t. His was a death for the sake of others. The more we die, the more useful we are to others. The less self-hope we have, the less self-help we’re looking for—I’ll tell you, Lazarus in that tomb wasn’t lying there figuring, “How can I get out of here.” His only way out was how? “Lazarus, come forth!”

That’s what this is about, conformity to His death. The faithfulness of God is the only thing that can pull us through. Usually then it cycles back pretty soon to the power of His resurrection. He comes through. He’s faithful. He raises us again to new measures of faith and hope and strength and peace and fruitfulness and opportunity and it’s “glory hallelujah” time again. But we won’t ever forget what happened. In fact, nothing says it will only happen once.

I’ve told some of you I’ve been walking with the Lord thirty years now, last December. I’ve probably had four major entombments in thirty years. You can guess which one is the scariest of all. The first one because you think it’s all over. Faith spent. Hope gone. Strength weakened. Opportunities shriveled to nothing. Disappointments abounding and all you were trying to do was just please God. Not that you did it all perfectly, but that was your basic heart. And you end up buried. Boy, when he raises you though, there’s something about it. See, the greatest threat of the enemy is “I’ll wipe you out. I’ll bury you. I’ll kill you.” Well, you did once and it didn’t seem to work. There’s always resurrection, you know. Wow! It puts a whole new hope in you, resurrection hope. You receive a faith in a God who raises the dead, not only in the end, but whenever needed. It changes everything.

Paul said, in that cycle of “know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means [if by all these ways] I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). Literally the “resurrection from the dead,” contextually, linguistically and Biblically in its theology, this cannot be talking about the final resurrection. He wasn’t trying to achieve something in life now that—oh no, I’m to be
resurrected at the end. No, that comes with being in Christ. This is obviously a getting acquainted with God thing, a daily growing thing.

Verse 12 says, “Not that I’ve already attained, or am already perfected…” See, it’s all about maturing in the faith. I haven’t got it all, but I press on. Why? To grow in more of it, “…that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

Verse 11, I think is all about this. Paul wanted to get to know the Lord so well in all these means that he might increasingly live a resurrected life in a dead, self-centered world, “if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from this deadness that is all around.”

Verse 12 Paul says, “Not that I fully live that way yet….” Paul says that he doesn’t yet know the Lord well enough that he responds to every situation in this perfect resurrected way. But he keeps pressing on. That’s what I’m aiming at. I want a resurrected life in this dead world. I don’t respond that way. There are some dead responses, he’s saying. I love this humility after he’s walked with the Lord some thirty years, probably at his point.

Philippians 3:13, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended.” I haven’t totally arrived in all God wants to do in my life. But look at this, “but one thing I do.” What’s the one thing he did? I thought he did forty-seven things, this guy. He was a man of a hundred hats. Apostle, part time pastor, part time tent maker, traveler, adventurer in the name of God, evangelist, counselor, disciple maker, leader, equipper. And when things went bad with him and they locked him up—“Fine, I’ll just sit down and write the Bible,” you know! The man did everything. And even the worst moments turned out to be some of the best things he ever did in his life. Right out of prison, the Spirit of God was writing things that still touch our lives today. But when he speaks he says, “One thing I do.” He could boil his whole life down to one issue.

What is it? It is knowing the Lord, getting to know the Lord. “That I may know Him” is pursuing that one great value of life. How did he do it? “...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

What is the goal that he’s pressing toward? Knowing God. What is the prize that he’s anticipating? It’s all the benefits that continue to accrue and collect from getting to know God. What is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? The heavenward invitation, “Come get to know Me. Come follow Me.” It’s all about knowing God.

Our counseling should aim in that direction. Knowing Christ makes us more like Christ and we live more like Christ.

There’s another umbrella cliché that comes up here, another one of these sheltering, protecting, sayings that lets humanistic, man-centered, psychological, theoretical thinking influence the life and counsel of the Church. It goes something like this: “People’s problems are all rooted deep in their past. You need to learn to help people go into their feelings and back to their history. Or at least get them to a professional that can root these things out.”

Inward and backward goes the counsel of the world. And it makes such perfect sense. Hey, it’s your life. What’s going on in you? How do you feel? Tell us. Come on, let’s get it at it. And you start to dump it out. And the basic therapeutic response today is, “Oh my goodness, that’s going on in you? Whoa, we better trace back where you’ve been. Find out who or what made you like
that.” So in and back runs the therapy of the world. And we’ve brought it heavy-duty into the Church.

In and back are the two opposite directions of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, right here in this passage, is revealed as forward and upward. Pressing forward, looking upward. You want to add other verses? Colossians 3:1-3, “Seek things above not the things that are on this earth.” Forward and upward, that’s where the kingdom of God develops. That’s where life grows in Christ. Follow Jesus, looking heavenward for the revelation of Himself, His values, purposes, and resources. Forgetting what lies behind, I press forward for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That is forward and upward.

Counsel that goes inward and backward is humanistic, man-centered, and self-centered counseling. It doesn’t matter if it’s done by Christians and called Christian counseling. It’s of the world. It’s not counseling God’s way and there’s plenty of it around.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, there is a similar matter of coming to the Word to behold the glory of the Lord and being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. Getting to know the Lord and being made like the Lord.

Then in 1 John 3:2-3 is the final step in all of that. Someday we’ll see Him and we’ll be like Him. What will be the dynamic that makes us like Him? “For we shall see Him as He is.” The full revelation, the full knowledge and knowing of the Lord will be the final transforming impact upon our lives, and we shall be like Him! But all along the way, we’re to be growing in that path, as we get to know Him.

The root problem in people’s lives is not that they need to know themselves more and their past better. God can help them forget that and press ahead. The root problem in everyone’s life is, I need to know God better. There’s no problem I have that won’t be dealt with God’s way as I get to know God better. Both in what He wants to do and the resources He has to do it. There’s no dream, vision, hope or plan that pounds in my heart that can bring glory to God that will get dealt with in a better way than just getting to know God better, confirming what He wants to do, showing me He’s the one able to do it in us and through us.

Our last verse in this study, in conclusion is 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Look at this great benedictory prayer. What a great Counseling God’s Way prayer for our own lives and each other’s and those we counsel. “Now may the God of peace Himself, sanctify you completely…. We’re talking about counseling and sanctification. When God counsels He wants to sanctify us, set us part to His glory and use and purpose. Yeah, well how are you going to be made like Christ more and more? Not by grabbing ourselves by the collar and straightening ourselves up. Or grabbing our bootstraps and yanking ourselves up to the heights of heaven. Here’s how it happens—by trusting God to do the work in and through us.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; [A prayer that God would do this] and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Look at verse 24, you might want to add this, “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” He’s faithful. You put your faith in Him to do this, to carry out the sanctification process, He’s faithful. He’ll do it. He’ll honor your faith. He’ll prove Himself trustworthy.
We want to get to know God. Grow to be like Christ, be more godly and walk in more holiness. May God do that to us completely, more and more, day by day. You know, He’s faithful. He’s reliable to do it if we trust Him to and if we seek Him for it. What a great hope that gives.

Our counseling should be flavored by a message of sanctification. Because not only is the Lord the Counselor, but when He counsels it’s for the purpose of discipleship and sanctification. Not “feel-goodism.” Not just coping and getting by another day. But rather being changed to be like Christ.

Let’s pray together.

*Lord, we thank You for the call of Your Word. It’s so heavenly. It turns us toward You and upward and calls us to press on to know You. Counsel us this way as we need it, Lord. And when others come to us for counsel, may we give a discipling, sanctifying word of You and from You that can be used by You and for You, that we’ll see lives changed to Your glory. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 5
God’s Word in Counseling

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Lord, as we come into the Word of God tonight, we ask You to speak to us. We seek You again, Lord, for the guidance of Your Spirit, for the teaching ministry of Your Spirit. We thank You for this great subject of Biblical counseling that You have given to us in Your Word what we need to hear, the path we need to walk, the resources we need to find. And we come humbling ourselves before You tonight, Lord, and confessing You as our wonderful counselor. We ask You again tonight to counsel us, to equip us, to warn us. Do the things that are pleasing in Your sight, Lord, in our lives, through our lives, with our lives. And give us a broader, deeper vision and a more consistent path to walk in concerning counseling as You have ordained it. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

We started out considering what counseling is in our first three units of study. We saw that the Lord is the Counselor, not man. The Lord Himself, He’s the Wonderful Counselor. In our next two studies we saw that the Lord, when He counsels, He counsels unto discipleship and sanctification. He counsels to make disciples and He counsels to sanctify lives.

**God’s Way in Counseling**

Now we’re going to consider a new section in our study, moving from what counseling is, to God’s way in counseling; that is, His means in counseling. Wanting to know now how the Lord gets His counsel to us. And we’ll see from the Scriptures that there are four basic issues and aspects involved—God’s Word, the Holy Spirit, prayer and church life.

First is God’s Word in counseling. This is a strategic issue that we’ll return to again and again. Because if the Lord is the counselor, we would expect us to counsel then by what He has to say to us. That’s how counsel is given and expected to be received. And the Lord has said what He wants to say in His Word…“The faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). No deletions and no additions between the giving of it and the time the Lord returns. And what the Lord wants to counsel us in, He has given us here. And we’ll find how basic and central and critical this issue is time and time and time again.

God’s Word in counseling from Psalm 119:24. “Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.”

God wants us delighting in His Word. Then as we are delighting in His Word, living in it, listening to the Lord from it, He will counsel us. That’s basically how He does it, right through His Word.

Also in Psalm 119:105, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

So many people seeking a word of counsel need to know where they are. Where do they stand spiritually? Well, the Word is a lamp to our feet. The light of the Word shines right down on where we stand. But it’s more than just showing us where we are, it also shows us where we are to go. It’s a lamp to our feet and then a light to our path. Shining down, showing us where we are with the Lord. But also leading us in the way He wants us to go. That’s why we want to use it as our counsel. Receive our counsel from it. When others come to us wanting counsel, find it there in the Word. The Word will show people where they stand before Him and where He wants them to go.
Psalm 119:130 says, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” Those who will admit that they are naïve, not wise, simpletons needing wisdom, God’s Word will give it. The understanding comes by the light of the Word shining in. “The entrance of Your words gives light.”

So many people seeking a word of counsel, they’re motivated, they’re stirred to seek that counsel because it is, as it were, they’re in the dark. It is the darkness of confusion, the darkness of perplexity and sometimes the darkness of bad habits, bad attitudes, and bad relationships. Just darkness! Nothing can deal with darkness except light. Light alone is the factor that deals with darkness. Darkness cannot be chased away, screamed away, cursed away. You can’t run from it. You can’t beat it. You can’t kick it. You can’t reason with it. There’s only one element that can deal with darkness and that’s light. And a lot of people, what they’re struggling with is some aspect of darkness. Well, the unfolding or the entrance of the Word of God gives light.

A few years ago I was praying and meditating, thinking with the Lord in this verse, which I love to do in Scriptures that are grabbing my heart, and often understanding comes in many ways as the Spirit illuminates the Word. As we chew on it, and listen, and think with the Lord. In applying it to the counseling ministry this picture came to my mind. A person quite smothered in darkness, obviously needy and burdened, coming to a friend, another Christian, one they trusted, looking for help. And the person to whom they were going knew what was needed and that was the Word of God. So that person had the Bible in their hands and they were beginning to open it to share. And because this was a visual illustration, as the Word was being opened, light was shining out of it. The light cut across that person’s darkness, and wherever that shaft of light cut across, the darkness was gone. And it’s just a simple little picture, but I think it’s exactly how it works spiritually. The darkness in people’s lives is driven out by the light of the Word.

“The entrance of your words”—or some versions translate it—“the unfolding of Your Words.” You know, not really in some kind of magically zapped way, you know. I’ve got about three minutes, I’ll counsel you. Bzzzzt! There does that take care of it? Not in that kind of a way, but in a spiritual way as it is unfolded by the Spirit of God, giving understanding and insight. It's like, ah, the light dawns; the darkness flees.

“The entrance of Your words gives light.” When the Word of God enters our lives, it drives out darkness. And that’s how we can use it in our counseling ministries.

Psalm 107:20, “He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” This is describing people with a lack of wholeness of life. They need to be healed, that is, made whole. They need to be rescued, delivered, from their destructions, from the things that devastate their lives.

Let’s see what this was about, beginning at Psalm 107:17, “Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted.” So here are people walking in the foolishness of crossing over the guidelines of the Lord and getting involved in iniquity, in sin and rebellion. And so they were afflicted. There were difficulties that developed from the transgressions, natural spiritual consequences.

What did that produce in their lives? Psalm 107:18, “Their soul abhorred all manner of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.” This is one more of thousands upon thousands of illustrations that there is nothing new under the sun. Again, our culture has thought we invented eating disorders this generation. I don’t like, personally, the term eating disorder. Man’s always
searching for euphemisms. Nice ways to say spiritually unhealthy, ungodly destructive things. Eating disorder sounds kind of sterile and clinical and a little therapy, a little medication and it will be all cleared up. The virus will pass.

Now you may have had something in your life that someone called an eating disorder. I wouldn’t be surprised. It hits many people. But it’s nothing new. And it doesn’t take some human clinic to come up with a way through it and out of it. God knows of these things. There’s nothing new. And that’s what they had. “Their soul abhorred all manner of food.” Because of bad thinking, bad behaving, not proper relating to God and His truth and His ways, they ended in a spot where their soul abhorred all manner of food. And of course, that will lead you near to the gates of death. And there are those with such problems today and there were back then as well.

What did these people back then do? Verse 19 says, “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble...” They made their appeal to God. They cried out to the Lord. And what did the Lord do? “…And He saved them out of their distresses.” How did He save them? How did He rescue them? Verse 20 says, “He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” He sent His Word to them. As a consequence of their difficulties and their wrong thinking, wrong living, transgressing, iniquity, bad thoughts or behaviors, bad thinking or bad behaving before God, they ended up abhorring something that God has created and given to man for good.

Anyone who abhors food, they’re not thinking God’s way. Food is not something to abhor, to dread, to fear, or to hate. It is something that God created that’s good for man. It’s for nurturing the physical life we have. And it actually even was created by God to be enjoyable. And all things that God gives can be enjoyed. And they can be sanctified by thanksgiving and prayer and the Word. So anyone who abhors food, who’s afraid of it, who despises it, who shuts at the thought of it, there’s some ungodly thinking going on. This thinking that food wasn’t ordained by God is all messed up by the world, the flesh, or the devil.

On the other end of the scale, there are people who do not to eat—they flip it around the other way, they live to eat. And food becomes their God. Well that’s bad thinking. That is an ungodly perspective on food. God didn’t make food for that purpose. He made it to be received with thanksgiving and enjoyment to nurture the physical life He’s given to us and to give Him thanks for it. It is to be a blessing, a resource and a pleasure. So being afraid of it or possessed by it is spiritual bondage to ungodly thinking.

What does the Lord do to make a person whole when their life is broken up like that? He sends His Word and heals them. He sends His Word and tells them the truth. He lets them reconsider what’s going on by hearing how He views all of that. And anyone willing to receive that, and believe that, and stand on that, will be made whole and delivered from their destructions. That is what happened back then.

There is a dear sister who was diagnosed with an eating disorder. I would say she was in spiritual bondage to bad thinking, ungodly thinking about food. Someone ministered to her, prayed for her and shared some things from the Word and the Lord touched her life. He healed her and made her life whole, brought her mind back to wholeness and sound thinking. And food was neither something to run from nor something to live for. And she was given a great burden by the Lord for ladies that were messed up in their thinking and wrong behavior with food. Those that the world would say had eating disorders like anorexia or bulimia or chronic overeating or fearful under eating. There are all kinds of things, along the scale that you could give some kind of clinical description to, but it doesn’t get at the heart of it. It just looks at the outside characteristic,
the behavior. And she started seeking the Lord, in the Word and praying for gals that had these needs in their lives.

When I first began to travel and teach on this subject, she went to the first seminar we ever did and God touched her life deeply. She started calling every week or two or three and sharing some Scriptures she had found that had helped her greatly. And she said, “Bob, please tell me if I’m flipping out here. Am I seeing food in everything in the Word of God, you know? Am I seeing the whole world through my own trial and victory?”

And I said to her, “No, I don’t think you are.” Every time she called, she had profound insight. The first time she called I thought it was an adolescent. I thought she was about eleven or twelve years old, a real sweet little gal with a young voice. I found out she was married and had a baby at that time, she might even have more now. Last time I saw her, the baby looked like two or three. And the last time I talked to her she had 130 or 140 some girls on her prayer list, many of which had been gloriously delivered from their destructions. And all she did was hear from the Lord, with great insight from the Holy Spirit to apply it to this bondage and confusion and just pass it on. And through this little gal the Lord was sending His Word and healing dozens upon dozens of others.

And I believe with all my heart that’s exactly what God is talking about when He lets us consider counseling God’s way. That’s how God designed to do it. He sent His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions. Counsel from the Word, it’s so critically true that’s what we need. And it’s abundantly, wonderfully available. May we seek our counsel in the Word and offer our counsel from the Word.

Now the Word in discipleship and sanctification. Why do we enter into that as our next issue of study, our next heading? Because when the Lord counsels, He counsels unto discipleship and sanctification. How does He do that? It is by the use of His Word.

Remember John 8:31-32, “If you abide in My word you are truly disciples of Mine. You’ll know the truth and the truth will set you free.” What truth? It is the truth of the Word of God. Living in the Word of God, we know the truth of the Word of God, and the truth of the Word of God sets us free. That happens to real disciples. If you live in My word you are really My disciples. God disciples us by His Word and counseling is one way God produces disciples, so obviously He’s going to counsel by the use of His Word. That is what disciples people. It all fits together with one perfect mind from the Lord.

Sanctification. In John 17:17 Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in Your truth. Your word is truth.” A prayer by Jesus to the Father that lives would be sanctified by the truth of the Word of God. When God counsels, He counsels unto our sanctification.

How does God sanctify our lives? He uses the truth of His Word. Sanctification is being increasingly set apart for the use of God, the glory of God, and the purposes of God. How does God do that? He brings the truth of His Word to bear on our lives, changing our thinking, behaving, relating, and our path and He sets our lives apart to the Lord. That’s what the Lord wants to do in our counseling ministries.

At this point there is a major umbrella cliché. Remember what they are? Cliché—a saying that’s used so often by so many that most assume it is the last word, the summing up truth, the concluding issue. Why umbrella?—because umbrellas shelter and protect. These clichés, in the church-counseling world, offer shelter and protection for all kinds of self-centered and flesh-strengthening, humanistic counseling theories.
The umbrella cliché goes like this: “All truth is God’s truth.”

It has such a true ring to it, it almost sounds like why even bother to evaluate that. I mean, surely all truth is God’s truth. The reasoning goes this way: God is true. God made everything, so any truth you find anywhere has its source in God. You know, bingo! I don’t think so. It overlooks too many things in the Word of God. It leaps to too many assumptions. It sounds ironclad, but it’s full of holes. Now there is an aspect in which the cliché is true. Anything that actually is absolutely true did source in God. But that’s not how this cliché is used. Let me share with you a bit how it’s used.

In the integrative world of Christian counseling, which is not only the dominating vanguard movement in the American church world, in fact, around the world among the churches, it also is not just the leading point, it is the predominating influence in the American church. It is the integrative approach. We’ll take the absolute truth of the Word of God and we’ll integrate into it the theories of man, like Jung and Maslow, and Freud and Adler and Eric Fromm and others like that. And we’ll bring to bear all of this great truth of God and all of this great discovered truth. So we’ll have revealed truth and then this great arena of discovered truth. And we’re very comfortable doing that, you see, because we have this great assurance—all truth is God’s truth.

There are major Biblical problems with that kind of thinking. One problem is these men who came up with these theories were dead and blind. How good is their so-called truth going to be as they’re groping around guessing? Can you see Freud, “Let’s see, I think man has three parts. Yes, here’s the ego, the id, and oh the super ego too. Yes, that’s what man is.” And then if you dare say in the church, you are mixed that with the Bible? Oh yeah, because hey, all truth is God’s truth. I’m sorry, I don’t buy it. I heard it at seminary in Dallas in the late 1960s and I didn’t know anything. But I didn’t think that quite clicked. It didn’t ring true really. All truth is God’s truth, except that saying!

There are other problems with it too. What are you going to measure truth by? This approach just mixes that with God’s Word because it looks like it is true. Hey, these guys are brilliant. They agree. And hey, it has kind of a reality to it, so let’s mix it in.

There is another great problem. This approach to counseling takes the absolute, eternal, reliable, sufficient truth of God and brings it down to a level we never should have lowered it to. While at the same time, it takes the so-called discovered truth of man and elevates it to a place that it never should have achieved. And there they are, God’s truth and man’s truth, but it’s all God’s and it’s all on one level table, one great smorgasbord of truth. And everyone is inviting us to the banqueting table and the banner isn’t love. The banner is, all truth is God’s truth and it is self-satisfying, self-serving.

And on that table there’s a great spread, lavish. And praise God, look there’s some Philippians there. But we dare not use it without some Freud. Matthew, sure, that’s going to help. That’s God’s Word. Are you kidding me? But don’t forget to mix it with Maslow, you know. Then you get a better counsel than either could offer on their own. This is the dominating perspective in the American church. And you probably believe me when I say this, little testimony. To challenge that in teaching and writing and interaction, causes many to look at you as though you just landed from Mars, or just fell off the turnip truck coming in from the farm. “Well, we’ll have to humor this guy. He just doesn’t understand.”
Well I don’t understand everything, but I believe the Lord has shown enough light of His Word on that umbrella cliché that, to me, it’s just riddled with holes. It looks to me like God shot a machine gun at it. It has so many holes in it.

And you say, “How can you mix Matthew and Maslow? And how can you mix Freud in there with Philippians?” And they go, “Well hey, we all know all truth is God’s truth.” And they point to the banner and say, “Have another plateful.” It’s deadly.

For counseling God’s way, God’s Word is the truth for discipling, for sanctifying, for setting people free and for making lives whole. All truth is God’s truth is a banner that waters down and compromises real truth, the truth of the Word of God. In fact, Jesus made it very clear in what He said that He was not anticipating supplemental input from Freud and Jung someday. He said, “Real disciples live in My word and they know the truth and that truth sets them free.” They’re not waiting for one more turn of the key to Freud so the handcuffs are off. The truth of the Word sets people free. Jesus didn’t say, “Real disciples are digging for truth anywhere they can find it. And wherever they find it, it liberates them.” He didn’t even leave room for that. Real disciples live in My Word. They know the truth and that truth liberates them.

It is the same with the sanctification prayer. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The church is acting as though Jesus prayed far differently than that, you know. “Oh Father, as My disciples roam to and fro and catch the wisdom of man and mix it with the wisdom of heaven, sanctify them by any truth they find, because we all know where it came from.” No way! Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. Jesus left no doubt where heaven looks for counsel, for liberation, for being set free, for being sanctified and made whole. It’s the truth of the Word of God.

With that in mind, let’s think together for a little while about the ability of the Word of God.

2 Timothy 3:14-15,

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The ability of the Word of God is one of the great themes of Scripture. The Scriptures not only have this immeasurable, heavenly capacity, the Scriptures reveal to us this capacity, this ability.

Many years ago I started a study folder called, “The Ability of the Word of God.” And like most study folders that I have developed through the years, especially once I got out of school and wasn’t developing folders just on what everybody told me to develop them on. But I enjoyed study even more once I was out of school. I must say I liked seminary. I went there for wrong reasons. I thought you had to go there to learn the Bible. I was a little confused there. I didn’t yet know that revolutionary thought that churches were supposed to teach that to us. So I was a little bit off base. But praise God, I did want to learn the Word. That’s why I was there. And I loved being at a seminary that had a heavy, heavy duty Bible emphasis; where everyone had to be an English Bible major and everyone had to take a couple years of Hebrew and three years of Greek. I do like language and it’s been a blessing. Though I realized once I got out of school and stopped hearing how important it was, I realized you didn’t have to know Greek to understand the Bible either. But I really enjoyed studying the Word through school, but once I got out, I enjoyed it even more. There was no one to tell me what to study, but God laying it on my heart. And this
was one of the early studies I started and I stuck at it and I still keep an eye out for verses with this theme. It came to me one day reading, and I came across this phrase, “the Holy Scriptures, which are able….” Then somewhere else I noticed that phrase, and I thought, “Oh my goodness, I wonder how many places that appears?” Found out a lot of places in the Word of God talk about the ability of the Word of God.

Bet you’d never guess what I majored on in seminary. Christian education. You know, like I was going to go out and develop the Sunday school ministries of the world. I did it because I liked the two leading professors. I wanted to hang out with them and learn from them, which I think was wisdom. That is the way it works in the kingdom, the older disciple the younger. And lives you are touched by are far more important than the curriculum shape.

What is the Holy Scripture able to do? “…make you wise for salvation…” How?—“…through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). If it weren’t for the Scriptures, we’d have no clue how to wise up unto salvation. No clue. But the Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation. But there’s more. Look at these next two verses. It even gets increasingly richer.

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)

Right in the middle of verse 16, “All Scripture is profitable….” It’s a similar kind of phrase. Scriptures which are able, the Scripture is profitable. They are able to bring a benefit, a spiritual profit. Not make you rich in dollars, but rich in heavenly treasure. Profitable for what does it say? Not for the Rolex and the Rolls Royce, but profitable for doctrine, that is, teaching. The Scriptures are able to profit our lives in teaching of the way of the Lord. And even more for reproof, the Scriptures are able to give us the benefit of knowing when we’re off the way and even more, they are able to profit us for correction. That is, move us back on the way of the Lord and walking down His path to discipleship. And even more, they are profitable for instruction in righteousness. That is, teaching and training us to move right down that right path, that path of righteousness.

To what end is all of this working? Verse 17, “…that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

People seeking a word of counsel, sometimes they need to have the ability of God unleashed to make them wise unto salvation. In fact later, we’ll look at counseling session guidelines. This is a high priority in counseling. Ask God if that person is saved. If they aren’t, you know what their number one need is even if they’ve got eight others they want to talk about.

But others who are seeking help, they need to have the ability of the Word unleashed to bring the spiritual profit of teaching them, reproving them, correcting them and instructing them. And for those that are growing and yearning and want to serve God, that’s included in verse 17, “that the man of God may be complete…” Their life made whole, filled out, thoroughly equipped. How completely? It is for every good work. For every spiritual calling of ministry God has, we can be equipped right in the Word of God.

There are three Biblical theological terms in these verses: inspiration, authority and sufficiency. Inspiration—all Scripture is inspired of God. Why do we want to counsel from the Word? Because this is not religious literature, this is God speaking to man. Sure He used the prophets
and apostles and their vocabulary and their history and their understanding. But God inspired the message. He literally breathed it out through their lives, exactly what He wanted to say. That’s why we want to counsel from the Word of God.

We’ll talk about this later too, but I’m always, in a counseling situation, looking for that moment when we can open the Word of God and let the Wonderful Counselor start doing some counseling. That’s when things really start to pop.

You know, we’ve got all these theories instead. Oh don’t forget what Karl Rogers said, “You don’t want to be too direct.” So now people go to pastors and staff members and pour out their heart and trouble and sin and heartbreak, and the counselor goes, “Well, how do you feel about that?” “Well, I…” and they start telling you. “And I don’t know what I should do. It seems like this option and that and the other…” The counselor comes up with another great round of advice. “Well what do you think you should do? Well what do you like? What works for you?” Karl Rogers, good counselor. Why counsel that way? It is because of the foolish idea that all the answers are in that person.

Jeremiah wrote, “…the way of a man is not in himself…” (Jeremiah 10:23). He can’t find a path. He’s dead and blind.

The Scriptures are inspired. That’s one more of many, many reasons why I love to counsel with it, because it lets God talk to that person instead of me. Instead of me starting out, “Well, let me tell you what I did when I came across that.” Well, who cares? Unless it’s anchored in the Word of God, then tell me. “Boy, you know that happened to my uncle once. Let me tell you what he tried. It didn’t work too good, but it might work better for you.” I mean, flimsy, lifeless, powerless counsel. The Word of God, this is God speaking to man! We unleash that in counseling and it can be as though people are sitting at the foot of the Wonderful Counselor getting personal counsel from Him.

It is inspired and it is authoritative. When God speaks, that settles it. I mean, that’s it. When God gives His teaching or doctrine that is final. When He reproves and says that’s wrong, that settles it. When He corrects and says here’s the way back, there’s no further word. When He instructs us how to move down that path of righteousness, that is the authority of God right there!

There’s another great truth in these verses about Biblical theology and that is “sufficiency.” Many, many, many so-called Christian churches no longer believe in, no longer stand on the inspiration or the authority of Scripture. That’s tragic! That’s like counsel from any psychologically oriented book they can find, religious or irreligious. They might mix a little religious platitude with it or not, right in the church world. That’s a heartbreaker, but in many ways here’s a sadder one. Many churches that still believe the Word of God is what it says, inspired and authoritative, no longer believe it is sufficient. “Oh sure, this is all from God. Oh yeah, whatever God said, that settles it. But here’s the problem, He just didn’t say enough.” Seldom do people in churches say it quite that bluntly, but that’s exactly how the church is behaving. Yes, the Lord spoke on this, that and the other, but He just didn’t speak in these areas. And someone kind of shouts up, “Well have no fear, Sigmund Freud is here. What God missed Freud will collect.” That’s the way the church is behaving. As though there are great gaps there in what God said, but oh, we’ve got these wonderful godless antichrists, self-centered, humanistic geniuses. They’re going to help us walk God’s path.
It is not sane thinking though, spiritually speaking. It is not solid thinking. Right in this county in a large evangelical church whose pastor preached the Word all of his life, never promoted psychological thinking, but never warned about it either. One day Christian counseling clinic was conducting a seminar on campus. It was a seminar by the biggest integrative Christian counseling clinic in the entire movement. And which, by the way, is one of my heartaches, because they have been part time professors at a seminary for six or eight years, teaching pastors how to help people see their lives changed. I couldn’t and shouldn’t judge their heart or where they stand with God. But I know their message. I’m responsible to evaluate and it’s psychological to the core. They’re psychologists. And they’re not trying to hide it. They’re leaders in the entire American church world of integration. That’s their passion. That’s their goal. That’s their vision. A lot of men true to the Word still there, but the leaven is there too. We don’t have to guess what happens to leaven if it’s not purged. I mean, the Lord’s already told us what happens.

So the clinic was being conducted on the campus of this church. One of the leading men of the church, a Bible teacher there who’s been in, I think, three different classes or more here, was curious what’s that all about, and went to visit. He told me one day what he heard. A man stood up, actually a Dallas seminary man. When he mentioned him I knew him well when I was there in Dallas. A very gifted man. And he opened the seminar this way, a prayer almost exactly like this. Doesn’t have to be the quote, the sense of it you’ll get. “Lord, we thank You so much for Your Word. It is so tremendous. We couldn’t get along without it. Oh how we appreciate it. Amen, Amen, Amen!” Then he adds, “But for the things that are missing in it, we thank You that You are revealing them in seminars like this.”

I mean, how blatant can it be? What is that saying? The Word of God is not enough. What else is it saying? The wisdom of man can help this. Freud, hey, he had some ideas that can help this. Karl Jung, oh yeah, so he was demon possessed. I mean, picky, picky, you know. He had some great ideas that can help this. That’s the way the church is behaving.

Of course in doing that you can turn all counseling into pathology and everybody has a disorder or a disease. And lo and behold, then you can get the American insurance industry to underwrite it as healthcare. Oh, you’re off and running on a billion, multi-billion dollar industry. And even able to sign the name of the Lord to it, so Christians will flock there for help.

Now if I sound like I’m a little bit burdened, then I’m understating the case. It’s a heartache! Oh what we’re doing in underestimating and demeaning the Word of God.

The Word of God is sufficient. Look at these words. “That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17). The word sufficiency isn’t used there but it screams out. The Word is enough to make us complete. What do we want to be, more than complete? Well, we certainly aren’t going to be using something less than the Word. We’ll be less than complete.

Yes, the Word of God is inspired. Praise God for all who still believe it. Yes, it’s authoritative. Thank God for those who let the Word settle things. But brothers and sisters, the battleground in the evangelical born again Bible-believing church world today is not so much on those two points, it’s on sufficiency. The American Church en masse, does not believe in the sufficiency of the Word of God. Shame on us! God forgive us! God revive us! God reform us!

Look at the ability of the Word of God, in Hebrews 4:12. Look what the Word of God can do—
For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The character of the Word of God is given and then what it’s able to do. The Word of God is living, powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. It’s alive! It has power in it! It’s sharp.

Here’s another reason I love to counsel with the Word of God. Another reason I don’t have an ounce of interest anymore in the theories of man, when it comes to helping man. I just put it straight out. I have zero interest, even though in college I was deeply enamored with psychological theory. I was excited about it. I was intrigued with it. I mean, after all I read their theories and these men knew me! They knew I was at least semi-paranoid. Everything I read was me. I could have been a lifelong patient! Everything I read was me. How do these men know that? Well, they were genius. But they were quite surface and in many ways quite general too. Like today, the diagnosis of codependency, I mean, you could just almost put 98% of the population in there and say, “That’s me!” Yeah, we’d like you all in there. Come, get treated.

I have no interest in any of that any more, for the Word of God is living, powerful, sharp. You know all that stuff? It’s dead, weak and dull. That’s the difference. The Word of God is living, powerful and sharp. All those theories are dead, weak and dull. Oh, I’m not saying it’s not ingenious. I’m not saying that. And I’m not saying they never touch on anything that has any actuality at all. They touch on enough actuality to get people hooked. But their ideas and words they’re not living, they’re not powerful and they’re not sharp.

The Word of God, what is it able to do? Pierce even to the division of soul and spirit. Oh so much counseling, brothers and sisters, has to do with letting the Word of God cut in and divide soul and spirit. That is, soulishness, carnality, fleshiness, the soul, the psyche, separating psychology from Holy Spiritology. It is dividing the soul and spirit, showing the distinction between the two. It distinguishes between the soul, the mind, the emotion, the will, and personality—all human resources. What Adam passed on to us, separating that from the spirit, that place where God is willing to dwell and share His life.

It is really the difference between spirituality and carnality. The church is plagued with carnality and needs spirituality. And the Word of God is able to cut in there and sort those things out and say, “Hey that’s just fleshy. That’s just self life. You’re just walking and thinking according to the flesh. You need to walk according to the Spirit. Set your mind on things above. Let the Word sort those things out.”

It also separates joints and marrow. Sometimes that is real important in counseling, separating the joints and the marrow. In a physical body the joints and marrow are quite easy to think through. The marrow is that place inside the bones where blood is produced. And what is in the blood? Life! So the marrow that’s life producing on the physical realm, the life producing place in the body. What are the joints? That’s where that life comes out into action and is worked out.

Well, we are talking spiritually and these are to give us spiritual insight. In the body of Christ, in life in Christ, there is spiritual joints and spiritual marrow. There is that which is spiritual marrow and that is where life is produced. And then there are spiritual joints, where there is the out-working of life. Many Christians don’t have those sorted out. And some of them are just trying their head off. You know, their whole life is joints. They are flailing and going and doing. Why doesn’t this work? They know nothing about spiritual marrow, where the life comes from.
Take passages like Hebrews 12:1-2 NASB, “…run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfeclip of faith…” What phrases and concept there relates to spiritual joints, the outworking of lipeace? Running the race, that’s action. And the Christian life is like a race to be run. But when you talk about marrow, you are talking about life, you’re talking about how you’re going to be able to do this. What words in those verses point to the marrow, the life producing aspect?—“Fixing your eyes on Jesus.” There’s no way to run the race apart from fixing your eyes on Jesus. That’s where the life comes from to pour out on the track. There are Christians just flailing away on the racetrack of the Christian life. And they are weary and getting nowhere. Their eyes are on themselves and their eyes on the other person running by them. Their eyes are on the one that fell down. They are thinking they are doing real well now. Or their eyes are on those who are running past them and they are, well why can’t I run like that? You can’t run the race that way. We’ve got to fix our eyes on Jesus. That’s where the life comes from. That’s the marrow.

A lot of people that are seeking a word of counsel, they need the Word to sort out for them the difference between marrow and joints.

In John 15:5 Jesus said,

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.

There it is again, marrow and joints. What is like unto the joints, the outworking of life? Bearing much fruit and life is appearing. Ministry, service and character are available to people to be touched and blessed. But where’s the marrow that produces it? Where’s the life producing source there? It is abiding in Him.

There are Christian branches everywhere straining and groaning and striving that can’t even birth one grape. It is because they know nothing of the marrow that produces the life that appears as fruit. How do we know the difference between these things? The Word of God is living, powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. It gets in there and sorts these things out for us and you go, oh wow! That changes everything.

It’s also a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. In ministering to someone, in counseling someone, we don’t know what their thoughts are. We don’t know what their motives are. We can’t read their hearts. Well then how do you help them? You just minister the Word of God to them. The Word of God, because it’s living, powerful, and sharp, it can get right down in there as deep as discerning the thoughts and intents. Just let God do it. Let God do it by His Word. I don’t know if their motives are right. God will sure reveal that through His Word. He’ll nail them on their motives if they’re wrong. I don’t know if they’re thinking the right path here. God knows their mind. Just minister the Word to them. It will cut right in there as deep as sorting out their thoughts and motivations deep inside their heart.

The ability of the Word of God.

In Psalm 19:7, again the character of the Word, therefore what it is able to do. “The law of the LORD is perfect…” These terms, the law of the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, the statutes are all general terms for the Scripture.

God’s Word is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.
The commandment of the Lord is pure, therefore enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

The Word of God, it’s perfect, flawless so it can restore souls.

Oh, the excitement of the world and the church over the recovery movement! I can understand the excitement of the world. They know things are in a mess and they are trying to find something that works. What baffles me is why the church is so excited over it. We’re acting like recovery was just invented this decade, and surprise, the world invented it. No, it started in the Garden of Eden and God invented it. In fact, it goes back further than that. It goes back before the foundations of the world. God had a plan to restore man to the condition he was intended to be in.

The Word of God in its flawlessness can restore souls, renew lives, revive lives, brings lives back into the condition God intends them to be. God’s Word is sure, making wise the simple. It’s certain, infallible so it gives wisdom to the simple.

It’s right, rejoicing the heart. It’s the absolutely correct way to live. That produces joy inside. It’s pure, so it enlightens the eyes. No impurities. No admixtures in the Word.

It’s clean. No corruption to destroy it. It endures forever. It’s not faddish, here today and gone tomorrow. Thank God we have something better than left brain, right brain counseling theory. What a striving vain hope that is to change lives!

Amen!
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 6
The Holy Spirit in Counseling

By
Bob Hoekstra

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In our study in God’s Word in counseling, we are looking at Psalm 19:7-11 and following. We’ve seen some amazing terms describing the character of the Word of God: perfect, sure, right, pure and clean. There is great character with the Word of God. No wonder it’s able to do what it can do.

If we were to contrast for a moment the character and descriptive phrases of psychological theory, by comparison we could use terms like: imperfect, unsure, incorrect, impure, unclean and untrue. This is at the very least, in part even at the best of psychological theory. And when you put it that way, we know the Word of God is perfect, sure, right, pure and clean. Well, the wisdom of man, at its best would be imperfect, unsure, incorrect, impure, unclean, untrue, at least in part. Hardly designed, I would say, to make us race out to hunt it down and integrate it into our counseling from the Word of God. And yet that is what the Church is doing. We’re not paying attention to what God is saying in His Word, about His Word, and we’ve been enamored with the wisdom of man.

At this point another umbrella cliché comes up often and it’s another very popular one. You’ve maybe heard it. Maybe you’ve said it. I’ve said some of these along the way, maybe all of them. I haven’t kept track and I don’t use any of them any more. But I hear them all the time. I’ve taught an all-weekend seminar and maybe went over ten or twelve of these umbrella cliches and I’ve actually run into people the very next week and in a twenty minute conversation they used every single one of them on this subject. I mean that’s how they dominate the thinking in the church world.

Here’s one. It comes something like this—“Yes, Bob, we agree with you that the Word of God is great. It’s very important to us too. We’re so glad we have it. But you’re being kind of rough there, aren’t you, on psychological theory? I mean, after all, you’ve got to be careful that you don’t throw out the baby with the bath water.” That is a heavily used cliché.

There are applications of these cliches that are valid. And of course, you know the most valid one. If you’ve got a baby at home bathing it, you better apply this cliché. When you get rid of that filthy bath water, rescue the baby first. And there are maybe other valid areas—say in the arena of our culture won’t endorse spanking children any more. Why?—for many reasons, but one reason is child abuse. “Hey, we’ll just get rid of all child abuse. No more physical discipline.” Well, you could say that’s throwing out the baby with the bath water. The baby is the value of godly physical discipline. The dirty bath water is the ungodliness of abusing children physically.

It’s not that these things don’t have any application, but they do not validate using psychological theory in Christian counseling and discipling. That’s the point. But this is a biggie, “Don’t throw out the baby with the bath water.”

The thinking goes like this: Yeah, sure in psychological theory there’s a lot of dirty bath water. There’s a lot of foul thinking and theorizing. And let’s call it dirty bath water. And we certainly want to chuck it out. We don’t want to keep it around church life and use it in ministry. But sift through there. Be careful. There’s a baby in there. There’re some good things in there. Don’t just chuck it all out. You’ll throw out the baby with the bath water if you set aside the entire arena of sociological, anthropological and psychological input.

Well, let’s think about that a little bit. If there is a baby in that bath water—listen, I’ve been sifting carefully through that dirty bath water for twenty-five years. Go ahead and throw it out.
There’s no baby in there!” Let’s give them every possible benefit of the doubt. Let’s say there’s a bouncy healthy baby sitting there in that hundred thousand gallon tank of filth. Let’s say there is a baby there, a real healthy baby. Let’s say there is some good stuff there. Ah-ha, you see, that’s what I’m saying. If you’re going to toss it all aside and you throw that baby out. Oh, no you don’t! If there’s a baby there, that same baby is already sitting right here. It’s in here, in the Bible. If there’s anything good there that man needs, it’s already here in the Word of God. Why? It is because God has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Why? It is because the Scriptures are able to make us complete, thoroughly equipped unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:17).

Personally, I have been convicted to set aside all of that theoretical input, the whole bit of it. And I don’t think I’m losing a baby if it’s there. And I don’t even care to debate whether there is one or isn’t really. The fact that there’s dirty bath water there is something that needs to be checked out. And we don’t have to stop and sort and sift, because if there is good there, since God has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness, it will be in here. It’s in pure living water that you don’t have to sort anything out! Like: “Oh, this is good.” “Oh, that’s okay, use that page.” You know? The Bible is good and we just take it all. It’s all good.

Another way to evaluate this, if I could draw an infinitely large circle to include all of God’s truth and wisdom, and then I could draw a little representative circle that would appropriately and proportionately encircle man’s wisdom and so-called discovered truth. What if that little circle overlapped that big circle at a point, where they were saying the same thing? What if they did? And for the sake of argument, again, let’s say it does. What if we take the little circle of man’s wisdom and truth, so-called, and say, I am going to set that aside. I’m not going to draw on that for life and godliness or for ministry and counseling. Does that leave a little gap in God’s big circle? No way! It just meant there was some overlap there. And if there is some overlap there is no shock. Somebody will say, “See they’ve got something.” Well, man is made in the image and likeness of God, fine.

I have a real comforting illustration on that anyway. A broken clock is correct two times every twenty-four hours. So what? You don’t grab it and set your whole life by it. “Look, it’s right!” That’s the way I see those theories. So what if they’re right sometimes? Am I supposed to be overwhelmed and awestruck and oh, we’ve got to weave that into the Word of God. Why?

Don’t throw out the baby with the bath water. I say, don’t worry about it. Just chuck it all out. If there was a baby there, you’ll find that baby where it should be found. Right here in the Word of God, that’s what we want to counsel with. We won’t look at it just to conserve our time. I mentioned we have far more Scriptures than twelve weeks of study will allow.

In John 5:39-40 ESV, Jesus said,

> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they [the Scriptures] that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you might have life.

When we minister the Word, let’s keep bringing people to the Lord Jesus Christ that they might find life. Let’s not use the Word of God just to get principles and procedures and ideas and ways to make things work the way we like them, or make them better or whatever. Let’s keep bringing people to the centerpiece of the Word of God.
Jesus said, (John 5:39 ESV) “[Yeah] you search the Scriptures…you think you have eternal life…” in that many will search the Scriptures, but for their own reasons, either to get this principle and to prove that point, or to validate their own preference. But the Lord nailed them. He said, “You are unwilling to come to Me that you might have life.”

When we go to the Word let’s do it to take people to the Wonderful Counselor. In Him alone will they keep finding, initially and then day by day, the life they need.

Then the concluding verse, Isaiah 55:10-11, is likening the Word of God to rain and snow that comes down and it waters and brings forth life and it doesn’t return void. And the Word of God is like that. When water goes out it germinates those seeds and life comes forth. Well, that’s what the Word of God does. It doesn’t return void.

I was reading that verse one day and I was stirred to begin praying that the Lord would give us a tropical rain forest of spiritual fruit as the Word of God rained upon the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s what we need. I love to see travelogues or documentaries about rain forests. You know they are just so lush and well, how about having a spiritual environment in the church like that? So much of the Word just raining on us so everywhere you look there is just growth. Everywhere you look there is greenery, heavenly life, just smothered in life. Well, the Word’s like that. It’s like rain or snow that comes down, waters and brings forth seed.

That’s why we ought to use it in our counseling. We want to see lives fruitful, abounding in life. Let’s get the Word of God into them.

How does God counsel us? It is through His Word. But that immediately necessitates the second of the four aspects of God’s way in counseling and that is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is required in counseling God’s way. It’s just theologically or Biblically logical. If God is the counselor and Jesus isn’t here and the Spirit is ministering things of Christ, we’d better have the Holy Spirit involved in our counseling. The fact that the Word of God is how God counsels, requires the work of the Spirit.

Let’s see that in a number of ways. First, the Holy Spirit, He is another Counselor like Jesus. Remember Isaiah 9:6, Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor.

In Isaiah 11:2, Jesus is described there, the Messiah prophetically.

The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

There, the Spirit is linked to the Wonderful Counselor. God guided us in His wisdom and knowledge by the work of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:16-17,

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, [Key phrase: another Helper] that He may abide with you forever, ‘the Spirit of Truth.’
This is one of the titles of the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth.” Jesus is praying to the Father, that the Father would give another Helper. Another of the same kind is the inference from the language, a Helper.

We’ve made an English word out of this Greek word. We say parakletos, referring to the Holy Spirit. This noun is coming originally from the verb parakaleo, which is the verb “to call” and the preposition “along” or “beside.” He is called alongside to help. Helper. This is sometimes translated Comforter, because it’s a coming alongside comforting kind of ministry. He is Helper, Comforter, Intercessor, Consoler, and Encourager. The Amplified, RSV and others translate it here and elsewhere, Counselor. He’ll give you another Counselor. This is one of the two New Testament Greek words that can be translated counsel, counselor or counseling. Parakaleo is to counsel by comfort.

Along the way, next week I think, we’ll come to the other one. Nouthateo from which Dr. Adams coined the phrase nouthetic counseling; this is counseling by confrontation. You bring those two words together and you have the full picture of New Testament counsel. Counsel by comfort, counsel by confrontation, counsel by grace, and counsel by law. And we’ll look more at that as we get going along the way. It is a critical issue in itself.

The Father will give you another Counselor. Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor was leaving. “Don’t worry, the Father will send another one just like Me, also God, and the One who was upon Me empowering My ministry here. You know, so don’t panic. My ministry as Wonderful Counselor will still be available by the work of the Holy Spirit.”

John 16:13-14,

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you [unfold it, and open it up for you].

The Holy Spirit guides us into all the truth. Takes the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and discloses them to us. The Holy Spirit takes the realities of our Wonderful Counselor and makes them our possession to walk in. This is why counseling God’s way must be by the Holy Spirit. He is another Counselor just like Jesus. Look at the Spirit, the Holy Spirit and the truth of God’s Word. We just read in verse 13, the Spirit of truth guides us into all of the truth. One of the titles of the Holy Spirit, He is the Spirit of Truth.

Of course, the American church, many have wanted to make Him the spirit of goose bumps. Or the spirit of hyenac laughter. How about the Spirit of truth? The Holy Spirit inspired the truth of the Word of God. He is true. He ministers the truth of God and brings the reality of Jesus Christ to bear on our lives. He’ll guide you into all the truth, the truth of the Word of God. Guidance and counseling are so closely linked together.

The Spirit and the truth of God’s Word, remember from John 8, the Word is for discipling and liberating. The Spirit must be involved in that, guiding us into that.

John 17:17, the Word and sanctification. The Spirit of the Lord must be involved in that unfolding, enlightening, and sanctifying use of the Word of God. It is critical that the Holy Spirit be fully involved in the counseling ministry. Yes, the Word of God is the critical avenue. God speaks to us His counsel, but not by human ingenuity. Not by my best intellect grasping most
deeply what God has said and then taking it and by my soulish, self-resourced energy, making it work. No, that is not counseling God’s way. Yes, the Word of God, but by the work of the Holy Spirit, revealing things in the Word, guiding us through the truth of the Word, and bringing to bear upon us the liberating power of the truth of the Word.

Now let’s look at the Holy Spirit in counseling as we counsel and are counseled. Remember in Isaiah 61:1 Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me...” and He began to describe how He would minister. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus to minister the counsel of God.

You know, if we want to counsel in a similar Christ-like way, how are we going to do it? We have to do it by the work of the Holy Spirit. It’s not like learning every answer to every struggle, question, or perplexity and get a chapter and verse. And then think we’ve got the counseling thing nailed. You’re missing something. What? God counsels through His Word and I’ve got all the answers to all the questions? Let me ask you, who is the dynamic behind all of that, you or the Spirit of God? You just easily check your reference list and bop, bop, boom, it’s done. Now there’s nothing wrong with finding reference points in the Word of God from lists, nothing wrong with that at all. But who are we depending on? Who are we getting the confirmation for what that person needs to hear? Who are we trusting to work through that to touch that life? Sure God counsels through His Word, but not by the letter. Not by just procedures and formulas.

I praise God for those in the church world who are calling us to Biblical counseling. But let’s not trade off psychologically infiltrated counseling with letter-of-the-law legalistic counseling, and just say, hey, it's Biblical. Biblical isn’t Biblical unless the Holy Spirit’s involved. It’s unbiblical to just throw thoughts and ideas and chapters and verses at people with no exhorting them to “walk in the Spirit” with us not depending on the Spirit, or with us not being led by the Spirit. As we counsel and are counseled let’s do it the way Jesus did. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim good news, to set captives free, and to comfort the brokenhearted.” How did Jesus do it? By the Spirit and that is how we’re to do it. He’s the Wonderful Counselor. If we want to do it like Him, it’s got to be by the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 says, “…be filled with the Spirit.” Be filled! Those who are counseling, and really those who are seeking counsel, need this, need to be filled with the Spirit. Their lives need to be overflowing with the presence and comprehensive work of the Spirit of God, taking the truth of God’s Word and changing their lives with it. For those giving and seeking counsel, we want to counsel like Jesus, let’s do it filled with the Spirit.

John 16:7-8 says, “…the Helper [the Counselor, the Holy Spirit]...And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” This is often critical in the counseling ministry, for those who share counsel, those who receive counsel, need these convictions. They need to be convinced by God of the reality of sin, the availability of righteousness, and ultimate accountability, and judgment before God.

We need conviction of sin to counsel God’s way. And the root problem is sin and the root sin is not believing in Jesus, these verses say. It is sin because they wouldn’t believe in Jesus. It’s often an important convicting issue of the Spirit in counseling.

Man wants to turn everything into a disorder or a disease. “Hey sin! You’re inferring I’m doing something wrong! You’re inferring I’m accountable to someone. Hey, don’t look at me when I beat my wife around. I just have a rage disorder.” Oh yeah? You’re into the sin of brutality. That’s what it is. Let’s call it what it is. How can you get help calling it what it isn’t? The Spirit convicts of sin.
But also it says, “of righteousness because I go to the Father.” The Spirit convicts. There’s a way to stand righteous in Christ before God because there’s One who went there before us. In His [Jesus] name we can stand before the Father. There’s hope there and people need that hope of righteousness and righteous access.

Verse 8 says, “…and of judgment.” It is because Satan and all who are without Jesus are going to be judged and condemned. There’s a reality of judgment that’s often critical to bring to bear in a counseling situation. Especially where there is rebellion, self-centeredness, or hard-heartedness.

The Word of God desires everyone to learn to live under the grace of God. And you know my passion, some of you, for the grace of God. We have a whole course here on it. And it’s my favorite theme in the Word of God to teach about Jesus Christ, the grace of the Lord Jesus.

But the law, conviction of sin, and the need for righteousness, and the inevitability of judgment, that's what tutors us to the grace of God. And often in counseling situations, people can’t rely on, walk in, depend on, or draw on the grace of God because they won’t face these issues of their own rebellion. God gives grace to the humble, not the rebellious, self-sufficient, “I’ll do it my way, thank you.” This is often an important part of counseling. Nouthateo. Bring that truth of God right up in their face! This is right. What you’re doing is wrong, you know. That’s the heart of nouthetic counsel, counsel by confrontation. That’s a critical part of Biblical counseling, but it’s for the rebellious.

It says in 1 Timothy 1:8-9 that the law is for the rebellious. And often people who are seeking counsel are in rebellion. What do you do, lay the law on them? Absolutely, Amen! It’s even the grace of God that would provide a remedy that can take them from rebellion to a candidate for overflowing grace. And it’s the law of God that softens those hard hearts.

The Holy Spirit brings those convictions. The Holy Spirit is the critical agent for counseling.

In Galatians 5:16 -23, it’s a long section. We won’t take time to go through it, except to comment on it. I think it’s quite familiar to most of us. It’s about the contrast between the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Oh how that comes strongly to bear in counseling situations so often. So often, people describe what’s going on and you’re listening and you’re going, “Oh my goodness, all I hear are deeds of the flesh.” You know, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry and sorcery.

We are talking about the pharmakeia aspect here, drugs. And boy, what a subtlety of the enemy to make medication our hope! Now we’ll get to medication later. Medication is part of the common grace arena of God’s providential and merciful work. It’s not automatically ruled out. The big arena we’re warning about is philosophical psychology, which, by the way, dominates the psychological field. We’ll talk more about that but that’s the warning area. True medical aspects are not prohibited by the Word of God, but we’ll get to that too. That’s a whole issue in itself, this pharmakeia thing. The answer is in the drug? Medication isn’t forbidden for Christians. We’re not Christian Science counselors.

Someone said to me one day, “Counseling God’s way, man that sounds like Christian Science taken into the counseling room.” I said, “Wait a second. The reason you think that is you are not considering the difference between common grace things like medication, aspirin, that fall on the
just and the unjust alike.” You know, Jesus said if the sick need a physician… Luke was the beloved physician.

And we are not forbidding that medical arena. It is the philosophy that we’re warned to stay away from the predominately influence of psychology which is philosophical thinking. Who is man? Why is he here? How do you help him? Where is he going? That’s philosophy. That’s not medicine. That’s not science. Science shows creation the way God made it. Philosophy is man’s guesses at what the unseen is all about, inside man and beyond.

So the hope that everything is in the pill or the medication or the prescription, that’s a false hope. And this includes even the witchcraft involvement, kind of like magic and all of that. And they you prescribe medications and people get on drugs. Some of these great theoreticians like Freud were into cocaine. So you’ve got a man on drugs suggesting that the hope might be drugs. And the church is saying, “Hey, we can use that.” Yeah, somewhere there’s a baby in there, you know!

Then you step a further step out and you’ve got Jung, who was demonized. He said he learned all of his theories from Philemon. You say, four hundred theories from a two page book? He said Philemon was his spirit guide. Jung is the most popular theoretician in the American church world because he’s a spiritist and people think therefore he’s spiritual. The man was demon possessed.

From pharmakeia, from drugs, witchcraft, to doctrines of demons is where the counseling of the church has come. It’s astounding. It is flabbergasting, really. It’s time to blow a trumpet. Someone said to me, “What do you think one man can impact?” Nothing, but God using one can do great things. And He might use one other and one other. And even in Elijah’s day He had 7,000 others and Elijah thought he was the only one. So man, I don’t mind working alone with God! I’d rather stand alone with God than with the cheers of the popular church world. Not to be nasty. Not to be self-righteous. Not to be you’re wrong and I’m right, but just to say, hey, brothers and sisters, let’s get back here, and here is back to Christ. Let’s get back to the Wonderful Counselor.

Now regarding the deeds of the flesh or the works of the flesh, this is so often what people are caught up in. In Galatians 5:20, it goes right from “sorcery” to “…hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, and dissentions.” We might think that you don’t put those on the same list with adultery and idolatry. Oh yes you do, if you’re God. It is all the same. It’s of the world, the flesh and the devil. It’s all destructive. It all is related to the flesh resource or the flesh wanting to use it. And often people need to see the difference between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. How are you going to live a life out of your own resources? Here’s what you’ll produce listed in verses 19-21, right here. I can tell you, you’ll fit here somewhere, if there’s an option. But by the work of God in your life and the light of the Word of God, you can live a life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, a character of life that only the Holy Spirit can produce in and through a person. These are critical passages for counseling. Critical passages and it’s all about the Holy Spirit being involved.

In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 are very strategic verses, for this day and age. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God…” We Christians have received not the spirit of the world. That’s the spirit that Freud and Jung and all the rest walk in and all the unsaved. Theirs is the spirit of flesh and the influence of the enemy. That’s not the Spirit we’ve received. That’s the spirit we’ve been freed from. But we’ve received the Spirit who is from God, the Holy Spirit, for what end or for what reason? It is “…that we might know the things
that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). One reason we’ve been given the Holy Spirit, among many great reasons is that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

The necessities of life, things man must have, they are the freely-given things of God. To put it another way, they’re the gifts provided by the grace of God, the freely-given things of God like forgiveness, new life, hope and power to transform. You can’t buy those things. You can’t conger them up on your own. They’re the freely-given things of God. They come in Christ with the grace of God. And the Holy Spirit lets us know these things, understand them, rely upon them, stand in them, and live by them.

Verse 13 says, “These things we also speak...” We have plenty to say as the children of God, things to speak about. The church has become so intimidated by the world.

They say, “You know, if you’ve got a mild case of disappointment, discouragement, or day dreaming, we might be able to help you here at the church. I’m not saying we can. We might be able to, but if you’ve got anything serious, I mean, if you’ve got a disorder or a bad habit that you can’t get free of, you know, I’m sorry, you’ll have to go out there where the experts are. I mean, you know, we aren’t experts, we’re just Christians. But here take this card. Dr. So-and-so, he can help you. He understands man and you’re blessed because he’s a Christian too. And he’ll give you Christian psychotherapy and he can help you if you have any serious kind of problem.”

That’s the way the church has been functioning. We’re intimidated. It’s like we have nothing to say. Hey, we can teach you a few hymns, but we can’t change your life. I mean, let’s be practical. That’s not right!

“These things we also speak.”

We’ve got plenty to say. We can sit and talk with people about the freely given things of God. Things Freud couldn’t even imagine, let alone produce. Things Jung, even in his deepest pits of demonic insight, couldn’t think of or come up with, the freely-given things of God. We’ve got plenty to talk about to help people.

“They are the freely-given things of God.”

We’ve got plenty to talk about when it comes to man’s needs and God’s remedies. But we are not to be speaking about them in words which man’s wisdom teaches.

I think it’s sad. I think it’s quite heart breaking, the way the church is picking up the vocabulary of the world when we talk about man’s problems and what are the right remedies. And everywhere you go in the church now, people are talking about dysfunctionalism, or codependency, or self-esteem, or victimization. None of these terms came out of Biblical study. None of these terms came out of Biblical theology. Relating truth with truth to get the big picture of God and life and what’s wrong and how it can be made right. None of those came through the path of the Word of God.

We’ve got plenty to talk about, but let’s not use words which man’s wisdom teaches. Well then, what do we do? What kind of words do we use?—“But which the Holy Spirit teaches.” See that? “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches.”

Think of it for a minute. Think of the unbelievably glorious vocabulary God has. I hate to see the church acting like the world needs to coach God in His vocabulary. He didn’t know how to tell
His kids about what’s really it, you know, so the world tells us now. It’s dysfunctionalism, that’s the issue. And a support group is the hope. Co-dependency is the problem and making a life for yourself, that’s your answer, you know. In all these things, my goodness, what’s happened to us? Think of the great vocabulary God has. None of these words really fit. They’re weak. They’re anemic. They don’t precisely hit it. They don’t offer hope. When God talks about the problem, He talks about things like sin, condemnation, alienation, separation, spiritual deadness. I mean, God just nails it. Rebellion, self-centeredness, I mean, God just hits it right on the head! Then He talks about preparation for hope and help. And He talks about humility, conviction, contrition, repentance. Boy, God just nails it.

Then He talks about the remedy itself—salvation, justification, sanctification and someday glorification—all along the way the possibility of transformation. He talks about identification with Christ. He talks about resurrection from the dead. Wow! What a Counselor! What a vocabulary, so why go into these anemic, earth-bound terms? It doesn’t fit. It doesn’t pay heed to the Word of God. “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” See, that’s the issue. God wants to compare spiritual with spiritual. People have spiritual problems and God, by His Spirit wants to compare spiritual remedies for that. People are in spiritual death and God wants to offer spiritual life, not psychological jargon.

Psychological theory is comparing carnal with fleshy, self with soulish. It doesn’t get out of the circle of death and helplessness and bankruptcy. God’s vocabulary is talking about spiritual things applied to spiritual issues. That’s why it’s so profound, so life-changing.

Last, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. We’re talking about the Holy Spirit now in the counseling ministry. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.” Oh, people need to be set free. Well, the Lord is the life-giving liberator and where the Spirit of the Lord is, where the Holy Spirit is given room to work, there is liberty.

The people who come to us for help need to be set free, there needs to be a work of the Spirit of God. Sure, He’ll use the truth of the Word of God, but it’s the Spirit using the truth, giving it clarity, conviction and power.

How much liberty? Liberty unto transformation, verse 18—“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

We come open faced, humbly, without hiding, to the mirror of the Word of God and seek the heavenly reflection of the Lord Jesus out of it, the glory of the Lord. While gazing upon that wonder revealed in the Word, the glory of the Lord Jesus, we are being transformed. There’s transforming power in the revelation of Jesus Christ and His glory in the Word. We are being transformed—into the same image. We’re being made to look more and more like Him, to think, and behave, by being conformed to His image from glory to glory. It is one area to another, one degree to another. How does that happen? It is “just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The Spirit of the Lord is revealing the glory of Christ, stirring us to yearn to be like that. To know Him, is to be changed unto His image, humbled by it, encouraged by it and the Spirit of God reshaping us into that likeness.

Boy, there’s powerful counseling right there. Just take people into the Word, encourage them to be humbly open-faced with God. Not hiding. Not pretending. Just look for the glory of Jesus in here and be willing to let the Spirit remake you more and more like Him. Boy, there’s a whole
counseling ministry in itself. Just when people come, do that with them every time they come for counseling.

There is this tragic misconception in the church. We just don’t have that much to offer, I guess. Oh yes, we can get them forgiven. Praise God. We know Freud can’t do that. I think. He can’t, can he? No, I don’t think so. But you know, we don’t have all that much to offer, so we’ve got to refer them out. Or the new way—let’s train our own and bring the theories in, you know. Look what we have! We can sit down with people and by the work of the Spirit of God, let them see the glory of the Lord in the Word and encourage them to humbly, openly face that, asking the Spirit of God to change them like that. Why, there’s not a theory of man that even begins to measure up to that. That’s the power of the Spirit of God at work.

In conclusion, there’s another umbrella cliché. It goes something like this: “Life’s problems are much too complex today. Maybe in the Bible days the Bible was sufficient to help. But the Bible, the Holy Spirit and all that, life’s problems are way too complex. We need a much more sophisticated answer.”

What a pathetic, heart-breaking underestimation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. There’s nothing too complex for the Holy Spirit. Okay, so life probably is more complex. Maybe even in mega-doses of complexity. But so what?! Our Counselor is Jesus and His ministry is born to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Is anything too complicated for God? Can you imagine God sitting on the throne of grace saying, “Oh it went so well for thousands of years, but I never imagined the twentieth century would come. Oh, where will the help come from? It’s like Freud delivers God now. Jung does what the Holy Spirit can’t do.

We have resources and a Counselor that go out of sight. I think God wants to build our faith in that truth. Let us receive it and live by it and just start giving it away to people. That’s what will make us counselors like the Wonderful Counselor.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You so much. We just love Your Word because it’s You speaking and it’s where we’re getting to know You as You’re revealed there. We love the Spirit of the Lord, teaching us, guiding us, there to fill us. He is another Counselor just like Jesus carrying on that wonderful ministry. Lord, may we counsel this way, using the means of the Word, empowered by the Spirit of God. Let that be the counsel we receive, the counsel we give. And Lord, revive us. Reform us in the church. May we not look to other directions. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 7
Prayer in Counseling

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Father, we come again with just untold numbers of reasons to give You thanks and praise. Lord, You are so faithful. You are so merciful. You are so steadfast and reliable, trust worthy, ever true, and Your lovingkindness never ceases and we give You great thanks for that, Lord. Thank You for what You have done in our lives. Thank You for the things You are doing now. Thank You in advance for the wonderful things we know You have ahead. Thank You for the opportunity, again, in this time together to study Your Word. Lord, we know this matter of counseling and doing it Your way is a critical issue in the life of the church anytime, especially in these days when it is under such attack and undermining. And we just come seeking You that we will be a part of a revival, even a reforming, a reformation, a reshaping of the thinking and behaving and ministering of the church of Jesus Christ. So we trust You to even counsel and guide us as we seek You now, and to work by Your Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name. Amen.

We now come to the issue of prayer in counseling. This is our third study under the heading of God’s Way in Counseling. That is, God’s means in counseling, the means that He uses to get His counsel to us. The Lord is the counselor. Well, how does He counsel us? We’ve already seen that it involves His Word and the Holy Spirit. His Word used by the Holy Spirit in our lives. And that leads us in a spiritually logical, natural way to the third of four means God uses in bringing His counsel to us, and that is prayer.

Since the Holy Spirit must be the One who takes the things of the Word, explaining them to us, unfolding them, applying them, transforming us, and enabling us, then prayer must be involved. The Holy Spirit works in prayerful, humble, seeking hearts.

First of all, we will look at prayer concerning the Word. Then we will look at prayer concerning the Holy Spirit. We are sort of stepping back. The Word is critical in counsel as is prayer, but much of the prayers the Lord wants in our lives are to be in relationship to the Word of God. And then we’ll see many of the prayers coming up from our hearts are about the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. So we’ll kind of just keep building on the very things we have looked at. Then we’ll look at general exhortations to prayer and some prayer examples for counseling in the Scriptures.

First with prayer concerning the Word, the Lord is our counselor and His basic way of course to counsel us is by His Word. But this happens as we prayerfully seek Him concerning His Word. Like Psalm 119:17-19,

Deal bountifully with Your servant, That I may live and keep Your Word. Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law. I am a stranger in the earth; Do not hide Your commandments from me.

Psalm 119 personally, to me, is a favorite in all of the Word of God as a section of Scripture. It is one of my favorite psalms and Psalms is one of my favorite books. Psalms, the Gospel of John, the Book of Colossians, the Book of Hebrews, Second Corinthians… just to name a few. Oh, but this psalm is so great! You probably know that virtually every verse in this psalm uses a term in reference to the Word of God. And when we’re talking about law of God and commandments and all that, we’re not talking about law versus grace. These are just general statements about the whole Word of God, just sort of titles of the Word of God. And almost every verse, at least 171 of the 176 verses, mention the Scriptures in them.
Another thing that often is overlooked in reading this book is that the vast majority of the verses in this psalm are, in fact, prayers. Not just statements about the Word, but prayers about the Word. The majority of the verses in this psalm are addressed to God and certainly these are here. This is part of one of the great prayers in the Word of God about the Word of God. “Deal bountifully with Your servant.” That’s the appeal to God. “Deal bountifully with Your servant that I may live and keep Your Word” (Psalm 119:17).

I like to paraphrase Scripture personally. I like to outline it for my own understanding. It helps me meditate on it and think through it. And I also love to paraphrase verses, especially if I’m either touched by them or perplexed and missing the point. You know, I like to just keep seeking the Lord till I can just rewrite it and not leave any element out of it.

Something like this—a prayer to God, “Work in my life abundantly, so that I may thrive spiritually and be able to live by Your Word.” It’s a great prayer. And it is a prayer about the Word of God.

The Word of God is critical in the life of one seeking counsel or giving counsel. Well, praying about the Word is very critical. It’s in the praying heart that the Word of God goes to work, as the Holy Spirit unfolds it, applies it, convicts, encourages and transforms us.

Psalm 119:18. What a great prayer this is for one who is offering counsel or seeking counsel. See, just looking into the Word is really not enough. God intends more than that. We need God to reveal to us what we’re seeing in there. That’s the kind of prayer this is. “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18).

When we go into the Word of God, it is great to do it crying out to God. I just don’t like it when I’m in reading the Word and I realize, fifteen, twenty minutes later, half an hour later, I just been reading and trying to grasp it with my own best thinking, or my interest. I kind of realize, “Lord, I just kind of, you know, jumped into this on cruise control. And I know that’s not awful, but there’s a better way. You know, I just need to start over again here. I really wasn’t seeking You. I really wasn’t asking You to speak, to open my eyes, or to plow my heart tender and things like that.”

Praying in relationship to the Word of God is so critical. It's so right. The Scriptures exemplify it. And since the Word of God is so critical in the counseling ministry, we need to be praying in regard to the Word of God.

I was teaching a men’s study, I still remember Nils a dear brother. We were going around, actually taking turns paraphrasing different verses. I remember, I wrote down part of what he paraphrased that night for verse 19. It was something like, “Lord, I’m an alien here. I need Your road map.” That is good! “I’m a stranger on the earth. Do not hide Your commandments from me.” That’s pretty good. I’m an alien. I need Your road map. But it was a prayer and a great way to seek the Lord.

We need to be praying about the Word of God and not just in a perfunctory manner, just sort of well you got to read the Bible, so read it some. Well, I mean, that’s a start, but there is more to it than that. We are not just gathering data out of a religious compilation of writings. We are encountering the Author Himself, the Living God, and we want Him to speak to us and talk to us. So this is prayer concerning the Word.
When someone comes to us seeking counsel, we want to be praying in the Word, about the Word, for the counsel we share. We want to encourage them to be praying about the Word and what they are going to hear.

Psalm 119:25-28 has more prayer still addressed to God.

My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your Word. I have declared my ways, and You answered me; Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works. My soul melts from heaviness. Strengthen me according to Your Word.

Revive me according to Your Word. Strengthen me according to Your Word. This is a phrase that comes up often in Psalm 119—“according to Your Word.”

I’ve got a personal prayer list I’ve worked on now and then through the years, sort of entitled “According to Your Word.” And I write things I find in there that God has said or promised or desires. I just like to turn them into prayers, according to Your Word. There is no safer ground to pray than to pray the Word of God. That is where we know the will of God is expressed. And this is a great arena to pray in and a way to pray. “Revive me according to Your Word. Strengthen me according to Your Word.”

People who are seeking counsel need to pray that way. They need reviving. They need strengthening. That’s really what they need. And listen, those who are used of God in counseling need to pray this often. Revive me according to Your Word. The counseling ministry is one of the most refreshing and impossible ministries at the same time. One of the most delightful and yet devastating ministries at the same time. It can really wipe you out. Just tear your heart out. “Revive me. Lord, give me life to function in this arena, as Your instrument of counsel. Strengthen me according to Your Word.” Oh how we need the strength of the Lord.

But according to Your Word, that phrase at least has a couple of aspects to it and probably much more. But according to Your Word, maybe the most obvious is in line with Your Word. Revive me by the very ways Your Word describes. Strengthen me by the very ways Your Word describes. But also, just a little turn on that—according to Your Word, that is, by the resources of Your Word. Revive me according to Your Word. That is, in accord with what is in there that can give me that new vitality. Strengthen me according to Your Word. Not only in line with what Your Word says about strength and where it comes from and how You give it, but by the very resources of Your Word. You know Job 23:12, Lord, Your word, I need it “…more than my necessary food.” Strengthen me by the resources that are in Your Word.

When we’re seeking God’s counsel in the Word, or giving God’s counsel from the Word, we are to do both of these things, by praying concerning the Word of God. Prayer concerning the Word, it’s a great arena of prayer. It’s very critical for those seeking or giving counsel.

Now prayer concerning the Holy Spirit, why touch on that? Because again the Holy Spirit, we have seen, is so critical to the counseling ministry. The Holy Spirit must be involved in counseling God’s way. He must be. No choice here.

Ephesians 6:18 says,

Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.
We are to pray at all times. But we’re also to pray at all times in the Spirit. This is not talking about praying in a private prayer language. That is one way that some of God’s people through the ages have prayed, and some do now. This is bigger than that because it says, pray at all times in the Spirit. Well, there are all kinds of praying modes that God has for us. And not all even have that gift, the Scripture says, so some won’t be praying in that specific way ever. But, we’re all to pray at all times in the Spirit. So it’s bigger than that.

Praying in the Spirit would be praying—whatever way we’re praying—praise, thanksgiving, intercession, or in private worship language or whatever else, we’re to be praying guided by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit. This is prayer by the Holy Spirit.

Praying is one of the hardest things man has to do; the flesh just does not gravitate toward it. Why is it that more Christians will show up for a praise concert than a prayer meeting? One is much easier, much more inviting. Now, not that it’s wrong to want to go to a praise and worship concert or something like that. That’s fine, if it’s by the Spirit. But praying is just kind of like death to the flesh. The flesh is dying to make room for the Spirit. The flesh wants to do things, make things happen, or enjoy itself. In prayer you are asking God to make things happen. And you are often praying about things that just become a burden or a hope, but not yet fulfilled. I mean, prayer is a critical part of the warfare for all of us. We must be praying by the Spirit. “Lord, sustain me so seven minutes later I’m not asleep or all prayed up, as they say. Or so distracted that I have to go off and do the twelve things I remembered that I didn’t get done the day before.”

Pray at all times in the Spirit. Humbly crying out, depending, asking the Spirit of God to guide, strengthen, sustain and focus us.

But not just prayer by the Spirit, but also prayer for the Spirit. Luke 11:9-13,

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he ask for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?” [Well, of course not.] If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

I think the basic application to this is ultimately, in the fullest sense, to believers. I mean, most unbelievers aren’t asking, God, “send Your Holy Spirit to me.” They are, crying out, “I’m a sinner. I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” You know. Of course the Spirit is sent. But this specifically, ask, seek, knock. And then it closes, you know, if earthly fathers know how to give this to their children, how about the heavenly Father? To whom?—to His children. And a lot of Christians kind of balk at this because they say, “Wait a minute. I’m a Christian. I have the Holy Spirit.” Yeah, well it’s still addressed, I believe, primarily to the children of the Father. And having the Spirit doesn’t mean that we stop asking the Father to send the Spirit in the sense of new ways, new works, and new dimensions in our lives.

Just a little side note, if you want to write in your notes—Ephesians 3:16. This prayer in Luke 11 is kind of like Ephesians 3:16, kind of praying “…that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”
It’s one thing to have the Holy Spirit, but it’s another thing to be open to Him working in our lives in all the ways He wants to and can. Praying for the Holy Spirit to be given to us by the Father, say in some new dimension, measure, area, arena, or to some effect or work, is not denying we already have the Spirit. The Person of the Spirit lives in us, yes. As one man said, “Yes, you have the Spirit, but does the Spirit have you?” Yes, you have all of Him. But does He have all of you? It’s that kind of an issue. It is a desiring for the Lord to send the Spirit to work in a more full measure in our lives.

And even the Spirit who lives in us can also come upon us. If we were like sponges, standing in the ocean of the Spirit of God, we would be in that ocean of the Spirit. The Spirit would be in us. But at times it’s like you need a twenty foot wave of His work to come upon you. You know, to just—whooosh! Thank You, Lord. I needed that. You know sponges get kind of wrung out sometimes, a sense of need there.

That’s all that this is about, just sensing a need, a thirst, a desire, a lack, a weakness, an emptiness. Just ask, seek, knock and the beautiful promise is everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds. And to him who knocks it will be opened. You just take it by faith. God keeps His promises and that’s how you will know. Just ask and believe and you’ll know you will receive and just go on about your business. “I didn’t get the same tingles that she did, you know. I didn’t jump the way he did. I didn’t sound the way they did.” So? Do you see anything here about that? No, just the straight out—ask, seek, knock. And everyone who does that, concerning the Spirit, God will work. It’s astoundingly simple. Praise God it is!

I love to fight against religious flesh wanting to complicate the things of God, including in the counseling arena. Let’s not complicate it with the theoretical guesses in the psychological field of man’s theories and all. Let’s not complicate it. Let’s keep it simple. Jesus is the wonderful Counselor. Let’s keep it simple with the Spirit. If we ask, the work of the Spirit will be given. We seek, we’ll find. We knock—“Lord, pour out Your Spirit in a fresh new way upon my life”—it shall be opened to you. It will open up and God will work. The consequences, the effects, the timing, the fullness and when and where and how, let God take care of all that. Just keep it simple. That’s His choice and He knows far better than we do anyway.

Oh, in the counseling ministry, prayers by the Spirit are important, and prayers for the Spirit. There’s hardly any place in ministry that you can pour yourself out more quickly than in counseling ministry. Those in counseling ministry, prayers for the Spirit are very appropriate and wise. In fact, you just won’t sustain any other way. Your heart just gets too deeply involved in the impossibilities. Or even the joys, which can also be wonderful, but also can be exhausting. The Lord can even pour out a blessing that we cannot contain. Then what are you going to do? You know, cry out for help. That’s the most fun way to get helpless, by blessings that we can’t contain.

So ask the Lord to send forth His Spirit upon us in whatever way is needed. Seek His empowering, teaching, guiding, counseling us and helping us to counsel others. Yes, the Holy Spirit lives in every believer. But we can be seeking Him for a new working in us, in measure, or arena, or effect. These are prayers for the Holy Spirit and are very appropriate for those seeking counsel, as well as those giving counsel.

Often folks seeking a word of counsel, if they’re just encouraged to seek the Lord for a fresh filling of His Spirit, it’s amazing how they get more than they even realized they needed. Counseling is not always just, what’s this dilemma you’ve got? You know, it’s not in the 48,000 miles and you just come in there with this great word. Wow! There are moments like that, but not
daily. So much of it is sustaining impossibilities in which people learn to walk by faith instead of by sight. That’s more what most counseling is about, you know. There are these little things that you just pull one little thing and the whole thing unravels. Usually if there is one thing to pull, it’s something like this. You know, maybe you just need a fresh new filling of the Spirit of God.

There are not many folks whose entire lives are turned in whole proper different directions just like that with one new insight. Most of our lives have so many things coming to bear upon them, and it’s just learning often one issue after another, day after another, to walk by faith and not by sight. Walk by the Spirit not by the flesh. Issues like this are critical.

All right now, there are general exhortations to prayer. Remember Luke 18:1, Jesus gave this parable and said—to teach that “men at all times ought to pray and not to faint, or not to lose heart.” So often people seeking a word of counsel are seeking it because they are kind of losing heart. They are fainting. They are discouraged. Many times the big thing is just to remind them again of something they maybe already know. This thing needs to be faced with just ongoing, continual, daily prayer, seeking the Lord, trusting in the Lord and looking to the Lord.

How about those giving the counsel? At all times counselors ought to pray and not to faint. You can lose heart in personal ministry with folks, you know. You can get frustrated with them or at them, or discouraged for them. We ought always to pray and not to lose heart. In fact, every time we get a bit discouraged or fainting or losing heart, you know what one thing about that is? God’s allowing that as a reminder to pray. We don’t know how to pray as we ought. Well, the Lord, has His ways of teaching us. “Lord, teach me to pray!” And then the Lord lets the circumstances come that give us only one option. And boy, I don’t know what this, I don’t understand why this doesn’t make sense. Well, there’s the answer to your prayer. Do you see any reason there to pray? Weren’t you asking for an increased prayer life? “Oh, yeah!” Men ought always to pray and not faint.

Here’s another one. Philippians 4:6-7 are great verses on prayer. Great application of truth can come from these to the counseling ministry.

> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Oh, what two powerful verses these are concerning prayer!

Again, many people seeking counsel are driven to find it because of rising anxiety in their lives. A lot of people seeking counsel. The Lord may give us many other things to share with them. Boy, here is a great thing right here, a good place to start. And don’t leave it. Encourage them that with that anxiety, that whatever they’re anxious about does fit in this category called “be anxious for nothing.” Whatever they are anxious about does qualify here. You know, it’s that broad. Be anxious for nothing. “Oh no, but you don’t understand. If you understood you’d be anxious with me.” Well, here’s the Lord’s invitation—“Be anxious for nothing.”

You don’t just flip a switch. Oh thank you, anxiety off. I mean, that is not how it works. It is prayer that removes that anxiety. It is talking to the Lord about it. Be anxious for nothing. Everything can be taken to the Lord in a way that the Lord can deal with, diminish, and even remove the anxiety.
Instead of being anxious, what do we do? But in everything—everything that stirs anxiety is to be dealt with through prayer. “In everything through prayer…”

And notice this—Let your requests be made known to God. Sometimes those seeking counsel get trapped in letting their requests be made known to everyone but God. Now there’s nothing wrong with sharing our burdens with each other. We’re called to that and that’s part of the body of Christ. But if that’s all we do and we don’t realize that we’re not even addressing them to the Lord, we’re missing the point of what prayer is all about.

When I was pastoring we got into the habit at prayer meetings, when we might sing a few songs of praise and seeking God in worship, just to let the Lord use that to draw our attention on Him and just let us enter His gates with thanksgiving in our hearts and enter His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4) in that sort of sense. And then we just often, just go right to prayer. You know, we just let our requests be made known to God. It’s interesting, if you’re together and letting them be known to God, you end up letting them be known to each other too. But sometimes the other happens and you don’t get both. You let them be known to each other, and nobody prays, or there is no time to pray. I guess that’s that, okay everybody we’ve got a thousand requests, you know. And I’m not saying God can’t use that at all, but I do think it’s too easy to miss this, where we just don’t address our requests to the Lord.

And in the counseling ministry this is important. Help people address their concerns to the Lord. We’re not the great anxiety removers. God is! A great way we can minister to people in counseling is just help them be reminded and learn to pray about the things they are struggling with.

Now none of this diminishes the place of the Word of God in counseling. All it does is it enhances the fruit of the Word of God. Counseling God’s Way has a lot to do with prayer. Oh, the Lord is the centerpiece and right next to that is what He says in His Word.

Psalm 138:2 says, “He has magnified His Word according to all of His name.” What He said is just as important, and some translations say “above His name.” Either way, what He said is as important to God as His very name, that is, His very character.

How do we enter into all that? It is by prayer, praying about these things. Then we have the peace of God, the calm, the serenity, and the tranquility of heart that is so priceless, so precious, so impossible to manufacture on our own. It surpasses all comprehension, this peace of God (Philippians 4:7). You cannot figure out how there could be peace in the midst of all this, you know. Well, it’s because God’s at work comforting us and calming us.

And then that peace guards our hearts and minds. Literally, builds a spiritual fortress around our hearts and minds, our feelings, our thinking, our motivations, our desires and our decisions. And this all happens—it will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. That’s how God works in our lives. For those who are in Christ, He works in our lives through Christ, through what Jesus has done and can do and what He is to us now and His works for us and His provisions now to us and His life in us. That’s always how the Lord works, by Christ Jesus, through Christ Jesus. And this is all entered into by prayer.

Then of course, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” This is a good word for those giving counsel and receiving counsel. If you are getting together with someone, pray before you get together and when you get together, pray. While the other one is sharing, you pray. It is possible to pray and listen. In fact, we’ll talk a lot about that toward the end of this course. The
more you listen in counseling, the more you want to pray and when you part from counseling, pray. And while you’re apart, pray. Just pray without ceasing. It is tremendous, heavenly methodology for counseling.

This came to my mind, some of the stories through the years that stirred me to study the Word of God on this subject. Troubled Christians out seeking help in the so-called Christian counseling clinics. Way back that didn’t seem all that strange. I mean, I guess this is the way it’s done, you know. But oh, the horror stories I was hearing and of the perplexities! I wondered why they didn’t just come to the church. I guess these clinics are where the experts are. And then I ask them, “What did you do there?”

“Well, they gave me a bunch of tests, and found out I was phlegmatic or something else.”

Self-introspection, I guess is finding out what kind of self should have been crucified, or something like that.

“What else?”

“Well, I did a lot of talking.”

“Oh you did. Did you get into the Word?”

“No.”

“Well, did you pray together?”

“No.”

Boy, I tell you after hundreds of encounters like that I was just starting to think: What is happening out there?

Anyone who is in counseling, personal ministry, from the most informal level, to the most formal, maybe a staff person with an office and a schedule—if prayer is not a critical part of their counseling ministry, I know they are not doing it God’s way. And I’m not saying I know how to do it all, I’m just saying I know it’s not God’s way. Prayer is critical to counseling God’s way.

And in the Scriptures there are of some what you might call prayer examples for counseling, some great ones. Ephesians 1:17 is a great one, which is a prayer, by the way. A prayer that the “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” It is a prayer that God, by His Spirit, would give us the spiritual capacity to know God with wisdom and the unfolding, revealing work of God. It is a profound prayer about getting to know God.

Let’s face it, our deepest need throughout life is addressed right here in this verse. You know, people debate, what is a person’s greatest need? Well, I think the Scriptures are absolutely forthright on it. Everyone’s greatest need is to know God, and then to know Him better. There is nothing that competes with that in priority. Knowing God. A lot of people who are seeking counseling, what they really need is to get back on the track of getting to know God better. What better way to launch that refined path of discipleship again, sharper and refocused, than a prayer like this. A prayer that: “God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,” in getting to know Him. Just think about it, there’s no heartache, problem, decision or dilemma anyone faces but that cannot be dealt with, improved, by a greater knowledge of God—who He is, what He is like, what He’s done, how He thinks. There’s no dream, vision, stirring, opportunity, or the like, but that it would be dealt with and fulfilled and progressed by a greater knowledge of God, who He is, what He likes, how He works, what He can do, what He wants to do. It is through the knowing of the Lord.

This is a great prayer for the counseling ministry, for those giving counsel, and those receiving it. Colossians 1:9 is another one.
For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

This great prayer in Colossians is a prayer about the will of God, a prayer to be filled with the knowledge of the will of God. Every aspect of our lives permeated by the knowing of God’s will. Now think about the application here for the counseling ministry. In fact so many people out seeking a word of counsel, they’re saying, “I’ve got to know the will of God on this matter!” All right, praise God they feel that way. We should feel that way about everything. And that’s right on target. Well then, how about praying about it. Sure it’s great to share what the Lord has shown us. Sure it’s great to be in the Word looking for light and insight, but how about asking God to do this. It is His will that we be fully led, controlled, and overtaken with the knowledge of His will. How about asking Him about that? Do you think He might answer a prayer like that? You know, that’s right on target. Talk about asking something according to the will of God, let’s be praying for one another that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom. God’s wisdom in knowing that will and in spiritual understanding, not just a shallow, carnal kind of “Yeah, I got it. I’ll go do it.” I mean this is a powerful kind of praying. And how great, how perfectly it fits into the counseling ministry!

Those who are out on a quest for knowing the will of God, here’s a great place to start out with them, right here. You want to know the will of God? Well, let’s get in the Word and pray about being filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. And if we want to share the will of God with people, let’s be praying that our lives will be filled with that will, that we might share it as they seek the Lord.

There are other prayer examples. Just a couple more before we take a break. I just put a few down here. The Scriptures are filled with them. Let’s look at Psalm 6:1-3.

Oh Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak. O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled; But You, O LORD—how long?

Oh, I tell you, the folks through the years that I have prayed that with; I learned to do that by being in that spot myself and crying out to God. Have you ever been in the place where you’re thinking, Oh Lord, how long? You know that prayer is asked toward God multiple times in the Word of God.

Years ago I research on that. I just started trekking through the Word to find out all the places I could where questions in prayer were addressed to God, “Oh Lord, how long?” You might ask what got me doing something like that? It was because I was asking that of God, day after day after day after day. Then I noticed in here, I can’t remember if it was this psalm or some other, but it was like, “Oh man, others have asked this. This is not unique. And then I began searching the Word and I began to think that this is kind of routine, isn’t it? I think we all come to those times when we are just crying out, “Oh Lord, how long? My soul is greatly troubled. My bones are just disintegrating. Make me whole. Have mercy on me. I’m so weak I’m falling apart, Lord. I just can’t endure this any longer.”

Often there are folks seeking counsel and you know where they are? They are actually exactly where this prayer is. And sometimes when I listen to folks in a counseling situation and they’re
asking, “How long is this going to keep going on?” How long? I can’t take it. It’s killing me. It’s crushing me. It’s driving me into despair. It’s impossible!” Listen, God understands that sort of thing. People have been in that spot through the centuries, through the millennia. And they’ve cried out to God.

The ultimate answer to how long is probably, to paraphrase Galatians 4:4, “In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son.” In the fullness of time, when everything was just perfectly arranged where God wanted it that’s when He sent forth His Son, the ultimate work of God upon this earth. And that’s how He works in our lives too, in the fullness of time. When He has everything just where He wants it, including us, then He sends forth that new work in the name of the Lord. “Oh Lord, how long?” is a great prayer. It is so right and so valid for the counseling ministry.

One more and then we’ll stop. Psalm 25:16-20,

> Turn yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain, And forgive all my sins. Consider my enemies, for they are many; And they hate me with cruel hatred. Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You.

As we’re reading the Word as I believe the Lord wants us to just have delight in His Word, live in it, keep going in it and through it, and letting it go in us and through us. Those with a heart to minister personally to others, personal discipling, one-on-one counseling, it’s good to take note of prayers like this, crying out to God when we need to. And then be ready—I mean, this prayer probably fits tonight maybe just across the county, maybe thousands of people that are seeking counsel. I mean, this prayer would just say to God just what they’re struggling under, and just what they ought to say to God. It is fantastic way to minister to people. Take them to the prayers of the Word of God that are applicable to people that are hurting and seeking counsel. It’s just a way to immediately let the Lord start to work in their life and get them engaged with Him, instead of wrestling with the problem itself.

Prayer in counseling, it’s critical. It’s just basic to counseling.

In conclusion, counseling God’s way is not getting ideas from experts with psychological theories and special human insights to humanity. It’s putting our hope in the Lord. It’s crying out to the Lord, seeking the Lord, our Wonderful Counselor, through prayer. It’s right for us to be looking much to the Lord in prayer, as we seek counsel and as we give counsel.

And another prayer application concerning counseling, I think it’s important these days to be praying much for a reviving in the church of counseling God’s ways, instead of man’s ways.

Let’s take a break here and come back and study the next section.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 8
Church Life in Counseling

By
Bob Hoekstra

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This is the fourth area under the heading of God’s Way in Counseling, and that is the Church Life. God’s four means of getting His counsel to us: His Word, the Holy Spirit, prayer, but all in the setting of church life. We’ll see that counseling God’s way is not designed to take place in some sterile or secular or even professionalized Christian clinic. It’s not designed to take place there. Not saying it can’t take place there. Anyone that seeks God anywhere and sticks to His ways, God will work. It may be less than ideal, but we’re not saying that God cannot work there. Although so often the way the Christian professional approach to clinic counseling, the way it is done, builds in so many obstacles to God’s way, that sadly in some cases, nothing of God takes place. It becomes just the flesh excusing the flesh or feeding the flesh of someone else.

But let’s come back the other way. It doesn’t mean that God can’t work in any of these settings that are not ideally as He ordained. But even if God is working somewhat in a situation that’s less than ideal, we don’t say, “Hey, perfect, great!” No, we say, praise God for what He’s done, but let’s all call each other to His more perfect way. And it doesn’t condemn everyone out there in the so-called “Mental Health” field or out there in the clinics that are trying to help people. It doesn’t condemn them because a lot of them really do want to help people. And a lot of them are very compassionate and lay down their lives for others in many ways. And if they pray at times, if they point to the Lord at times, if they share the Word at times, God’s going to honor that.

God is not a Pharisee. “Oh nope, that’s not perfect. I won’t be working until that’s perfect.” That’s the way man gets. If God were like that none of us would have any ministry. So we want to look over that whole range of what is or isn’t happening there and can or can’t. The bottom line is that it still doesn’t change anything, ultimately. If any of us are doing it less than the way God designed, let’s call each other back to the right way. That’s all. I’m not saying we all know how to do it perfectly. But if we notice in our own lives that we’re off the track, may we be reproved or may we be convicted and let God adjust us. If we see others that are off track, even though God is using them in part, we go praise God for what He’s doing. Let’s all come back to God’s way. Let’s learn together how to do God’s way better. Not just say, “Well, you know, at least there are some good things happening out there. Even so, let’s look where God ordained for this sort of ministry to take place. And He ordained for it to take place in church life, as a regular, normal part of member to member, one another relationships and ministry. That’s where God ordained it.

Let’s be reminded further, just briefly by way of introduction to Ephesians 1:22-23, of the heavenly picture of the church. And then we’ll look at a passage that is a picture of church life, living together.

And He put all things under His feet [He, the Father put all things under Jesus’ feet] and gave Him [Jesus] to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Some of the things we touch on in this study are elaborated on at length in one of the other studies that we often do called, “The Church, How Jesus Builds It,” that a lot of us went through together. But it has critical implications to the counseling ministry.

God “put all things under His feet and gave Jesus to be head over all things to the church”—including the counseling ministry, both those who counsel and those who seek
it. Jesus is head over all that; He is head over all things to the church, “which is His body.” It is a living, spiritual organism, not a dead religious organization. It is certainly not a psychologized religious organization. Which is His body—a living, spiritual organism, that lives by the life of Christ the head. His body, the church is the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The church can be called, rightly understood, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Remember, Colossians 3:11 says that Jesus is to be “all in all.” The One who is all lives in all of us and we’re to let Him be that. And the more we are looking to Him that way the more the practical reality of it is true that the church is the fullness of Him who fills all in all. The One who is the fullness and had the fullness and lives in all of us, that’s what the church is to be. To put it another way, the church is to be filled with Jesus. And then the church can live as the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Don’t you see the implications there for the counseling ministry? The Head is the Wonderful Counselor, who is to be all in all of His body. Wow, let’s just let Him be that. Let Him be all that the Wonderful Counselor is to be in all of us. And let it happen in the body, which is where it’s ordained to take place.

This New Testament truth is all lived out, primarily and basically, in the individual local churches, each a microcosm you might say, of the whole. Each is a little reflection of the whole church, the body of Christ.

So that’s by way of introduction, just to have our thinking in the right direction. This is the spiritual reality behind, the setting in which, counseling God’s way is to take place. All the rest now will elaborate on that.

Let’s look at a picture of church life, that is, body life. Colossians 3:12-17, is a beautiful snapshot, spiritually speaking, of what life together in the church is to be. How it ought to be and can be as we allow the Lord to live among us.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection—[that work of God that just binds us together]. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

What a picture of church life. It is obviously church life, just terminology here for the elect of God, holy, beloved, forgiven, and it is relating one to another.

Verse 12, as those who “put on a heart of…” is speaking of those who are the elect; as the elect, put on this kind of heart. Ask God to work in us to walk this way in light of who we are—God’s people—let’s ask God to produce this kind of life among us. May we have hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience with each other.
Verse 13, “…bearing with one another....” Putting up with each other and forgiving each other. How? Like the Lord forgave.

Verse 14 then, “…above all these things, put on love.” Live by the love of God which is the bond of perfection. It is the love of God that perfectly binds us together. It is His truth, we are to stand on. His love then binds us together upon that truth.

Verse 15, “…allow the peace of God rule in your hearts.” Literally, the word would mean function as an arbiter or umpire. Let the love of God be the umpire between us. You know, the one ruling how we relate to each other. When you get those attitudes and the love of God goes, you’re out of here. That’s out of line. That’s a foul ball, you know. That’s no good. The love of God is toning and shaping how we are to treat each other.

Verse 16, is also allowing the Word of God to have a major place in our life together. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” There is a lot of room in each of our lives and among all of us. Then “…teaching and admonishing one another” and doing it with wisdom. And we are doing it sometimes through “…psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Boy, sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? I’d like to just see every church like that. Well, that is what the potential is. That is what’s there for us to walk in.

Verse 17, “And whatever you do [all of church life] in word or deed, [words or actions] do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Thanksgiving appears here, I think, three times in this section as God’s people are living together in gratitude. God is so good! We are to be doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. That is, under His authority, according to His will, as His representatives, for His glory, by His resources! These are all related to someone’s name—doing it in His name, under His authority, according to His will, as His representatives, for His glory, using His resources. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

That’s a picture of church life, body life. That’s how the church is to relate to God and to each other. Boy, the more a church is like that, the more glorious it is! The less it’s like that the more agonizing, the more humanistic. I mean, this is a glorious comprehensive picture, of life together as the church. This would be a great thing to pray for all of our churches. “Lord, just make our churches like this!” Wow! That’s what God has in mind. That’s what He can do.

Then Colossians 2:19, related to this church life, is speaking of people who are not holding fast to the head. They were off base. This was wrong. We need to be holding fast to the head, “…from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase [that is] from God.” They are holding fast to the head, abiding in Christ, looking unto Jesus, staying in close fellowship and walking with dependence in Him. From whom the entire body—every member of the body, every one of us, finding in the head, receiving from the head all that we need and what we need to pass on to the rest of the body.

Then we get nourished and knit together we are nurtured and are given from Christ things to release and share with others. We are held together, knit together, strengthened together, built together by joints and ligaments. Joints being the relationships of member
to member, functioning together like members of the body do in their joints. The ligaments are the strong love bonds that hold those joints in place.

We can be enabled by the love of God and the work of the Spirit among us and holding fast to the head and ministering to each other, to have the joints of relationships in the body of Christ, member relating to member, creating a joint. Just like members of the physical body, create a joint in their relationship and work together. We can see spiritual joints created and held together by ligaments.

It’s sad the trivial things that pop one Christian out of joint with the other. It seems like sometimes it takes almost no pressure. I guess you could say, to get someone’s nose out of joint in the body of Christ. It doesn’t have to be that way. We can let the head, as we draw from Him, ministering to each other, build strong ligaments. Just like in the physical body. If there were not strong ligaments, any little pressure, movement, change, just pop that joint out to where it would be unusable. And that relationship between those two members would be gone. They could not function together. It doesn’t have to be that way. The spiritual body of Christ can be like the physical body, which is the language used here. God has created the physical body with joints and then ligaments that grow in there tight and hold those joints together, so that one member can stay functioning with another member, even under great pressure. They just stay related.

Of course the ligaments in the spiritual body of Christ are strongly developed bonds of love. So, even as pressure comes, a tough day, a bad word, a harsh attitude, we don’t get disjointed. I hope I see you again talking to that person, hugging that person, praying for that person, you know. We don’t have to get popped out of joint. And that’s the setting in which we are to live together. And that’s the setting we are going to see in a moment, in which God has ordained counseling to take place. It is to be such an alive, fertile, living relational setting and not some cold, sterile clinic somewhere. And especially we are not to be drawing on some theories of godless geniuses. This is where God intended for it to take place, in the body where there’s life and Him and relationship. That’s where God does what He wants to do.

Colossians 2:19, then the body grows with the increase that is from God, a qualitative growth, a discipling growth, and a counseling growth, which is from God’s divine activity. We want to see counseling grow and flourish in the church. Here’s the setting. Let it come from a growth that is from God. God the Son allowed to be the Wonderful Counselor. And using us in our joints, member to member, joint relationships, bound in ligaments of love and counseling one another.

Ephesians 4:15-16 gives us the same kind of picture;

But speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

God’s truth, God’s love, oh they’re critical in counseling ministry and that’s how we minister to one another, speaking truth in love. Not compromising truth, but not being unloving as we share it. Truth shared desiring God’s best for the other person. It is truth in love, compassion and concern. This is the context in which God wants to work. Then
we “grow up and mature unto Christ-likeness into all things into Him who is the head, even Christ.”

Then that picture of drawing what we need from Christ, ministering it in relationships and joints. And then out of those ministry relationships, supplying the things of God out to serve and minister to others as we all, every one, doing their part. That’s God’s will. This is a picture of church life: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, truth and love of God, teaching, admonishing in God’s wisdom, and thankfulness, holding fast to the head, doing everything in His name. This is the entire church is participating and growing relationships, supplying God’s resources one to another. This is a picture of God at work among His people as they relate to each other.

Now in the midst of that, we have noticed there are “one another” relationships. Let’s look at one another ministry in the church and we’re going to see that one of the strategic ones is counseling one another.

Colossians 3:13, “…bearing with one another, and forgiving one another.”

One another ministries is hanging in there with each other, mutually each with the other. It is forgiving each other and not holding grudges.

Then Colossians 3:16 where we want to land a little while; “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.” There are many ways to do that. Other Scriptures speak of here, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. But the phrase that appears a number of times is “admonishing one another.” We could study it in other passages. The reason we want to study it here is that it is right in the middle of church life. It’s right in this classic picture of the church living together as the church under the head, relating to each other.

“Admonishing one another” is one of those two key New Testament Greek words that can be translated “counseling one another.” This is the word noutheteo, from which Dr. Jay Adams coined the phrase “nouthetic counseling.” Dr. Adams is not only a gifted counselor, but he’s a very gifted Biblical linguist. He loves studying the Bible languages. He couldn’t find an English word that he though captured this Greek word noutheteo, in the noun form. He just coined an English word nouthetic. He just transposed, transliterated the Greek to English and then that gives you a new word and then you define it. That’s how we get all our words anyway. And I think that was wise of him.

Nouthetic counseling has to do with warning. It is putting something in mind with sort of a challenge in it. It is confronting people with the truth of the Word of God. See, some know who the confronters are. In fact they call Dr. Adams the consummate confronter. I’ve had some wonderful interactions with Dr. Adams through the last few years and I tell you I love him, he’s a dear man.

But counsel by confrontation, this very word is in a number of versions—Revised Standard, Amplified, Williams New Testament, and others—at different places they translate this word “counseling” or “counsel one another.” It’s that kind of word. It’s strategic to understanding New Testament counseling. Seeing what it’s used in and what it means and how it’s applied. And this word shows up right here in Colossians 3, a picture of church life. Part of church life is to be counseling one another.
See, counseling God’s way is a “one another” ministry, by admonishing one another, confronting one another and warning one another.

Now, it’s not all confrontation. Another word that we’ve seen and we’ll see again. We saw it with the Holy Spirit. The Comforter, The Paraclete or Paracaleo, that’s the other New Testament Greek word that many versions translate as counselor or counseling. It is a completely different word. It’s not, truth of God right up, as they say, in your face. In other words, you see where you are and you see what God says. You must yield to what God says. And that’s an important part of the counseling ministry. I must confess it’s not my favorite part. Though I’ve gotten more bold through the years and I see how critical it is.

We can’t counsel just, you might say by personality. We’ve got to counsel by the Word of God. And there are times when it’s critical to bring that truth right up in front of someone. See where you are? See what God’s Word says? Don’t you see the implications? Where you are has to change. If they say, “Oh yeah, I want to, but I can’t,” well then you start ministering the grace of God to them. But the rebellious, the disobedient, the self-sufficient, the stiff-necked, they need counsel by confrontation. See what God says. See where you are. That’s wrong! God’s right. There’s got to be change. And if they stay willful, then more confrontation is needed and maybe heavier doses of it. Not out of cruelty and not out of self-righteousness, but for their sake and for the glory of God that they might be accountable and see the consequences and might be humbled. Then you pour out the parakaleo, the paraklete counsel. This is that other word that can be translated counseling or counselor, which is called alongside to help. It is standing beside with the arm around another. Comforter. And boy, you can even in one counseling session go from confrontation to comfort when the law that convicts and exposes the sin, the rebellion, the wrong. And if the heart is humble and melts and wants help, well, you’re just right there beside them with the comfort of God, that paraklete ministry. “Oh brother, you know how God feels about your broken heart? He loves a contrite spirit. You know how He feels about your humility? He gives grace to the humble. You’re in a super place, you know. You’re right where God’s going to do big things.” And you just encourage them.

And that’s kind of a little capsule view of New Testament counsel. It’s all either going to be confrontation or comfort or measures of each depending on where that person is. Our desire, of course, is that they can learn to live by the comfort, encouragement and grace of God. That’s the goal that they need to be confronted less and less and less, because they’re softer and softer toward God and His will, seeking more of His help and His way. And by the grace of God they’re enabled to walk in godliness. That’s really New Testament counseling in a nutshell, in those two words.

But it’s a one another ministry, admonishing one another. Counseling one another means I can counsel you and you can counsel me. This is brother to this brother. This is sister to this sister. It’s not, let’s all go off and find the experts. Instead it’s let’s ministering one to another in the setting where the body is all connected and they’re all under the Head drawing what they need. See, that’s the dynamic. That’s where all the resources are. That’s God’s ideal.
Now again, it is not that God is handcuffed, when people try to operate a little bit differently. It’s just they’re already building in factors that diminish the work of God. It’s not that they’re awful people always. And it’s not that nothing ever happens from God. Not at all! God is merciful. He honors His name. He honors His Word. He honors prayer. He honors love and compassion. But this is what He ordained for us to do. And in counseling God’s way, that’s what we’re aiming at. Discover how God arranged it and then let’s learn together how to walk in it. And Colossians 3 is a classic passage to that extent.

There are a lot of other “one another” ministries that are greatly adaptable also to the one another counseling ministry.

A little side note before we get into that. The question often comes up, “Yeah, this is great to help each other with the resources of God, you can see great things can happen there, but how about the tough cases, the difficult cases and all that? Don’t we have to find the experts and refer them?” Well, we’re headed just that way. We’ll be there in our next couple studies. God hasn’t overlooked that either. God has a plan and a way and it’s right in the Word of God, where He raises up experts in the body. And we’ll look at that over the next couple studies, when we move to the next section called “Counselors and Their Equipping: Who should do it and how do they get equipped to do it?” It follows up on this session.

But let’s stay now just at the “one another” level, ministering one to another. That’s what counseling is to be as God has ordained it. A lot of the one another ministries are so applicable to the counseling ministry.

Romans 15:7, receiving one another,

Therefore receive one another [or accept one another], just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

People who are like this, who accept others and receive other people into their lives, willing to develop relationships, they’re the ones who will see their counseling ministry enhanced. As opposed to being stand-offish, that kind of an attitude does not develop a healthy counseling ministry. But those who accept and receive one another and want to make room in their lives for others in the family of God, of course that enhances one another ministry and that’s right where counseling takes place.

Galatians 6:2. “Bear one another’s burdens.” Those who are willing to get under the load in love and prayer and help burdened folks cast those cares over on the Lord, that aspect of one another ministry will enhance and multiply the personal counseling ministry.

First Thessalonians 5:11, “encourage one another.” Building one another up is so adaptable to enhancing the counseling ministry.

Hebrews 10:23-25. We are to be “motivating, stimulating and provoking one another to love and good deeds. Not forsaking the assembling together.” Those with that kind of heart, will see their counseling ministry, personally, even informally can just multiply and flourish and grow.
And then this last one, really the ultimate one. First John 4:7. “Beloved, let us love one another.” Verse 12, “…if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” This is the ultimate ministry one to another. All of the other ministries are caught up in this. Just loving one another, and pouring out God’s love on each other. Desiring God’s best for each other and being willing to be a part of seeing it happen, see this is loving one another.

This is the way God ordained counseling to take place. And this is where I see, again, this approach of man is a real intrusion into the plan of God. Counseling God’s way was not designed for the professional clinic outside the church. Again, I am not saying God is handcuffed out there. I’m just saying it wasn’t arranged to take place like that, so it automatically has some built-in obstructions to the plan of God.

And again, it’s not that those who are out there in that clinic are awful people. Though, I tell you, I always understate this. I have seen and received testimony and even documentation of unbelievable horror stories too. They stoop to manipulating, conniving, money grabbing, scheming, dishonesty, manipulation, domination, all in the name of professionalism with a Christian flair to it. So I want to be honest and as accurate as the Lord would show me how to be in this whole spectrum. This is not some blanket condemnation of everyone out there trying to help people. There are some wonderful people out there counseling, I think in less than the best place, but they are trying with all their being to do the best they can to help hurting people. I don’t condemn them for that. I praise God for the sacrifice and the compassion and the selflessness of a lot of them.

But I still would say to them, “Hey, come on. There’s a better way. Come on and do that in the midst of church life, where we’re all drawing from the Head and relating to each other and really know each other and where we aren’t charging each other. There’s a better way.”

“Yeah, but it’s my profession.”

“Well, let it just be your calling in ministry. Who knows if you’re really gifted of God—and this kind of gets into our studies coming up—it may become your full-time ministry right in the church. But either way, let’s just, let’s do it God’s way. You know, there’s a better way, that’s all.”

Indeed some out there are, are vicious wolves in counselor’s clothing. And be alert to that. You might have friends shopping around out there for counseling. Just alert them that it’s not all what it looks like. That everyone in the Christian clinic operation isn’t just kind of a Christian a little off base that God’s using somewhat, maybe. I know people who’ve been chewed on and spit out in some of situations, spit out when the insurance runs out is usually the way it works. Which is a tragedy and that danger isn’t built into church life. In a lot of that clinical systems, it is built in. “Hey, we can help you as long as the insurance covers it.” This is often only fourteen days to eighteen days, more or less, depending on the company, the policy and what diagnosis they were willing to accept. But we’ll touch on a lot of all that stuff down the road.

The point here is this is how God ordained it, in church life. How does God get His counsel to us? Through the Word, by the work of His Spirit, in prayerful seeking hearts, all in the context of church life, of God’s people sharing the love of God, the life of God, through the relationships that God develops with the love of God. I mean, that is such a pulsating place of potentiality, you know, spiritually speaking. And in the midst of that, God wants us counseling each other. That’s where we should expect miracles of
counseling to take place. And too often we think, “Well, I don’t have the training. I don’t have the answers. I don’t have the degree.” Well, who said you needed that? Here’s what we need [the Bible] and if we walk in it, and many are praise God! Many haven’t been sucked into the way of man. And some who have been sucked into that, they have been sort of convulsively spewed out! They just can’t take it anymore and they say, “Oh that is not what God has said. And many are finding that just what God said is available.

Let’s be praying that God would use us that way more and more and touch His church as well.

Lord, thank You for speaking to us through Your Word. Thank You that You have addressed these issues in the most profound measures. May we see, hear, receive, believe, be guided, adjusted, committed, convicted, and be a part of what You want to do to develop counseling Your way, Lord. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 9
Who Is to Do Counseling

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Lord, we give You thanks again for bringing us to Yourself. We’re so grateful, Lord. Just one thought of where we used to be, how far off we were from You, how dead, how totally into self, and Lord You called us out of darkness into light and out of our lifelessness into Christ. And You’ve been a wonderful Shepherd and Lord and Master and Counselor to us. We just give You great thanks, Lord, for all You’ve done in our lives; the things You’re doing these days; the things You have ahead between now and Your return. Lord, You can do many things even in just a day or a week or a year. And we ask You to minister to us tonight in a way that will build Your church that we might serve and glorify You. Lord, we’re burdened that there is an enormous need to see the counseling ministry of the church come back to You and to Your ways. And we ask You to do that work in our lives and make us a part of that transformation, that reformation in the church. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Counselors and their Equipping

Study number nine is the first lesson in the third section of our course entitled, “Counselors and Their Equipping.” The first section was “What Counseling Is.” And we saw that that is the Lord as Counselor counseling unto discipleship and sanctification. The second section, “God’s Way in Counseling,” that is the means He uses. It is fourfold: His Word, by the Spirit, in praying hearts, all in the setting of church life through ministering one to another. Now we build on that last section of church life a little bit in a third portion of the course called “Counselors and Their Equipping,” where we’ll spend three or four different units of study.

In this arena of counselors and their equipping, first we ask: Who is to do counseling? Well, as the outline indicates, I think the Biblical pattern is that every believer in general is to do counseling. The next heading indicates particularly those who are gifted in counseling. Furthermore, especially those who have these characteristics of spiritual life developing in their lives as listed here.

Who is to do counseling?

Now we’ll notice along the way, too, how the Biblical truths here speak contrary to this general trend of thinking that only experts can do the counseling. And usually by experts what people mean, in this day in age, even in the church—the “experts” are those who have the human insights given by man’s theories on what makes man tick inside. And so, the church is all into the theories of Freud and the theories of Carl Jung and the theories of Abraham Maslow and Alfred Adler and Erickson and the list just goes on and on and on of men taking guesses about what is going on inside, where only God can see. But those are the “experts,” supposedly.

Not so according to the Word of God. And we’ll see that God ordains every believer in general to be involved in the counseling ministry. Yes, to a different extent and with different effects or consequences, sure, depending on gift and calling and many other factors. But the basic issue regarding who is to do counseling is that every believer in general should. And we find that taught many places in the Word of God and one of the very strong statements on that is found in Romans 15:14,

Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.
This is addressed to the brethren, “You, my brethren.” God is speaking through the apostle Paul to the church at Rome, in other words to the family of God. He is speaking to a given church and by implication and application, the family of God, the church of Jesus Christ, or any local church anywhere. Not some select few, but “you, my brethren.” The family of God is being addressed here. “You are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge.”

Now to put that in a Biblical context, remember in the Scriptures there’s always the immediate context that gives light and insight on what is being said. And then there’s the context of the book in which you find a passage. But there’s always a bigger context: the whole Word of God. And there’s even a bigger context than that, and that is, the very person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and His being, which is even bigger than the Scriptures itself. And God and His character and His work revealed in the Word and then it is brought down to a statement like this.

Boy, this is a big statement. Jesus said, “None is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). So if anyone is full of goodness, where must it be coming from? God alone! It’s nothing about them. It’s not that they have just sort of arrived. Or generally speaking, people aren’t too good, but God selected those prizes and here we are. I don’t think so! It’s not possible. We know by our own experience it can’t be that. But far beyond that, by the Word of God, none is good but God alone. And yet it can be said that believers are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge. That’s in the context of this book and even in the whole Word of God. We brought in some of the other portions of the Word of God; “No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). “…Christ in you [us] the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). The good things in our lives are all related to the fact that Christ lives in us.

But let’s just take this in the context of the book of Romans. Fourteen and a half chapters revealed the plan and purposes and work of God for man. Starting off with the Gospel in chapter one and God’s righteousness and His judgment for unrighteousness in end of chapter one, going on into chapter two. And then it getting into justification in chapters three and four. There is some more about justification in chapter five. And then sanctification is covered in Romans chapters six, seven, and eight. And the promise of glorification and union with Christ is in Romans six. Romans twelve, minds renewed by the truth of the Word of God. That is the context. A believer must be drawing on that, living by that, counting on that to the extent that it becomes their context for Christian thinking and living. Here’s the fact: “…you, my brethren that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge” (Romans 15:14).

These resources of God can bring God’s goodness to fill our lives and fill us with the knowledge of the Lord. And on that basis, we are able also to admonish one another.

“Able to admonish,” the Williams translation translates that phrase competent to counsel. It’s the very verse from which Dr. Jay Adams got the title of his classic book on Biblical counseling that he wrote. It was one of the early wake-up calls to the church to get back to the Lord Jesus Christ and back to the Word of God. This is where he got the title for his book by that name, Competent to Counsel. He just took that phrase right out of the Williams New Testament translation.

We are competent to counsel, competent through Christ, through His Spirit, His truth, His resources provided as described in these fourteen and a half chapters of Romans. That’s where our competency comes from.

Why competent to counsel? This word is translated admonish in many versions. It’s a term we’ve already come across. Noutheteo is where Dr. Adams coined the American word—he created a new word in the English language, nouthetic. He just transliterated Greek characters into English.
He couldn’t find a good English word that said what he felt that Greek word said. And he’s a very outstanding Biblical linguist. He’s not just a counselor and quite good in Bible languages. And he couldn’t find a real good English word, so he made an English word and defined it, which is basically how we get all of our words anyway. And when people talk about nouthetic counseling, this is the word from whence it came. It is counsel by confrontation. Counsel by bringing the truth of the Word of God right up before someone where they’re held accountable to what it has to say.

Competent to counsel or it is able to admonish. Competent to counsel is being able to be an instrument in the hands of the Wonderful Counselor. For us to counsel one another we can really only do it right if we’re an instrument in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is the Wonderful Counselor. Don’t forget the anchor point in our entire study. When we talk about people counseling in the church, it anchors back in the truth that—“…His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor…” (Isaiah 9:6). If a person is an instrument in the hands of the Wonderful Counselor, sharing His counsel, then they’re doing Biblical counseling to that degree. It’s not that they are the counselor really. It’s that they are the instrument that the Wonderful Counselor is using.

We are competent to counsel through Christ, His Spirit, and His truth, there’s a competency there. And counseling, admonishing, bring truth before people’s lives as the Wonderful Counselor leads and guides us to do it.

Remember again, the counseling ministry is a “one another” ministry in the church. There is no more all-inclusive, comprehensive, every-child-of-God phrase in the Scriptures than “one another.” Everyone can minister to each other. It’s totally universal, comprehensive, and there is absolute mutuality in it. No one is excluded. There is total reciprocity, one to the other, just all over the whole body. It’s a beautiful phrase. And it’s tied a number of times in the Scripture to the counseling ministry.

So who is to counsel? Every believer in general.

One of the ways that this can be done can be seen in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. This is not the only way every believer can be involved in the counseling ministry, but here is a classic example:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble [or any tribulation], with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

This is a powerful look at personal “one another” counseling ministry. One of the ways every believer can do it. Not the only way, but a very profound way.

The God of all comfort, the Lord is called here. All true comfort, if it’s real comfort, genuine comfort, must be of God. To comfort, that is to ease someone’s pain, lessen or lighten their difficulty and their load, as well as strengthen and encourage them. All true comfort must be of God because He is the God of all comfort.

There is a lot of humanistic, philosophical comfort, you know. Whistling by the graveyard…great comfort. I’m sure that scares the enemy away! Or the other side of it saying, “every cloud has a silver lining,” as the storm is blowing. What comfort? It is not very good comfort really.
All real comfort should come from God. He is the God of all comfort. He has all kinds of comfort to give us. Think through the years that you’ve walked with the Lord, how many times He has comforted you or eased the pain, lessened the difficulty, strengthened, encouraged, and sustained us through things? He is the God of all comfort and we haven’t exhausted His comfort or even the varieties of the kinds we yet need and will get.

The God of all comfort is who comforts us in all our afflictions. There is no affliction, no tribulation, no trouble that God does not have comfort to provide for us. He comforts us in all our tribulations, if we’ll turn to Him for comfort. There is no tribulation that He does not have comfort for us.

Back to another familiar term, comforts us. It’s the other New Testament Greek word that can be translated counselor or counseling. One was neutheteo, nouthetic. This is parakaleo or paraklete, meaning to come alongside to help. This is counsel by comfort, not by confrontation. That’s why so often versions translate this word comfort. But it’s a word that some versions, in some places just translate counsel. But it has the flavor of a comforting counsel and not a two tablets of stone in your face. Though there is a place for that for the rebellious, for the hard hearted. But this is the arm of the Holy Spirit around your shoulder. The paraklete called alongside to help. This is I’m with you, I’m for you. God is for us, not against us. And the humble heart can enjoy that rest and live by that, counting on that.

Now God comforts us. This God of all comfort, our God, who has every measure of comfort needed and is the source of all true comfort, He comforts us in any trouble so that we might be able to comfort those who are in any trouble or affliction. How? “[It is with the same] comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” 2 Corinthians 1:4. God not only comforts us because He loves to share comfort, because He has a loving heart and He does it so that we can pass that comfort on to others. It’s not just to meet our needs, though He loves to meet our needs like that. But it’s bigger than that. When God comforts us in our trouble, part of it is He’s equipping us to pass on that comfort to somebody else. And in a world like we live in, there are millions of opportunities everywhere you look there are people who need comfort. There are people who are really hurting, discouraged, in despair, stressed out, striving, condemned, guilty, fearful, weary, and worn out. Boy, a little comfort can go a long way in ministering to someone. And we can minister the comfort of God to people.

Sometimes folks say, “I don’t know how to comfort that person. I’ve never been through what they’re going through.” Well, notice this verse tells you, you don’t have to know what they’re going through to comfort them. Do you see that? The God of all comfort comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble. Any trouble! How do you do that if you’ve never been through what they’ve been through? It is with the same comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Just share with them how God comforted you in your need. That’s all. It doesn’t have to be precisely the same situation. All they need to know is it’s the same God, the God of all comfort. And let me give you an example of how He works and how you share how He works because He’s the God of all comfort, so He can do for them what He did for you.

This is the counseling ministry in action in just the broadest, most basic picture possible. And yet this is a powerful ministry. This is not just a kind of fill in stuff until the heavy hitters come along. I mean, this is heart-touching, life-changing ministry. You find someone who needs comfort and just start to share with them the comfort that you’ve already found. Because if you’ve walked with the Lord over a week or two you’ve probably already needed to be comforted, unless you had an unusually long honeymoon with the Lord or just glory hallelujah
and your feet didn’t even touch the ground for a couple months. But sooner or later all of the children of God need comfort. And so, you’ve been comforted by God and all around us are people who need to be comforted. What a fantastic way to minister. Just be on the alert, watching out for people who need to be comforted. And no matter what they’re going through, don’t disqualify yourself.

Too many Christians either disqualify themselves or let the enemy disqualify them. Or the world, with all its systems and all of its degrees, [snap] like that—ooh, look at that problem. Oh man. You’re going to have to have at least two or three degrees to deal with that one. There is this person just tormented in affliction, needing comfort, and we’re looking for an expert for them, when we could go right to that person and just begin to tell them that God loves them. You’re concerned of the heartache we see and we’ve had heartaches too. “Let me tell you what God did for me once. He’s a God of all comfort. Let me tell you how He comforted me once. I know He can comfort you.” I mean, that’s powerful ministry and it’s so simple!

We all can do this. We are called to it. We just comfort people with the same comfort with which we ourselves our comforted by God. It’s again pointing people to the Wonderful Counselor and letting the Holy Spirit go to work, whose name is Comforter. Sure, the Spirit convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. Praise God for that ministry. But He’s also the Comforter for the afflicted.

Someone once said their ministry was two-fold? Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable, or something like that. There is a lot of truth in that, you know. That’s grabs a lot of Biblical truth. All believers are able, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by the work of the Spirit, to do such counseling ministry and much, much more than that, not only that but more.

Who is to counsel? Who is to do counseling? Every believer in general is to counsel and furthermore, particularly those gifted in counseling. Everyone, no matter what their gift, whatever their calling, can be involved in the kind of counseling ministry we just looked at in 2 Corinthians 1:2, 4 but particularly those who should do counseling are those who are spiritually gifted in counseling. I’m not talking about just some human skill, but spiritually gifted.

Romans 12:6, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us…” Context here—the subject is spiritual gifts.

You know the spiritual gifts are God’s grace imparted to us. They’re not just some special knack. It’s the grace of God enabling us to function in a certain way. You see it right here. “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.” Spiritual gifts are grace imparted to us enabling us to function in a specified way, characteristically, especially.

In fact the word charismata, translated most often in the New Testament as spiritual gifts, from which the English word “charismatic,” especially religiously speaking. Sometimes it’s spiritual; sometimes it’s just religious depending on what’s going on. You know, if it’s charismania you know it’s just religious. If it’s true charismatic, it means it’s just spiritual gifting by the grace of God to function in special ways.

But the word for grace is charis. It’s the very core of the word charismata which means spiritual gifts. It’s all about the grace of God. It’s not just a knack to do something. It’s God’s grace imparted in sort of a special way, a charismatic way. It causes one to function best and most and most effectively this way and another one this way. And that’s their gift. Every Christian is to function beyond their gift. We’re all called to arenas of ministry where we don’t have spiritual
gift. But we might have one or two or three spiritual gifts where our ministry gets emphasized and characterized by that. You know, we’re all to have faith. Well some have the gift of wonder-working faith, you know. We’re all to give. Some have the spiritual gift of giving. We’re all to help each other. But some have the gift of helps, you know. It just sets them apart as what they’re all about, really. So that’s the subject here, now let’s apply it to our study right now.

Romans 12:8, “…he who exhorts, in exhortation.” This is the same word *exhortation* here, as in 2 Corinthians 1 that spoke of comfort, exhorter, comforter, encourager, or counselor. You could translate it any of those ways. This would include the spiritual gift of counseling. All of us are called to counsel to some degree or another. Some people are spiritually gifted at it. The special way the grace of God works in their lives characteristically is, they’re enabled by God, given a heart for, and a spiritual ability to counsel other people. And those people, particularly, are the ones who should be doing counseling in the body of Christ.

In 1Corinthians 12:4, to carry this issue a little bit further there are diversities of gifts. So we’re talking again about spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:7, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” The manifestation of the Spirit is another way to speak about spiritual gifts. The manifestation, the open demonstration of the Spirit of God at work in that person’s life is another way to describe their special gift. It is given to each one, every believer having at least one. We are having gifts for the profit of all. Not for personal advantage or gain, but to serve others.

And on this list of gifts there’s some interesting gifts mentioned here. 1 Corinthians 12:8-9,

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit…gifts of healings by the same Spirit.

Just to pick those gifts out for an example, some Christians have the spiritual gift of counseling. And we’re going to talk in a while about the answer to the question, “Don’t you have to send some people who need counseling to the experts sometimes?” Yes! As long as we know who the experts are. We’re not talking about man’s experts. God has built in experts in His plan for the church. It’s built in to calling, gifting, training, enabling. God has a plan to raise up experts. It’s built right into the Word of God and life of the church.

We’ve been referring people to so-called experts for two or three decades now. But they’re man’s experts. And we’ll see later in the course God looks upon their wisdom and He has an interesting word for it—foolishness. The church has been referring people to those who are so impressive to the world and God says it’s all foolishness. Shame on us!

God has a way to raise up His experts and it has to do partly with those who are spiritually gifted. But there are some with gifts that aren’t precisely the spiritual gift of counseling, but their gift is beautifully adaptable to the counseling ministry. It doesn’t mean that counseling will be their main thing, but they’ll be especially, particularly useful there.

For example, if you have the gift of the word of wisdom, can you just see immediately how invaluable in a counseling situation this can be. When someone presents some impossible situation and you have the gift of wisdom and there are the facts. And most of us look at it and go, “Whoa. I’m sorry, there’s no hope. You’re the one exception to the God of all comfort. You know there’s no comfort for you.” I mean, that’s the way you feel sometimes when you hear someone pour out their heart and you go, “Oh, my goodness. I know what’s coming. They’re going to ask me to help them. There’s no way! What should I do?” And I’m going to have to say,
“Yeah, I was wondering the same thing.” Can you imagine the person with the gift of wisdom? A supernatural gifting of God enabling them to, with the wise thinking of the Lord, just speak right into that situation from the truth of God. Those who have the gift of wisdom this is a tremendous application. Now it can operate in all kinds of arenas, not just counseling. But you can see the adaptability there.

How about the gift of the word of knowledge? I grew up thinking the gift of the word of knowledge only operated at that time when the traveling evangelist let us know that Sister Jenkins’s kidney was being healed, at that moment! In the public meeting, you know. Maybe you didn’t grow up in that heritage. Some of you are looking at me like, “What?” I haven’t given you all of my testimony. But I, way back, was in a lot of meetings like that before I came to the Lord. I was in a lot of religious places and some of those were valid settings.

Now sure, in a meeting where the Spirit of God is really in control, if someone has the gift of the word of knowledge and God is, say touching an internal organ or touching someone in their heart or mind where you couldn’t see or know that. But if God wants it known for some reason, sure that gift could be used that way. Word of knowledge means it’s a supernatural gifting to know something that you couldn’t know. It’s a gift of knowledge, you know. It’s a supernatural, a working of God.

It certainly could function great in a teaching ministry. But how about in counseling? If you’re talking to someone and they are wanting your help. They’re giving you the whole situation but they’re kind of snowing you, you know, giving you their best effort at sincerity. What do you know? But what if you have the gift of the word of knowledge?

There was a story about this troubled family in the church, and people in the church were trying to bring together this young couple. It seemed like a real alienation there. There was a lot of trouble at home. People from church to reach out them. And this one young woman in the church wanted to go along with these older saints who had been trying and trying to help this couple, especially it seemed like the husband. This older couple condescendingly way agreed; okay maybe you will learn something, come along. And they went there and they were very fruitless. And the young woman was just listening and praying and watching. Then she asked if she could say something. And she directed herself right to that husband. The team had a beautiful spiritual covering and all. And she asked this young man, “Are you in the bondage of deep pornography?” I mean, she just nailed it right to the heart of the issue. Nobody had a clue and she didn’t even know these people. Her only exposure was that little visit there. But she was burdened when she heard this family was falling apart. How does that happen in the counseling situation? It is the gift of the word of knowledge. It’s like let’s quit talking about this other stuff. Let’s talk about what the problem is. Zap! Wow! Who’s to counsel? Every believer in general, but particularly those gifted; certainly those with the spiritual gift of counseling.

There are other gifts that have a tremendous application to the counseling ministry, like gifts of healings, plural. This is the spiritual enablement by God to help others to wholeness of life in all kinds of ways. Oh, the implications for counseling ministry there is enormous. Because so many people seeking counseling their lives are so broken and lacking wholeness. There’s such and emptiness and they are out seeking fullness and reality for that emptiness and brokenness. Those with gifts of healings receive spiritual enablement from the Lord to be able to see lives made whole with the truth of God, the love of God, the counsel of the Lord.
So, who’s to counsel? Every believer in general, particularly those gifted in counseling. But especially out of those two groups, those who are, for example, abiding in Christ and living by the Spirit (John 15). Every believer in general, if they are abiding in Christ will be more effective in their counseling ministry. The spiritually gifted ones, if they’re abiding in Christ will be especially fruitful in their counseling ministry.

John 15:4-5,

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

If we’re going to counsel, every believer in general, we’d better be abiding in Christ the Wonderful Counselor or we won’t fulfill the general calling. Why? Because “apart from Me you can do nothing.” Well, how can that be? I’ve had all kinds of experiences. I’ve given a lot of good advice to people. As far as the Lord is concerned it amounts to nothing unless we received it from Him. Sure it might bring human betterment, improvement, adjustment in circumstance or something. But what does it amount to? Nothing. It won’t save their soul. It won’t change their lives to be like Christ.

If we’re going to counsel in any way that impacts lives rightly, we want to be abiding in Christ. Whether it’s just our general ministry like every believer, one to another in counseling, or we’re gifted in it, we need to be abiding in Christ. Just think of the picture of abiding in Christ the Wonderful Counselor. We are to be fellowshipping with Him, leaning on Him, drawing from Him what we need in word and deed and attitude and relationship. What we are passing on to that person? The very fruit of Christlikeness that is coming into our life by abiding in Christ. Boy that will touch people in counseling!

What a beautiful picture of the ultimate issue in Biblical counseling which is, the Lord using us to share His counsel. How about if we’re abiding in Christ and like a branch in the vine, the life flowing through the branches, the life of the vine? How about if we’re abiding in Christ the life flowing through us and out to minister is Christ in us the hope of glory, then it is the Wonderful Counselor just reaching right out through us.

I mean, this is what makes counseling real, effective, life-changing. It’s not some clever idea we come up with. Or, “Oh yeah, I see that problem all the time and I know just what to suggest.” I mean, this type of counseling is so above and beyond that. When we are abiding in Christ and then when people look to us for help what’s going to come out? It will be life-giving, life-changing fruit. Love, joy, peace—things like that.

And that is the next passage, Galatians 5, because those abiding in Christ, there’s fruit that comes out. What is that fruit? It’s just another way of saying it’s the effect of the Holy Spirit working in and through our lives, sharing the life of Christ to us and through us.

Galatians 5:22-23 and 25,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control…If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.
If we’ve found life everlasting, spiritual life in the Spirit, let’s also walk, take each step depending on the Spirit. And what we’ll be sharing with people is spiritual fruit right from the Lord Himself.

Fruitful counseling doesn’t hinge on psychological training. It hinges on things like abiding in Christ and living by the Spirit. Now this is in the context of what we’ve looked at a lot already and that is, the Word of God. And that’s what comes up next. It’s not disconnected from the Word of God. That abiding in Christ will bring forth a life described in and will even be explaining the Scriptures right through our lives to others.

Those living by the Word and by prayer, especially those. Not only those who are abiding in Christ, living by the Spirit, but especially those living by the Word and by prayer. One verse hits that, John 15:7,

> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you.

If we let the words of the Lord abide in us, live in us, live out through us, live in our thinking, our deciding, our sharing, our priorities, our goals—if we let the Lord’s words live in us we’ll be those living by the Word, able to share the truth that sets people free. If we’re letting His words live in us we can ask whatever we desire and it shall be done. Isn’t that great? That is if we’re letting His words live in us, because His words then, determine the things we ask. If His words live in us we can ask anything we want! Why? Because we’re going to be wanting what the Word is planting and developing in us. Our prayer requests, the things we desire, they’re going to be coming right out of the Word. In that respect, hey, ask what you want because the Word is going to be working on us, working in us, forming our thinking and developing our desires.

This goes back to Philippians 2:12-13, “God is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.” He uses His Word and the work of His Spirit to do that. Oh, what a prayer life we can have then! Our mind is increasingly filled by the Word. The things we ask are what the Word is teaching us to ask, and we just keep asking all these things and God just answers and supplies.

Answered prayers in line with the Word of God are a powerful way to counsel. Ministering to people the truth of the Word, the will of God, praying for God to do these things, teaching them the truth of the Word, and urging them to pray that God does these things. Boy that person, whether they’re just counseling in general or gifted, their counseling ministry will be greatly enhanced by living in the Word and living by prayer.

Another matter that especially makes us competent to counsel are those who keep confidences. Proverbs 11:13. The natural way of man is not characteristically to keep confidences on every issue. It seems like the natural way is to publish it. Proverbs 11:13, “A tale bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.”

It seems like the flesh is a talebearer. This is kind of a crass definition but it’s got a lot of truth in it. Someone asked, “How would you define a secret?”

> “Oh a secret?—That is what you tell one person at a time.”

You know, I mean, that’s too real. That’s too much where people are. No, then that is not a secret. That’s probably closer to gossip, you know, where you just keep spreading it, but very secretly.
A tale bearer reveals secrets. A tale bearer just can’t wait to tell somebody else. Now there’s a proper time to tell things to different folks. But it must be led by the Lord not just done indiscriminately. A tale bearer just reveals secrets. That’s what they love to do.

“But he who is of faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Proverbs 11:13). Can’t you see the implications of that for counseling ministry? If we are tale bearers just watch our counseling ministry be undermined and disappear. It will be robbed, killed and destroyed by the enemy, by betraying people’s confidence. I mean the things that you hear in the counseling ministry, whether it’s a formal or informal counseling ministry, whether it’s a broken hearted friend at church or in the neighborhood just pouring out their heart, and maybe they looked at you as the only person they thought they could share it with. It could really be a life-shattering kind of a secret and they’re just broken and seeking help. That person can be doubly wiped out if we break their confidence and just start revealing secrets. And then we not only can’t help them, we’ve harmed them. And furthermore, we’ve diminished our own counseling ministry. Don’t tell him what you’re going through. Yeah, but he’s such a good listener. Yeah, but he’s an awful good talker too.

Those who keep confidences, especially they, should be counseling others. And also those willing to sacrifice for others. The counseling ministry is not a convenience ministry. Some of the most critical times and opportunities to be used in counseling come at the most inconvenient times.

I think of my buddy that was in Vietnam. Oh, he was a scary man! The most scary man I ever witnessed to in my life. And for a long time, day in and day out he was there in my office. And he’d start sharing things he’d been through and things he was currently going through and thinking about. And he had just come to the Lord there in the ministry and man, I thought: “Lord, help him, but I wouldn’t mind if You would just help me to come out of this room alive.” Oh the torment this dear man went through because he’d inflicted it as an unbeliever on so many. He had some ups and downs. Praise God, he’s walked steady with the Lord now. And he has a lovely family no.

But one night in the midst of his troubles, I don’t know if it was two or three in the morning or what it was, the doorbell rang and some banging on the door. I went down to see who it was and it was my buddy. I looked out there and I swung the door open and turned on the porch light. And he could hardly stand up. “Okay pastor, start pastoring!” Well, praise the Lord, God let me do it. I said, “Man, come on in here.” Put on some coffee for him and sat down and we talked hours that night. And most of the hours he was actually understanding what I was saying. God sobered him up and it was a tremendous night. You know, the flesh would have wanted to say, “Man, see you Sunday morning, if I even have time for you. What are you doing here at this hour interrupting the household?”

The counseling ministry is not a convenience ministry. Some of the greatest opportunities for it come at what looks like, circumstantially, the most impossible or the least enjoyable moments. But remember 1 John 3:16,

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Jesus Christ laid down His life for us so we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. He died for us. We can die a bit to self for the family of God and be willing to do what the Lord has called us to—just to walk in this Christ-like path. He died on the cross for us, certainly that should work
in us a willingness for God to shape and remake us where we’re willing to die to self in a lot of situations, to pour out the love of God on others.

Again, who is to do counseling? Every believer in general is but particularly those gifted in counseling. And whether every believer in general or those particularly spiritually gifted, especially those abiding in Christ and living by the Spirit, those living by the Word and by prayer, and those who keep confidences and those who are willing to sacrifice for others. These are the people God wants to use. And God can make us those kind of people. No one is naturally like this. This is supernatural. It isn’t that some people just have a knack at counseling and others don’t. It’s either God is allowed to work in a life and make us more like this and therefore be more useable, or we won’t be that. But He is willing and He is able.

People say, “Yeah, but don’t you need to send people to the experts sometimes? Don’t you get in over your head and have to send people to the experts?” Well, I’ve been involved in counseling ministry for twenty-six or seven years now and I’m always in over my head! The only one who never is in over His head is God. No matter how deep the water, He’s never in over His head. The water doesn’t have to get too deep for us, three or four inches of impossibility and it’s enough to feel like we are drowning. “Lord, help! I can’t help this person. I don’t know what to say. I don’t what to do.”

Well, as the Lord is shaping our lives and marking our lives, He makes us more useable, and whenever we’re extended where we think we’ve shared all that God has given us, there are others in the body, growing in these things that we can usher a troubled person to. “Listen, I’ve shared all I know to share and I pray God is helping you. But I see you just hurting and needy.” And you can be praying for the Lord to show you who can take this person on. The Lord has someone else in the body, probably right in the fellowship where they are. Not out in some clinic somewhere. Not in some office with a degree and with a high fee and with a lot of human theories. But to people who are walking in the Spirit so they’re more equipped. That’s who is to do the counseling and those who are to become the experts. We’ll talk more about that issue in the very next unit.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 10
Equipping for Counseling Ministry

By
Bob Hoekstra

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This is our next unit of study, the second unit of study under this matter of counselors and their equipping. We’ve looked at who is to do counseling. Now let’s consider equipping for counseling ministry.

First, the general ministry of equipping found in Ephesians 4:11-12,

> And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

We have seen who is to do counseling. It is every believer in general, particularly those gifted. And especially those being increasingly shaped and molded by their walk with the Lord in a proper path. That relates now to this issue of equipping for ministry. But let’s expand on that a bit. How are those who are generally ministering one to another in counseling to get more equipped, more outfitted and prepared? What about those who have a gift in counseling? How are they to develop in that arena of service to God?

Equipping for counseling is a critical issue. And again, the Scriptures speak to that. The Lord has fully provided. It’s not just, “Well, just do the best you can and you know maybe you’ll get by.” The Lord has a way to equip us. This is the general ministry of equipping for all the ministries that all the children of God are called to. Here’s the general way that God wants to equip us. It has to do with living together in the church, in church life, with and under the ministries of those gifted ones listed here. It doesn’t all hinge on them. There are other issues involved. And even then being used in our lives is all contingent upon them walking with the Lord and the Lord using them, and us walking with the Lord to receive from them. But this is a picture of living in church life and letting the gifted leaders in the church who God has given to the church, ordained by God, and appointed by the Lord, put there by the Lord, all the way from the apostles to prophets to evangelists and pastor-teachers.

And really in every given church there are some with these gifts of leadership. They’re not necessarily staff members in a church, though many staff members in a given church with multiple staff would have gifts and calling like this. And sure, we don’t have apostles today like in the first century, those who saw the risen Lord, those who sat down now, and then and wrote the Word of God. Sure, we don’t have exactly that. However, we have many in the church with that kind of ministry, apostolic type of ministry. You know, visionary church planting, missionaries, those with a big view that goes out beyond just where we all live.

Pastor Chuck Smith in fact in many ways has had kind of an apostolic ministry that touches the world at large and much of the church world. It’s just who God has made him in Christ and developed him to be and the impact that he has had and there are men like that. And praise God for that, we need those men. And there are many others like that in the body of Christ. Not just a few.

Even in a given church body you often find folks with kind of that vision far out beyond, you know. That missionary vision, we often call it. Well in many ways the apostles were the first missionaries. In fact there’s a total linguistic bond between the two terms. An apostle has to do with one sent, on a mission. And obviously missionary, that’s someone sent on a mission. So God has put such lives in the church as part of our equipping.
And then there are prophets. And again, we don’t maybe have the Daniels and the Jeremiahs and Ezekiels who also were used of God to write the Word of God. And in their ministry they had a lot of foretelling, but all of them had a lot of forth telling. They were just proclaiming forth the big, wide-sweeping, broad scope of the truth of the kingdom of God. You look at the preaching of the prophets in the Old Testament and see the kind of calling that is. Not all just hinging on predicting things, but they were just proclaiming the big scope of what is of God and what isn’t. And they were warning. And yet speaking reality, so we know where to put our faith. There are men like that in the church today. There are a lot of them really. Some are well known, some are hardly known at all, but they just have that kind of an impact or that kind of a gift.

I think back through the two churches that the Lord let me pastor for twenty-five years. We had folks with apostolic and prophetic type gifts and calling right in our church. And they led lives right in our church. You know, they had a leading impact with gifts of leadership. Some of them were right on our staff. God has men like that in the church today, and they are not infallible and all that, but they’re important to the equipping of our lives.

And the Lord has the evangelists. Those have that passion to reach souls, the vision for it, the prayer for it, the gifts for it, and helping us to see the importance and even how to evangelize.

Then there are the pastor-teachers. And though I believe there are pastors and teachers, I believe this is one combined gift. One person who is a pastor-teacher. Shepherds who lead the sheep by feeding them the Word of God. The Lord has called us to live in the church with leaders who God has given the gifts of leadership, special callings is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying [the building up] of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Leaders in the church are not to do all the ministry. Their ministry is to equip others for ministry. The equipping of the saints, the preparing, the developing, the outfitting, the training of the saints.

And don’t be fooled by that word saints. You know, I’m no saint. Oh, you’re not saved? Oh yeah, I’m saved but I’m no saint. Saint means you’re saved. The word saint means set apart one. Holy one in the sense that it is not a part of the unholy world, but taken out of the world and set apart in Christ. That’s all it means. It just means we’re set apart from the world in Christ unto God. Saint is just another synonym for believer, disciple, Christian, or follower of the Lord, all these talking about the same people, the saints.

The leaders of the Church are to invest their lives in equipping every believer for what?—for the work of ministry.

Ministry is for every believer. In fact counseling ministry is for every believer. Again, not all counsel to the same degree and not all to the same extent of time. Not all with the same fruit of emphasis or ability. But it’s for all of us. Counsel one another, the Scripture says.

How do we get equipped for that? Well how do we get equipped for any ministry in the church? “Well, you’ve got to go here and get this degree. And you’ve got to read this many books. And you’ve got to do that. And you’ve got to do the other.” No, we live in the Lord, in the Word, in church life and let God grow us up and prepare us.

Often as I travel and teach, pastors ask me to teach on this subject. Probably because there’s such a great need in this subject and too few have given attention to it over the last twenty or thirty years. And often at the seminars or even after church services, folks with a burden for or a gift and calling to counsel ask me, “I want to help people. I hear you teach on this and my heart just blazes. And what do you think?”
“Well, you know, I’m not a prophet and I don’t have the gift of the word of knowledge, but you’re probably gifted to counsel.”

And they say, “Well, I thought so but I didn’t even know that was a gifting from God.”

And then the question comes, “How am I going to get equipped?” Or they say, “You know what I’m doing right now? I’m in a university getting my degree in psychology cause I want to help people.”

And if I’ve taught one message they’re already going, “This isn’t the best path, is it?”

And I tell them, no, it isn’t. But God knows your heart and He can rescue you from that trail. And He has a better way.

And they go, “How can I get equipped? And where can I go to get a degree in this stuff?”

And I turn to passages like this. God has built it into the church. That’s where we get equipped.

Now, getting an education somewhere doesn’t prevent God from using you. It may handicap you somewhat at times, depending on what the program is and it may take years of unlearning. You know, it doesn’t mean God can’t use you. But it doesn’t mean either the other end. “Hey, God’s going to use me because I got the degree.” I know about people. You know, I’ve got my masters in psychology and I’ve got certification and licensing for counseling.” All of heaven is going, “Wow. Sign him up.” There are people who have gone that route and they are greatly used of God now. You know why? It is because they’re putting their hope in none of that. They’re putting their hope in the Lord and His Word and God is using them mightily. And praise God for that!

But how do we get equipped for the counseling ministry? The same way we’re to get equipped for every ministry in the body of Christ. The same basic fundamentals are there for every ministry. The Word, prayer, the Holy Spirit, body life, church leaders gifted to lead us on in being prepared and developed. It’s so astoundingly simple that Christian after Christian with a heart to serve God just overlooks the whole thing. And they’re hunting and hunting out there how to get equipped. It’s built into the Word of God. It’s built into church life.

Now if it’s a field of study that is not forbidden, you know, you don’t study black magic to learn how to help people. If it’s a field of study that’s not forbidden in the Word, certainly there’s liberty to get into it if you want to. It’s not necessary. But there’s the liberty to. But that’s not where the power is. That’s not where the hope’s going to come from. And even if it’s a field say that—well, let me put it this way.

One of my heartaches about the contemporary American church is what’s happening in the Bible colleges and seminaries all over the country. The church is getting her counselors from there and almost all of the institutions now have departments of psychology to train church workers and pastors how to help people. Now again, I’m not Mr. Know-it-all. I don’t have all the answers. But I’m totally convinced that is Biblically unacceptable. One of the reasons the American church is so weak and self-centered and so carnal is that we’ve been equipping leaders to strengthen the flesh in people’s lives, instead of making disciples out of them by denying self, taking up the cross daily and following Jesus.

I’m not against having psychology departments in Bibles colleges if they’re totally apologetic, where you only have them to study just like you would study Mormonism or the Jehovah’s Witness. We are not to make Mormons out of people, but to show what’s wrong and to show the danger that’s there. I think it would be great if every Bible College had a psychology department, if it was part of the apologetic ministry. Examining it to see why it is not Biblical, why it is intervening, interfering and displacing the Word of God. That’s fine. That would just be more equipping to communicate and—that’s fine. If you had a heart for that, go for it. I don’t believe you need it though, but it wouldn’t be forbidden to study in that way. Because the Word of God
sheds light on why the darkness isn’t right. And it’s fine to take the Word and examine things like that.

How do we get equipped? It’s right here in the Bible. God has given to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. For what?—“for the equipping of the saints.” For what?—“for the work of ministry,” including the ministry of counseling. But, it’s not just the leaders of the church. They’re important, but they’re only usable and useful and productive as they’re rightly walking with the Lord, in the Word, by the Spirit, in prayer. But it’s beyond that because it is not just the leaders. We’re to be equipping one another.

Ephesians 4:12, before you leave this verse check one thing, it is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Where the edifying of the body of Christ appears: Romans 14:19, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another [or build up] another.”

It is not just the leaders of the church carrying out the ministry that shapes us, though we’re all impacted by their ministry. I think right now of so many church leaders that God has used to impact my life through the years. And it’s happening right now. I can think right now of many church leaders. Some right here in this church where I hang out a lot. But church leaders in other churches I get to visit a lot also. Or those whose books I read, or tapes I listen to. It still goes on and I praise God for that. But it’s bigger than that. It is also a part of “one another” ministry. As we’re ministering to one another we are being used to build each other up, equip, prepare, and develop each other’s lives.

The things by which one may edify another is also in Romans 15:2,

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification [edifying each other].

One another ministry is for all. It’s a mutual ministry and this is the setting in which we can all be more equipped, increasingly for all ministry, including the counseling ministry. It’s not just leaders ministering to us. It’s all of us ministering to each other, building each other up. The more we build each other up, the more we are being equipped to serve the Lord.

How do you get equipped for family life? Well, God intended for us to do that living in a family. Sure it’s needy and it looks like it’s so vulnerable. And there are so many mistakes there. And of course, we’ve got the classic problem now of the ages. We’re into dysfunctional families. So how can you ever learn to live in a family? And yet God designed to learn family life by living in a family. And in the Word of God He tells us all about family life so we can live in families. It’s not that we have to go off and get a great degree in being a family expert.

How do we minister in the church? How do we get equipped? Live in the church the way God designed the church to be lived in. And let the church function the way God intended it to function, and the people will be equipped for ministry. It’s just built in. And it’s not slip-shod either. At least as far as how God has ordained, provided, and supplied what is needed. It can be profound.
I know a number of you really well. And I’ve watched God equip you. And I’ve watched God use you or begin to use you. And through the years I’ve ministered with those I’ve seen equipped right in the church until it blows your mind!

The pastor at Calvary Chapel in Irvine, who is pastoring there, He was my buddy and partner and associate for five years. He was saved at Costa Mesa, discipled some there, He spent time just hanging out at Irvine. It was a blessed fellowship. God did wonderful things through the years. But there was no one writing books on, how can we make our church like Calvary Chapel Irvine? But God touched lives there and when I think of John, most of his Christian life was lived out in that church. Now he’s been pastoring there since I left to travel and teach. And I marvel at how equipped he is. And he keeps getting more equipped. And his life is developing, maturing, more outfitted, more prepared. And those he is touching, same thing is happening to them. I did a seminar with them last year some time and I can see the equipping process goes on.

It’s just the very nature of the entity. It’s built into the church, if we walk God’s way in the church. I’ve told many a person, they want to be equipped to counsel, get into church life. If you’re in a church that knows nothing of church life, pray and exhort and reach out to the leaders. And if they have no interest or they think you’re weird, ask God to put you in a church that knows what Biblical church life is all about. And just plunge in! Your gift will start getting developed. Your life will mature. You’ll be reaching out to help people and God will use you and others will see you are being used of God and others will come to you. And before you know it, you’ll have so much ministry that you’ll be pleading mercy! Lord, I can’t take it! Because God opened the windows of heaven and poured out a blessing you can’t contain. It’s so simple. It’s just right there under our nose. It’s just waiting to happen. Every day of our lives we can be in the equipping process and be used to help others get equipped.

Just a couple of words about this next section, being built up in all aspects of counseling God’s way. In the general equipping ministry of the church, what we’re learning there can be applied to all aspects of counseling God’s way. And basically I’ve put five points there, just reminding us of the five major sections of our study. While we’re being equipped, if we have a burden for counseling ministry, ask the Lord in the general equipping process of the church to just keep building us up more in these aspects of counseling God’s way, learning what they are, thinking rightly, walking in them, giving and receiving in these dimensions, these five things.

One: “What Counseling Is”
Lord, as you’re equipping me, I’ve got a burden to counsel, let me see with more and more depth and breadth what counseling is from Your perspective. And we’ve spent a major portion of our course on that.

Two: “God’s Way in Counseling”
Lord, I want to counsel, I feel drawn to. At least I want my general ministry of counseling to increase or to be more fruitful. I need to know Your way more. Be more committed to Your Word, Your Spirit, prayer, and church life.

Three: “Counselors and Their Equipping”
Do you want to be used to counsel? Ask God to convince you of these truths, like—every believer can be competent to counsel. Ask God to convince us of that. And that God has built into church life an equipping process. Ask God to build us up in these things.

Four: “Foundational Truths for Counseling”
Pretty soon we will shift to that direction and spend thirty, forty percent of the course or more on that. There are issues of being in Adam or in Christ and united with Christ. And the difference between walking according to the flesh or walking according to the Spirit. It includes finding out in the Word who we are in Christ, having our minds renewed and knowing of spiritual warfare. We’ll look at learning how to walk in victory in spiritual warfare and boy, just right there, get built up in those arenas. Oh my goodness, how much more effective we can be in our counseling.

Five: “The Major Threats to Counseling God’s Way” This basically boils down to two thoughts, forsaking our Wonderful Counseling and thinking that He is not enough. And then that will always lead to the other threat, which is turning to worldly counsel.

Just ask God in our general edification process and equipping to get built up in those five arenas. Oh, the impact on our counseling ministry will be enormous.

But in all of this there are a couple of areas we should spend our remaining time on. They deserve special attention in the process of being equipped for ministry and equipped for counseling God’s way. And one of them is equipping through God’s Word.

One of the reasons the equipping process of church life is so effective is because it includes the Word of God. Remember Colossians 3:16. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell among you.”

I was eating lunch in a Texas town one day with my dad and a friend of his who was all excited about a new church he found. Oh, he just went on and on about this new church and how he loved this new church.

“What do you like the best?”

“Oh, what I like the best is the sermons. They’re so concise. They’re so compact. This man says everything that needs to be said in about twelve minutes.”

My dad said, “Oh, kind of like a sermonette?”

He goes, “Yes! That’s it! That’s it.” My dad used to say that classic old, “Remember sermonettes make Christianettes.”

That’s not Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...” Not see how convenient we can make it and how we can avoid, at all costs, making the flesh uncomfortable. But now, let’s go the other way. How much space can we stretch out together and make room for the Word of God?

One of the questions I always ask when I travel and teach—which is all, you know, regularly—is how much time should I teach this morning? And often it’s, “There are multiple services and that becomes kind of a strategic question. You know with kids and cars and parking lots and all. And it’s a real insightful thing. Let the word of Christ richly dwell among them. Other churches do this too, but characteristically not in the American church. “Hey, twelve minutes, man, pushing it aren’t you? Twenty minutes? The man is a preaching fanatic!”

For years I taught an hour Sunday morning and an hour, maybe a little more Wednesday night. I’m not saying you have to do that. But boy, when I hear, well you know, we usually do about twenty, twenty-five minutes maybe, I just kind of cringe.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell among you—personally, privately, but also corporately. One of the reasons lives can get equipped so well in the church is the church is to be the place where the Word of God is just pouring out. It is just pouring out and drenching people. It is feeding them, strengthening them, impacting them, shaping and changing them.
In 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

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.

That is to be taking place as a reality in the life of the church all the time. It is by the inspired Word of God, every word breathed out by God. Therefore it is profitable and able to bring a spiritual benefit to profit us in doctrine, which is teaching. It is teaching us the ways of the Lord. But able to reprove us, let us know when we’re off the ways of the Lord. More than that to correct us, getting us back on the ways of the Lord. And even instruction in righteousness, moving us on down the path of the Lord. Oh, what the Word is able to do!

If we just use the Word of God for these four purposes in our own lives and pass it on in counseling ministry, what a ministry we’d have! Teaching, reproving, correcting, and instructing in righteousness. Wow, what a counseling ministry that would be. Just using the Word of God, letting it do those four things in people’s lives and that is what happens as we’re letting God do this in our lives. And then we are just passing on that ministry to others.

Oh how that is equipping us. How thoroughly is that equipping us? That the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work. Too many Christians still think if they don’t have some special kind of recognized degree, accredited, licensed, certified, then they just aren’t ready. There’s not even a hint at that in the Word of God.

Now again, if you have…I was going to say if you have a license in counseling, you can still serve God. That’s really hard these days, because the licensing agencies deny everything you believe in! So it’s hard. You’ll always be fighting the government looking over your shoulder, checking up on you, saying, “You can’t say that.” Or “You told what to that troubled person?” “You talked to them about Jesus? We didn’t license you for that. I mean, come on. Tell them about the Id or the Superego or something. Or at least explain dysfunctionalism to them or help them grasp the profound dimensions of co-dependency. You talked to them about Jesus? Man, you’re in danger of losing your license, being decertified.”

Look at this. “That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Whatever spiritual work of service God has called us to, the essentials of the kingdom, salvation and discipleship and growth and fruit and transformation to Christ-likeness progressively, and being set free, being made whole, all the ministries that contribute to all those things, the Word of God, because it’s God’s Word, can make us complete. Whole life in Christ to share and grow in, thoroughly equipped and completely prepared for every area of spiritual service and ministry.

We have so tragically understated what God has provided to equip the saints, and we under use it. We are sending kids off to learn man’s wisdom to help them man’s way. And often those poor kids are Biblically illiterate. They know Freud better than they know Paul. How sad. No wonder they aren’t equipped for spiritual ministry. Sure, they’re equipped to get a job in the world system. Maybe even in the so-called Christian counseling clinic. But what are they drawing on, the Word of God or the wisdom of man?

Boy, I have a passion on this subject. There is equipping for the saints built into church life.
One of the reasons I love to teach in a Bible college setting like this is there’s no accreditation, so the government cannot be saying you can’t give a degree with that content. Okay, we’ll just call it a piece of paper then. It is just something to thank God that we had a couple of years to study the Word together. Fine. Who cares what you call it. That’s one reason I love it. The other is that it’s tightly tied into the local church. That’s God’s way. Outside of that I wouldn’t have any interest. It just really wouldn’t fit, as far as my heart, where the real equipping takes place. And it is not that someone going through a university somewhere that God can’t use them. Oh, yes He can. But you know how He’ll use them? It is to the extent that they get equipped in here [pointing to the Bible], whether or not they get that other degree. It will depend on getting equipped in here.

I thank God for the five years that He gave me at Dallas Seminary, where I just dug into the Word a lot. Four of those five years I was pastoring. And God showed me, taking care of this flock, feeding them, seeking Him, and being in the Word, that’s your number one priority. Even if you fail every class, that’s your number one priority, along with your family and your kids. And boy, that put things in perspective. And I’ll tell you, no one has ever asked me to see that Master of Theology degree once, not once, since I left there in 1973. In fact, I only looked at it once that day. I put it in a drawer. I have not taken it out since. And nobody ever asked me to see it. The first church I pastored started before I had it, so it didn’t matter there. The second church I pastored, the Lord put me there in spite of the fact I had that degree. It was totally immaterial and any good along the way came from the equipping that’s right here, by the Spirit, in church life. I believe that’s what the Word says and I think we should exhort people in that direction.

In 2 Timothy 2:15,

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Be diligent, or as the King James translates it, study. It’s great to study the Word. To be diligent in the Word. Why?—because we want to present ourselves to God, approved to God, not impressing man. “Oh look how many hours I studied. Oh look how many things I learned.” No, to be approved to God, so that God would look upon our walk and ministry and say, “Yes. That’s what I intend. That’s what I want. Go for it. Stay at it.” Like He looked down on Jesus saying, “…This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). May He see us walking in Christ, abiding in Christ. Christ alive in us by the Spirit and the Word of Christ richly dwelling in us. And He looks upon us and goes, “Oh yes. This is more of My beloved Son. I am well pleased with that.” Approved unto God.

It is a workman, a worker laboring in the Word of God, laboring with the Word of God. It’s a great thing to get in the Word of God and wrestle with God. “Lord, what does this mean? Lord, I don’t get this one. Lord, I get this one.” And the one I get troubles me more than the one I don’t get, you know. Just wrestling with God in the Word and really laboring in there.

We are “rightly dividing it,” or “handling it accurately,” it could be translated. Explaining it and applying it properly. Rightly dividing it is cutting a straight line through it. It is knowing the difference between law and grace and give and self and Christ and flesh and the Spirit. Is it man’s wisdom, or God’s wisdom, self-striving or overflowing with the Spirit of God. It is knowing the differences between these things. That one won’t cut it, the other always will. That is just rightly dividing the Word of God. The word of truth. The truth that sets people free, sanctifies their lives and makes them whole. Lord, there’s the way to be equipped, just be diligent in the Word of God.

Hebrews 5 has more on being equipped through the Word of God. Hebrews 5:13-14,
For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food [meat] belongs to those who are of full age, that is, [or mature] those who by reason of use [or practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

We’re talking about equipping here. We’re talking about experts being raised up in the church here. If we’re only into the milk, we’ll stay babes. Praise God for repentance and forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But it’s just milk. Oh, it’s glorious milk! It’s eternal life-giving, life-changing milk. But still we’ve got to go on beyond that. Praise God Christ died for my sins. But that’s milk. That doesn’t mean it’s bad, it just means it’s the beginning point. It’s great. It’s glorious. But it’s milk. Christ died for me, that’s milk. What’s solid food? Christ lives in me. Chew on that for a while! Boy, there’s something to get nourished on. Praise God He died for me. It’s a life-giving glass of milk, you know. For babes, for birth, for getting started, oh, it’s glorious! But the message doesn’t stop there. He died for us that He might come to live in us. Boy, there’s something to chew on. You can chew on that every day and the more you grow in the understanding and the walking in it, the more it just stretches your mind. My word, it’s the truth, isn’t it? Jesus Christ lives in me. I’m looking at you. Amazing, Jesus lives in you. And you’re going the same thing. Yeah, but He lives in you. It’s astounding. It’s so easy to forget. But it’s the difference between spiritual vitality and progress. It’s victory, growing, meat.

Solid food is for maturing. Those who, because of practice, that is use, they become doers of the Word not just hearers. They hear the Word and they want to live it just like they hear it. Senses are trained. Spiritual discernment is developed. They learn to discern between good and evil, between God’s ways and man’s ways, between the spiritual things and carnal things, heavenly things and earthly things. Living by the Word and using the Word in ministry. It is by counseling others that way, this is where the experts come from.

You take Christians in general, or those gifted, and they grow in these things, get equipped in the Word, and all these other things we’ve looked at in the previous study, they become more and more the experts that we all turn to when we’re kind of stretched out at the end of what we’ve shared. And people are still saying, “Help. More please.” And we, in this process become those that others say, “Hey, I’ve shared this, that and the other with this person. Could you spend some time with this person?” We help each other help others on.

These are where the experts come from in the body of Christ. And every church, moving in this path, will have experts. Some might be grandmas. Some might be pastors. Some might be Sunday school teachers. Some might be businessmen. But they’re the experts we want to turn to. I’d rather turn to an expert that God has equipped this day, and spend a half an hour or an hour with them, than spend all day with one of the experts of the world, trained in man’s wisdom. It’s not just that the price is better either. It’s what you’re getting for free is what God wants you to have.

It just baffles me that the church is out there paying to be told the wrong message! Have we been hoodwinked? I mean, someone has tricked us. Here’s the true message and it’s free. And we can receive it and share it with each other for free. Yet there are Christians out there paying, $80, $90, $100 an hour to be told lies. Or the truth mixed in and watered down with Freud and Jung and Abraham Maslow, and Eric Fromm and all the rest with their theories that we’ll look at later on toward the end, just for some warning’s sake because it is not God’s way.

Last, how to be equipped. Nothing equips us more than growing in knowing the Lord.
In 2 Peter 3:18, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.” This is the theme verse for the other class, “Growing in the Grace of God.” We’re to grow in and by the grace of God and in the knowing of the Lord. That is, grow, by God’s grace in a living acquaintanceship with God. Nothing will change our lives more than getting to know the Lord.

Can you imagine the disciples, especially when they were filled with the Spirit and all that they had seen in Christ was made real to them, the impact? How’d you like to walk with Jesus, full of the Spirit for a year or two or three or five? Wow! Well, that’s what we’re called to do. Just do it by faith and not by sight. That’s what changes lives.

Then last, 1 Peter 2:4-5,

> Coming to Him [coming to Jesus] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This is all about being equipped by knowing the Lord. Getting built-up to serve God by coming to the Lord. Look at how it’s built. “Coming to Him,” verse 4, He who is a living stone. He is solid, stable, strong, but alive, tender, compassionate. It is coming to Christ the living stone in verse 5. “You also as living stones are being built up, a spiritual house, holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” That is, to serve God, to minister.

What is the majesty and yet the simplicity of being equipped here? Coming to Him, you also are being built up. As we come to Christ the living stone, He builds us up as living stones to be like Him. Get in the Word. Get in there coming to Jesus. Not just getting the chapter read, but seeking the Lord in there. And prayer, not just saying our prayers, but worshipping, praising Him, praying in His name. Serving, not just, “Yeah, I witnessed to five people today. I told them they could miss hell and get heaven, you know.” Was Jesus involved in that? Did you pray? Did you lift up Jesus before them? Come to Him, that’s how we get equipped. Everyday in every way, whatever we do, just keep coming to Jesus Christ. Coming to Him, you also are being built up. We come to Him, He builds us up. It’s astoundingly simple! We come to Him, He builds us up to be like Him. He’s the Wonderful Counselor. Let’s keep coming to Him. You know what He’s going to make of us?—counselors who counsel more and more like He did and does. That’s how we get equipped.

In conclusion that verse I almost overlooked there at the end of Hebrews 13. Let’s read that then we’ll finish. Hebrews 13:20,-21.

> Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete.

Let’s make that more concise. Verse 20, “Now may the God of peace [verse 21] make you complete.” This is God making us complete. In fact, some versions translate that, “equip you,” not make you complete, but equip you in every good work. It could be translated either way. In fact this word is translated both ways in most translations. This is God equipping us in every good work, to do His will. Working in us, that’s how God equips us. Not just working on us, He also works in us what is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ. Using the glorious attributes of His character, His work on our behalf to make us what He wants us to be.
This is a prayer that God Himself would equip us. Would you rather have the wisest men of the world equipping you or God Himself? Hands down. No contest. That’s what this prayer is about. In fact, that’s what this study is about. It is God equipping His people in His church as a good heavenly Father and as Jesus the wonderful Head of the body. This is God’s equipping program. I believe we can rest in His processes and purposes and be fully equipped for whatever He wants to do with us.

There’s a way to be equipped without having to beg and borrow and steal from the world. Or try to integrate it and cram it in for some extra high wisdom. Listen, God’s equipping program is perfect. Any other program mixed in will complicate the process. Again, not saying God can’t use anyone who’s getting an education. But if they aren’t filling their lives with this, that education will mess them up, instead of broaden there or maybe open doors of opportunity into certain lives.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You so much for the calling to serve You in all kinds of ways and even to be counselors. Thank You for the equipping that You provide in Your Church by Your Word, Your Spirit. May we walk this path, Lord, and just keep equipping us, thoroughly equipping us for every good work. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 11
Vital Issues for Counseling

By
Bob Hoekstra

Brought to you by
Blue Letter Bible
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Let’s pray,

*Lord, we seek You tonight as the Wonderful Counselor. We ask You to counsel us and equip us and give us Your warnings and just shape us and mark us in ways that will make us useful in Your hands, Lord. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

We are continuing in the section of our course called “Counselors and Their Equipping.” Concerning who is to do counseling, of course it is all of us in general, but the gifted in particular and especially those growing and maturing and having the Lord work in their lives. These are the ones the Lord will use more and more in the arena of personal ministry.

Now in this visit together, there is a very special time of equipping. In these two sessions that mark tonight's study, we’re going to look at vital issues for most counseling situations. We’re going to look at about twenty key passages or so, from the emphasis placed on the Lord’s guidance. Some passages that have a personal testimony in them from my own life and walk with the Lord, as well as something the Lord taught me over twenty years ago now through these passages concerning the counseling ministry. And it has much to do with being equipped to minister. I believe that the issues we’ll look at tonight are so vital that if we’re letting the Lord work these matters in our lives and through that let the Lord equip us to share them with others, I think we’ll be quite amazed how much more equipped we’ll be to work in one-on-one ministry, even just through these passages.

Now I don’t want to infer in any way that these fifteen or twenty passages contain everything anyone ever needs to know for personal ministry, discipling or counseling. But on the other hand, I would not want to in any way understate the significance of them either. I believe through these passages, in themselves and the lesson they teach us, that there is an insight into being equipped to minister to others that can really be life changing, or life marking.

Let me tell you a couple of stories that set our framework of thinking in this arena. Well over twenty years ago now, the Lord sent my way a series of counseling encounters. I don’t remember the exact number now, eight, ten, or twelve. The number doesn’t matter, but it was more than two or three. And it seemed like every one of these people or couples were facing things so perplexing that at each case I was literally baffled as to what to share with them. I had been pastoring for some years and I didn’t then and don’t now have a total grasp on all of the Word of God, but even much less then. But I still had taught it for years, so you’d think I’d have some things to share. But you know life can get pretty impossible. You know, people can face things that just absolutely paralyze and stagger them, bind them, blind them, and perplex them. You know, life can sometimes look like a bowl of spaghetti. But the spaghetti is made out of steel, and it’s all wound in there, and it’s like where’s the end? And well, what’s the difference if I knew? What am I going to do with it? How do you budge it? How do you untie it? How do you straighten it
out? And they [the counselee] would say, “Here’s my situation,” hoping I’d have a chapter, verse and “Well, here’s what God says.” But instead it was like, “Oh man. Maybe there’s no help for you.” That’s the way I felt time after time after time.

And with the first person that came I almost didn’t share anything. I almost just said, “You know, why don’t we both surrender, not to God, to circumstances. There’s no way out.” But the Lord, I believe, rescued me and I believe that person and others who were going to come my way. The Lord stirred my heart with that first person, even though I felt I had nothing to share. I just began to share some verses the Lord stirred on my heart that seemed directly to have nothing to do with the dilemmas they were facing. And in a specific way didn’t. But they were verses that God had deeply touched my life on. And I just began to share them, and then I prayed for them. With the first person I was amazed, they went off amazingly encouraged, astoundingly encouraged. They looked at me as though I was some kind of Solomon. It’s like, “Lord, what is happening here? Boy, the power of Your Word, the sufficiency and effectiveness of it!”

Then the next person came. Again, I was baffled. I wasn’t quite as quick to, you know, just shout surrender. There’s nothing wrong with saying, “Hey, I don’t know what to say.” But don’t disqualify yourself too quickly in an impossible dilemma. And God really taught me something through these encounters.

So I shared with each person things that seemed to have nothing to do with exactly what they were wrestling with, but some other things that God had touched my heart with deeply through the years. And it kept going like that for eight, ten or twelve folks, over a week or two period. I’ll never forget the overall impact and perspective on it. With person after person and their impossibilities, I had no chapter or verse, to tell them, “Hey when that happens look what God says. Here’s the path. Do this. Stay away from that, you know.” And every time those people went away blessed, strengthened, encouraged, and more properly focused in the direction they should be. And all I did was share with them as the Lord stirred my heart some of the very passages we’re looking at tonight. These are passages that have been used in sometimes a revolutionary way by God in my own life. They were encounters with God that have been real signposts along the pilgrimage with Him.

And those are the two context setting issues about these passages. One, God has touched my life deeply through these. These have been personally and absolutely vital issues in pressing on to know the Lord, in not fleeing and hiding or quitting or being buried forever in doubt or perplexity. I just passed these along to others. And I’ve learned through the years that if you hear something that you can’t imagine who on earth would have a specific word for them, let alone yourself, don’t disqualify yourself too quickly. Ask God to give you a list of vital issues that are life-changing, life-giving, life-building in your own walk with the Lord. And whenever you’re with someone who is really hurting, seeking or struggling and what they share is a total bafflement to you, don’t believe for a moment you still don’t have anything to share. You do. And maybe some of these very issues are already vital issues in your life, and this will just be confirmation to you tonight. Maybe some of these things might be your first encounter with some of these
issues, but they might become vital in your walk with the Lord. Or this may stir other passages as you look back on your pilgrimage. “Oh yeah, back there God spoke to me through this passage. Oh, that was vital.” Listen, it will be vital to a bunch of other people too.

Let the Lord build up a spiritual reservoir of these kind of issues, which just equips us all the more to be ready to share something with anyone. The more I have walked with the Lord through the years, taught the Word and ministered personally in counseling and discipling, I have seen the issue isn’t having all the answers for everyone’s questions. It’s just being willing, being open, and letting God use us to share something of the Lord and the kingdom of heaven that can help in their time of need whether it’s specific or general or somewhere in between. Because it is the Lord and His Word that gives life and it isn’t having all the answers. It’s just being more and more used of God to point to the One who does have all the answers ultimately. So that’s what we’re looking at in these studies. Vital issues appropriate for virtually every counseling situation.

As those who share counsel and as those who seek counsel these are vital issues we all need to learn, like first, learning to rely on God’s resources not our resources. In 2 Corinthians 3:5, we find the first vital issue, and we’ll look at a number of passages that is the issue of God’s resources not ours.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.

In a counseling ministry where we’re giving to someone, this is a critical, vital issue. No, we’re not sufficient of ourselves to think that anything we’re going to need to give that person is going to source in us. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but—there’s more to the story. Our sufficiency is from God. What those people need, some of it, God will supply perhaps through us. And God becomes our sufficient resource to minister to that person.

When people come to us in dilemmas that just blow your mind and it’s like, “Oh, I’m wasting their time sitting here listening. I have nothing to share. Don’t be too sure. They’re as overwhelmed in it as you are in hearing it, and even more so. And you know what? They’re probably buried under this thought, they are going to have to be adequate to bear up under or get on out of it. That is not the truth. From God’s perspective they aren’t sufficient in themselves to consider that anything they need to cope with, to deal with, to understand, to get free and move on, is going to come from their own resources. I have marveled through the years, how just that in itself has brought an astounding peace and hope to people, as they see their circumstances overwhelming their adequacy. Just to hear this vital issue: “Hey, it doesn’t hinge on your sufficiency. God doesn’t believe that what you need can source, any of it, from your own resources. So don’t put that load on your shoulders.” It’s a matter of God’s resources not ours. It takes the load off their shoulders, thinking they have to produce, and lets them begin to rest in the sufficiency that comes from God alone. It’s a vital issue. A matter of God’s resources not ours. This one issue is so vital in counseling I couldn’t even begin to enumerate the times God has
had me share it through the years or the unbelievably diverse circumstances into which I have shared this verse.

Here’s another one. It’s so familiar and too many believers don’t turn to it in a time of perplexity. They say, “Proverbs 3:5-6? How can that help me? I’ve read that 48 times already. I need something new and fresh and deep and profound.”

Well, try this on for size once more. These verses have become a vital issue in my life in so many times and ways I couldn’t tell you. I’ve gone to these two verses through the years when my heart was broken, my eyes were blinded, circumstances were binding, and all wisdom seemed long used up. And every time I have gone to these verses in such a time, God has reminded me that in this matter of wisdom and guidance, it’s again a matter of His resources not ours.

Listen to these:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” (Proverbs 3:5). Listen, when you’re sitting with someone in a dilemma beyond description, I’ll guarantee you this is a vital word for them to hear.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” Put your dependence on the Lord with everything within your being, because everywhere inside there’s a temptation to try this or try that. Manipulate this or scheme that or maybe it’s just hopelessness. “Hey, trust in the Lord with all your heart, with everything within you.”

“…And lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Boy, that is a vital issue. It seems like the greater the dilemma gets, the harder we lean on our own understanding. I’ve got to understand this thing and straighten it out. We start leaning hard on the understanding and it’s kind of like the broken reed of Egypt. You know, you lean on it and you know, a little reed growing by the river bank. You can’t lean too heavy on that, especially a broken one. Lean not on your own understanding. There are all kinds of things all the time that go beyond everyone’s understanding, except God’s. What a vital issue to share with folks. So what do you do then?

“In all your ways acknowledge Him…” (Proverbs 3:6). In all your ways, in every aspect of what you’re facing. Well you’ve got 37 impossible aspects to a totally complicated dilemma. Okay, let’s just take them one at a time. And in every one of those ways just acknowledge Him. “Okay Lord, You see this. You’re the Lord. You see this one? You’re able. You see this one? It’s under Your authority. You see this one?” You know, just acknowledge Him right in all your ways. Oh, the liberation! The peace and the stirring hope. In all your ways acknowledge Him. “You’re the Lord. You’re my God. You’re my life. You’re my Master. You’re my Shepherd. You’re my strength. You’re my wisdom.”

Just acknowledge Him. And look where it leaves you. “…And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6).
More and more through the years I have preferred to send folks off with this in their heart rather than the best wisdom I could offer, even if I could back it up with Scripture. Now it’s not an either-or, sometimes you can do both. But I’d still rather send them off with this working in their life than the best specific word of wisdom I had for that moment because this will deal with every dilemma yet ahead. That timely word of wisdom may not come up again in their life, as critical or needful.

What would you rather have, all the answers in all your understanding beyond what man ever had? Or would you rather have this promise, God is directing your path? See where this leaves you. These are powerful verses. I think they’re so under-used in personal ministry. “Proverbs 3:5,-6? Oh man, everybody knows those.” We’re not talking about a memory contest. We’re talking life and death.

Most of us don’t need to hear some great new thing we never heard before. Most of us need to be reminded of and taken deeper in what we already know. That’s our greatest ministry to each other, the ministry of reminding. When we spend any time in the family in the Word with the people of God, our greatest ministry is reminding each other, not finding some great new thing nobody ever heard.

Vital issues locked up in these two verses. I mean, hardly anyone could come our way but that we could minister life to them out of just these two brief passages we’ve looked at already. That’s how vital they are.

Here’s another one. Isaiah 40:29-31,

He gives power to the weak. And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

So often when we’re with someone in an impossible situation and they’re seeking a word of counsel, they are so aware of their own weakness, their lack of might. They’re ready to faint. That’s the common thing when it’s impossible, the dilemma. It’s like, “Oh I quit.”

Well, look at this. God gives power to the weak. You feel weak? You qualify. So far, so good! To those who have no might, He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall. I can remember when I was eighteen or twenty-one or you know. Going at things endlessly, it seemed like. Who needs rest? Just go! Well, that strength runs out someday too.

Isaiah 40:31, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.” Well one of the vital issues for people in impossible dilemmas is to learn in a fresh new and deeper way what waiting on the Lord is all about. We’re not talking sitting in a rocking chair. You can sit in a rocking chair by the flesh just as well as by the Spirit. Just sitting in a chair, waiting on the Lord, doesn’t mean you’re waiting on the Lord. Even if you say you
are. God knows. God knows. That’s all that matters. Waiting on the Lord is just not letting time pass. Those who wait on the Lord—sure there might be a passage of time involved—but as the time passes our expectations are being set on the Lord.

There is a great synonym for this word wait, in fact some places in the Old Testament it is translated “hope in.” But those who hope in the Lord, look what happens for them. “They shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.” Sounds pretty certain, doesn’t it? There’s not a might, a maybe, or a possibly in there. We hope in Him and here are the consequences, renewed strength.

I like this next one. “Mount up with wings like eagles.” A lot of people who come with a dilemma seeking counseling, they are buried under the circumstances. They desperately need spiritually to mount up with wings like eagles. They need to be enabled to get up above it. Look down on it from God’s perspective. Not be smothered under it. But even as all the circumstances are piled on them, spiritually, they’re viewing it from God’s viewpoint. A heavenly perspective is mounting up with wings like eagles, above the circumstances, soaring into heavenly places with the Lord.

And those people shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. These are vital issues to share with people. Vital issues for most counseling situations. I often find, even when God gives me a very specific chapter, verse, or word for someone in a situation or even a dilemma, it’s still tremendously valuable to add on some of these bigger, general issues that are needed to keep going on every day, whether they have an answer or not.

Here’s another one, 1 Samuel 17:47. This is David speaking to Goliath, “Then all of this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands.”

Then verse 48 says, “…David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.”

Hold that in your mind, you might even want to hold your finger there too. And let’s also read with it 2 Chronicles 20:15. Before we read verse 15, I want to read one other verse in the chapter, here Israel is surrounded by three other nations coming against them. They are facing really bad circumstances.

2 Chronicles 20:12,

Oh, our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that has come against us, [now look at this] nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You.

Then verse 2 Chronicles 20:15, the Spirit of the Lord stirred Jehaziel, and he stood and said,
Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, king Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.’

Here in 2 Chronicles 20:15 we read, “…the battle is not yours, but God’s.” In 1 Samuel 17:47 David said, “…the battle is the LORD’s.”

That’s the vital issue. The battle is the Lord’s. Every Christian is on the battlefield and is in spiritual warfare all the time. It just varies in degree, kind, intensity and our awareness of it. But it’s always there. Here are two of the Lord’s servants, King David and King Jehoshaphat, right on the physical, literal battlefield. Visible pictures for us of our unseen warfare days of the church. What’s the truth here? The battle is the Lord’s not ours.

It’s not how hard or how straight we punch or throw the javelin or how impressive our footwork or whatever else. The battle is the Lord’s, not ours. Victory in walking in it hinges on the Lord, His faithfulness, His ability, not ours.

And it’s amazing that this truth appears with these two kings of Israel. David knew exactly what God wanted him to do and at what point the victory was going to be enjoyed, and he ran at the enemy. All he had was a pouch, five stones and a sling. It turned out that one stone was plenty. But he said, “I come to you in the name of the Lord.”

Jehoshaphat was surrounded by three nations. He didn’t run at the enemy. He ran and hid and cried, “Help!” To most people he looked like a whim, you know. This was a leader who is going to walk in victory. Yeah. Israel went out from the word of Jehaziel. The battle is the Lord’s and not theirs. And God even said, “You won’t have to fight. Just stand and see the salvation of the Lord.” God turned the enemies, the nations, one upon the other. And it was all over. It took them days to carry away the spoil. Wow, what a warrior Jehoshaphat is! What a tactician. No, he was just honest and humble before God. “We don’t have any power, Lord, against them. In fact, we don’t even have a clue how to approach it.”

So on the surface, it looks very different. You might say, “Oh that’s how you get victory. David. Man, you gotta know what to do and have the guts to go do it.” No, you missed the point. “Oh, here’s the key, Jehoshaphat. You kind of fall back and act like you don’t know what to do and it just happens.” Not the point!

The point is the same in both battles. In both situations the children of God enjoyed the victory of God by standing on this truth: “The battle is the Lord’s and not ours.” It is a vital issue to share with people in a dilemma. When they’re embattled by circumstances all around, some will counsel, “Well, if you want to get out of the mess you’ve got to take charge of your life. Get a grip on yourself. Find a life. Manage a life. Make it happen. Be a David!” That’s not the key at all! Anybody can strive in the flesh like that, even the world, as well as a carnal Christian. Some might say, “Oh no, the key is passivity. Jehoshaphat! And folks with plans and ready to take action—slow down here
now. The key is…and all of a sudden the key is timing. And go or don’t go, or take action or inaction, aggressive or passive. No, none of that’s the key.

Here’s the key. Here’s the vital issue. The battle is the Lord’s. Not ours. And it’s the same whether we know exactly what God would have us do, or whether we are totally buried in confusion. It doesn’t change. Isn’t that fantastic? This is still a vital truth: The battle is the Lord’s, not ours.

I think you can see what a vital issue that is for someone who’s just surrounded by circumstances that embattle. And there’s strife and fear or helplessness. What a vital issue. Brother, the battle is the Lord’s!

And if someone knows what they should do, and what God would have them do, still encourage them. The victory doesn’t lie in your certainty. The victory lies in your Lord. Put all your hope in Him, as you step out there. And He’ll show you His victory.

Others who don’t have a clue and no power, they don’t know what to do—the truth is still the same. Hey, it doesn’t hinge on your tactics or your strength. It hinges on this: The battle is the Lord’s. If you don’t have a clue and you’re totally weak, you know what? God may give you a Jehoshaphat victory this time. “Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD,” (Exodus 14:13).

And God didn’t send us out to make people Davids or Jehoshaphats. He sent us out to encourage one another to believe this truth. Whether you’re a David or Jehoshaphat or if you vacillate back and forth between the two and you have a warfare strategy disorder or something, you don’t know if you’re a David or Jehoshaphat. Well it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter if you change every other day. As long as this doesn’t change—you know the battle is the Lord’s.

It’s a vital issue. You can share it with almost anyone embattled by any dilemma or circumstance.

Here’s another one. Jeremiah 32:17,

Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by
Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard
[difficult] for You.

Oh what a vital issue that is when everything looks too difficult for you. There’s more to it. Jeremiah 32:27,

Behold I am the LORD, the God of all flesh [that is, all mankind]. Is there
anything too hard for Me?

In one statement there’s the truth that God is the Creator of all. Can’t He handle our little dilemma? Oh yeah, but we’re not talking stars and planets here. My problem is people.
Well, let’s flee to verse 27, “Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. [I’m in charge of all humanity. There is no one on the face of the earth that I cannot exercise My sovereign authority over. Now, let Me ask you] Is there anything too hard for Me?”

I mean, this is a vital issue. People all the time face things that are too hard for them. And they’re out looking for other people or other programs or maybe other places to work it out in. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord. That’s the issue. We might look around and see 50 things too difficult for us. And God’s calling us right in the middle of all of them. What do you do? In the name of the Lord, with faith in the Lord, just walk where He leads. Relying on this, I can’t handle any of this. He can handle all of this. This is all too much for me. But none of it is too much for Him. I mean, it’s a vital issue.

And again, I love to share things like this in counseling because say you help someone sort out the spaghetti bowl of their current predicament and they watched how you did it. What are they going to do the next time the bowl is given to them and it is wrapped 47 different ways? It doesn’t matter how that bowl is wrapped. It doesn’t matter how that spaghetti curls. It doesn’t matter how much there is, how tightly it’s wound. Is there anything too difficult for the Lord? I mean, this can just take you through anything, any vital issue. All of this is really having to do with God’s resources, not ours.

There are couple more areas that are related to all of this, but yet this is really a more specific and another issue in itself. And that is the matter of looking to the Lord. In seeking counsel, in giving counsel, we not only want to learn more and more to depend on God’s resources and not our own, His wisdom, His adequacy, His strength, His victory in everything, we also then, must be learning to look to the Lord.

Like Hebrews 12:1-2,

…Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher [perfecter] of our faith.

The Christian life is definitely like a race. And it’s not an indoor 60 meter race. It’s an outdoor marathon. Really, I would liken it more to a cross country steeple chase. It’s not only long, but there are all kinds of obstacles to jump over. And some of the obstacles you think you’re doing well, you’re right up over it and step and move along. When you come down, there is a big pool of water you splash in and you’ve got to deal with that unexpectedly, on the rebound.

We’re called to run with endurance the race that is set before us and the Christian life takes tremendous endurance, far beyond what man has. Far beyond what religious excitement would provide. Far beyond what emotional hype would suffice, far beyond that.

How do you run the race of the Christian life? It is by fixing our eyes on Jesus. When the race gets tough, the temptation is to look everywhere but Jesus. Look at the track, which represents the circumstances. Look how others are running. “Why can’t I run as well as
they are?” It’s not a contest between us and them. It’s just between us and us. We don’t need to be looking at them or at a couple who stumble. “Well, you know, maybe I’m not doing so bad.” What a false encouragement that is! Whether others are doing great or lousy doesn’t affect our growth with the Lord, or our progress down the track.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus is focusing on Him or locking in on Him. It is a word that speaks of really turning away from other attractive or distracting things. And just hone in on Him, fixing our eyes on Jesus. Giving attention to Him and not looking at self. How’s this for a Christian race, huh? Just wonderful, I’m going to hang around till I see the splat, you know. That is a good way to fall, by watching your own stride. Here comes a little hurdle, you know. Boom! Even if it looks like you’re making progress, who’s going to get the glory anyway? “Hey, look at this stride, you know. Is this a Christian stride or what?”

We are to be fixing our eyes on Jesus, not on self, not on circumstances, not on others. Not on our past. How many Christians are out there running the race of life, looking back at their past and thinking back there are the answers to the hurdle that’s just coming up ahead. I mean, it’s a fantastic picture. It just speaks a million things. It’s so simple. How do we run it? There’s only one way to run it, by fixing our eyes on Jesus.

He’s the author and perfecter of faith and He’s the one who gave us new life and put us on the track. We are born again through faith in Jesus Christ. Well, He’s not only the author of faith, He’s the perfecter of faith. How did He author it? He revealed Himself to us as the faithful one who could save us. The Spirit of God convicted us. Yes, He is who He said He is. Yes, He did what He said He did. Yes, you’ll find life in His name. And we did an astounding thing. We believed and put our faith in Him. He authored faith in us. Not in kind of an arbitrary way, but relationally, personally, and revealing. He spoke to us. Faith comes by hearing. “Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden.” People talk about faith as a leap into the dark. Well it isn’t really. It’s a leap out of the dark into the light. Even if it were—when we hear the voice there calling us to jump into His arms—you know—“Oh yes, Lord!”

But then He perfects faith. We keep looking to Him. We keep learning of Him. We keep following Him. We keep seeking Him. And the more we see of Him, what happens to faith? The more we see of Him the more faithful He appears. So we do an amazing thing. We put our faith in Him.

So He authors it and then keeps perfecting it, if we keep our attention focused on Him. This is a vital issue, looking to the Lord.

Luke 10:38-42. Looking to the Lord,

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and
said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’

Don’t you know Martha was expecting to hear these next words out of Jesus’ mouth? “Oh yeah, Mary, come on. There’s work to be done. I mean, get in there. You can’t be lounging around out here at My feet. I mean….”

You know naturally that’s what she expected to hear. She must have been totally blown away when, instead of turning to Mary and kind of “Come on, get with it, you know. Can’t expect everybody else to do the work,” instead He goes, “Martha, Martha you are worried and troubled about many things.” And here’s the mind-blower, “But one thing is needed.”

Oh what a vital truth this is for many counseling situations. In a dilemma of a perplexity, it looks like there are 50 necessary things. Well, Jesus didn’t say there aren’t many important things. And He didn’t say there aren’t a thousand urgent things. He just said there’s one needful thing, one essential thing.

“One thing is needed and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, receiving His word. We can only live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. She was finding life there. It doesn’t mean she never went in the kitchen, but the more her heart was at Jesus’ feet, she could go into the kitchen without being distracted with her much service, from Luke 10:40.

It’s not that we never go in the kitchen. But if we don’t live at the feet of Jesus, the kitchen will be a drag, a frustration, a place to gripe about everybody else that isn’t in there helping us.

But to apply it to counseling situations of a thousand kinds, so many people seeking counsel do not personally or at least practically believe there’s one necessary thing. Or if they think there’s only one necessary thing, they’re not thinking of the same one Jesus is. They’re thinking, “I’ve got to change this thing! I’ve got to get out of this thing. I’ve got to be able to handle this thing. I’ve got to get this thing accomplished.” None of those are the necessary thing.

Living life with our heart at the feet of Jesus, certainly has an application for what Mary was doing, the interpretation. She was sitting there receiving. And it is good for us to do that day by day. But since it’s the one necessary thing, there are times you can’t specifically do that. Say you’re in a hospital and they’re coming in every five minutes and poking you and opening your mouth and turning you over. You don’t tell the doctor, “I’m sorry, I’m having my quiet time.” You need to be able, right then and there, to let your heart be at the feet of Jesus. You are just abiding in Him, looking to Him, resting in Him, hoping in Him. You are counting on Him and letting Him speak words of Spirit and truth, which are life to our hearts.
One necessary thing and this is a vital issue. So many people in dilemmas are totally distracted. Often the last thing they think of is specifically, literally sit down and have a quiet time at the feet of Jesus, or whatever they’re in, rest in the Lord right then. Call upon His name right then on the firing line.

I don’t know how many times in the middle of teaching I have sensed, “Oh Lord, I need You right now, while all these folks are right here waiting for a word from You,” and we’re like halfway through the message and it’s just hitting me. “Oh Lord. I need my heart right at Your feet. Give me words of life right now.” One of the benefits, I guess, really of having such a weak voice is that you have to minister to it every now and then. It’s amazing how much you can pray about while you take one swig of water and just have a little quiet time, a little mini quiet time. It is a little “get-my-heart-at-the-feet-of-Jesus” moment, which I like to do it when my throat isn’t even scratchy.

One more, let’s jump down to Colossians 1:27-29. Those of you who know our ministry,” Living In Christ Ministries,” these are the theme verses for our ministry.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Him we preach….

What’s our message? A Person. Not politics. Not psychology. Our message is a Person. Him we preach. Who is He?—Jesus the Christ, who is come to live in us and in us as our hope of glory.

Him we preach, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

The message that matures is the message of Jesus Christ. This is why I have at times taught studies entitled, “Proclaiming Christ to Christians.” We had that on our ministry table and still have some on the ministry table this week at the pastors’ conference. And a pastor’s wife came up and looked at that. I could see the wheels turning. She goes, “Could you explain that title to me? You aren’t talking about evangelizing Christians, are you?” I said, “That’s a good question.” And I said, “No.” But I said, “As much as the unsaved need to hear of Christ to be saved, the saved must hear of Christ in order to grow.” I said, “If we don’t proclaim Christ to each other, who He is, what He’s done, what He provides, who He is to us, who we are in Him, we can’t grow.” And it was kind of funny. You could just see the lights going on, like, bing, bing! Yes! She said, “Yes! Okay! Yes.”

And often when people are seeking a word of counsel, what the Lord wants us to share with them maybe is this vital issue that Christ in them is their hope of glory. When people get in situations where they need a glorious hope—not only a hope of heaven someday assured in their heart again, which is the ultimate interpretation and I believe exegesis of that phrase—but the implication and application, wherever there needs to be glory in the sense of the way the New Testament uses the word. Whether it’s heaven above, glory to
God now, or glorious things happen that only God could do. What’s your hope of those things? Christ lives in me. Christ lives in you.

And boy people, many times in counseling situations, the vital issue they need to be reminded of is if they know the Lord, the Lord of glory, Who can do glorious things for them and can take them to glory above and can work in glorious ways now and can bring glory to God—all of that—He lives right in them. In other words, we are looking back to the Lord.

The world is so close but so far. They say, “You’ve got it in you. You know you do! You know it’s all there.” Well, not quite. But in this sense, He’s in us. We’ve got all we need right there. Not reaching in our flesh, but looking to the Lord who lives in us.

It’s a vital issue. I mean, I’ve seen through the years just these verses totally change a person’s walk through a dilemma. And they went off like I had literally emptied their bowl of spaghetti for them. I didn’t. I just reminded them, “You need a big hope right now, don’t you? I know you’re saved. I’ve seen that. You’ve shared that. Your hope of glory lives in you.”

These are vital issues for Counseling God’s Way.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 12
Vital Issues

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Let’s continue in these issues, vital issues for most counseling situations. These certainly are not exhaustive or comprehensive. It is not all that we need to know to minister to one another. But they go a long, long way. They are strategic. They’re powerful in counseling God’s way. They can be life-giving, life-directing vital issues from God.

Along with the matter of God’s resources not ours—the first issue we looked at was many Scriptures—and then looking to the Lord—other Scriptures, with this vital issue of trials, difficulties and impossibilities.

In 1 Peter 4:12,

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

We’re not to think it strange when the fires get hot. Many years ago a dear young sister in the church I pastored in Dallas, pulled me aside and started just pouring out her heart. “Oh, the strangest thing has happened to me,” she told me. “It’s just so strange.” Then she went on to describe it some more. She said, “It’s the strangest thing.” She just kept saying it. Finally it clicked, you know. It’s like the Lord just tapping me on the shoulder. You should open the Bible and read 1 Peter 4:12 to her. And really I guess with a kind of twinkle in my eye, I did. And she just burst out in laughter. You know, oh yeah, it’s not that strange, is it?

Think it not strange when the fiery ordeal comes upon you. So many people, when they’re seeking a word of counsel, especially if they’re in a tremendous dilemma, they are quite convinced this is the strangest thing in the universe. It really isn’t strange. It’s kind of ordinary as far as God’s concerned. He has seen it. In fact, it’s even built in.

It comes upon us, the fiery trial, to try you or to test us. You want to purify gold and test it and see what it is, you put it in the fire and if there’s impurity there it comes to the surface. The Lord surfaces a lot of things through our trials. It’s not strange. It is for our testing. God is going to use it to show you things and to purge things.

Now 1 Peter 4:15-16,

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, [you know, for Christ, as a believer, for righteousness’ sake] let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

There’s a kind of trial and difficulty and testing that is to diminish in our lives. Those are the ones we produce as humanity by being murderers, thieves, evil doers or busy bodies. Those will all produce tremendous trials too. But we’re not to suffer those ways. Stay away from that kind of trial. That kind of trial should diminish, you know, the kind that we cause.

But there is another kind that is beyond our control. The kind, sort of like Christ, where if you do everything perfectly right, doesn’t mean you won’t have any trials or difficulties or impossibilities. Jesus never erred, never rebelled; he never missed the Father’s will. Did Jesus have any trials and difficulties and impossibilities? Yes, heaps of them. What are we going to have if we walk with Christ, follow Jesus, and walk His path?

In 1 Peter 1:6-7, kind of on this same theme—
In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Testings, trials, and fiery ordeals come to demonstrate the genuineness of our faith. They are for the proving of our faith and the demonstrating of its reality. We do get tested by fire, fires of life, fires of battle, fires of warfare and circumstances. But ultimately, if we walk through them God’s way, it will result in praise and glory and honor to the Lord.

Trials, difficulties and impossibilities, these things often stir a quest for counseling. Oh how many people I have counseled through the years that did not realize, or at least had forgotten for the moment, that trials and difficulties and impossibilities are absolutely built in to the Christian life. They come with the territory, as people say. It’s not like if you do it all right, say it all right, name it, claim it, watch out, being careful, so that you can avoid all these difficult things. No, sometimes the more right you do it, the greater the trial. No one was as right as Jesus. No one faced the cross like He did. It is built in to the Christian life.

I have found folks buried in trials, and in just reading them these verses it was like a cloud blew away. They were under condemnation. They were under a sense of guilt and alienation. All from the work of the enemy, you know. “Boy, some Christian you are. Look at the trial you’re in. Ha, ha, ha. You call yourself a believer?” They are normal. They are guaranteed. Be encouraged. Have hope, things can get much worse!

James 1:2-4.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Count it all joy. That doesn’t mean that all suffering is enjoyable. “Hey, enjoy yourself. The painful situation you’re in, you must be having a tremendous time.” It’s not that. It is count it all joy. That is, consider it a matter that will produce joyful things. That where it’s heading—“For the joy set before Him He endured the cross,” you know. It’s not that it’s fun to hurt, but it’s a blessing to know that there’s value in it. That it is heading somewhere. That it is producing something of value.

Count it all joy when you fall into various trials. We’d probably prefer that that read if you fall into various trials. It might kind of leave us an out that, “Hey, maybe I won’t fall into a trial.” No, it’s when you fall into various trials. They are there. They won’t stop coming all the way, through our trek home to heaven. But we can count it all joy. We can consider it a cause for rejoicing in what it can do and what it can produce.

And notice, when you fall into various trials. Sometimes when we seek counsel, or those that are seeking counsel, they are in various trials. It’s amazing, isn’t it, the variety in which trials can come. There are not just ten or twelve kinds, but various trials. And the amazing thing is that sometimes they seem to come all at once. Well, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.

How can we do that? “Knowing this…” again, there are things we just need to know. The whole Word of God is not a list of things to do. Now, there are things to do. But the things to do come
built in to what God has already done in Christ. And we walk in His provision and find the doing thereof. But a lot of the Word of God doesn’t have to do with doing and not doing, rather it is knowing or not knowing. So we can believe what we need to believe. If we’re going to count it all joy, we have to know this, “that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

You know, people say, “Don’t pray for patience.” “Oh, that’s the key to growth, huh? Don’t pray for patience?” “Yeah, cause then you won’t have these trials.” No, God wants us to be patient people. It’s right to pray for patience. We might wince a little when we do, thinking what is it going to take to answer this prayer? “What is it going to take to make me patient, Lord?”

See, it is the testing of our faith that produces patience. Counselors need to know that. Those seeking counsel, those giving and receiving in counsel and personal ministry need to know that the testing of faith produces, develops, patience or endurance, and spiritual stamina. We want to have spiritual stamina. Well, it comes through the testing of our faith. It’s like saying, “I want this ideal, perfect Garden of Eden, physique.” Well, it doesn’t come from eating Twinkies. It is the testing of those muscles that produces stamina in them. So instead of lifting Twinkies you lift weights. And those muscles get tested and stamina gets built into them.

So it is with our faith. It’s the testing of our faith that produces patience or stamina or spiritual endurance. We need spiritual endurance for the battle, for ministering to others. It doesn’t come by sitting in a religious rocking chair. We get thrown into the middle of it [the trial].

Someone said “When you get put where you only have one nostril left above water, you know that is a good position to be in. Because if you only have one nostril left above water, your mouth is shut. And then you do a lot of listening.” That is part of developing spiritually.

James 1:4, “But let patience have its perfect work. [Why?] That you may be perfect [That is, mature] and complete, [made whole, growing, maturing] lacking nothing.”

We don’t want to flee from trials. We don’t want to hide from them. We want to let God work out the process that is involved in them, so that we can be perfected, made mature and whole in Christ, lacking nothing. Trials, difficulties, impossibilities, they’re built in to the Christian life.

How rough can they get? 2 Corinthians 1:8,

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

That’s a pretty tough situation, isn’t it? Look how tough. “Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves…” (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Why does God let His people, His faithful servants like Paul, go through such things? “That we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9).

“The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). God wants us to grow in faith. He reveals Himself to us in the Word. He often then applies that revelation of Himself to our walk and our practice. And we go, “Oh yeah, I’m orthodox. I believe in a God of resurrection.” Then He lets you die, you know, circumstantially, emotionally. And if God doesn’t become again to you practically a God
of resurrection, it’s all over. Boy, what that does to our faith. When you’re dying emotionally, mentally, relationally, spiritually, circumstantially, you just get purged of self-trust. That we should not trust in ourselves. It’s like, “Hey, I’m not changing this no matter what I do. And I can’t handle it while I’m going through it.” Oh how you start crying out for a God who raises the dead. We’re talking here about personal, daily, experiential application. Paul is not talking about the final resurrection because in 2 Corinthians 1:10, “who delivered us from so great a death.” God raised him, spared him, “…and does deliver us, in whom we trust that He will still deliver.”

These are great words to share with those who are going through dying circumstances. Let them know, “Hey, it’s not unique.”

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, look at the things God’s people go through—

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

God has put His treasure of life in the Lord Jesus Christ in us the hope of glory in these earthen vessels, these vulnerable human lives that contain Christ in us. He does that so He gets the glory. The power that comes forth in our lives has to be Him.

And He puts us through things that bring it forth. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9,

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

The earthen vessels are going through tough things, but the treasure is inside—Christ in us the hope of glory—is sustaining us. A lot of folks seeking counsel, what they’re really going through—is in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 and they never knew it. They’re thinking, “What am I doing wrong? Why can’t I get this right? How come me and nobody else?” And all that is happening is another earthen vessel, with the treasure of Christ, is going through those things that let the excellence of the power be of God and not of us. We are going through things we can’t handle, so that when we hope in Him, He comes through for us. People say, “Come on, what’s your knack? I mean, how’d you handle that? How’d you survive that? How did you go through that and come out the other side even better than when you went in it looks like? What’s the deal here?” It’s not this clay pot. It’s the treasure inside.

Trials, difficulties, impossibilities are built into the Christian life.

Let’s jump ahead to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10,

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

A lot of times the tough things of life the Lord is allowing like a thorn in the flesh, something that just hangs on and on. We might even plead with God and He doesn’t remove it. It’s not all that
strange. And it doesn’t mean you don’t know how to walk the Christian walk or that you can’t get it all together. That you’re thinking, “I guess I don’t have a knack at it.” It can be that God is perfecting His strength in our weakness.

The more we’re aware of our weakness the more we are inclined to rely on His strength. And often people’s strengths can become their greatest weakness. “I can handle it in that area.” Oh? Paul was begging for relief on this one. Sure, God could have healed him. He had been used of God in miraculous healings. But God had something else to show Him. “Not My healing power, but My sustaining power seen through My daily grace, given to you to bear you through.”

We don’t know when someone is hurting and comes to us for counsel if what they are involved in is a thorn in the flesh, but it might be. Especially if it has hung on for years and especially if everyone knows that person walks a path of godliness. They’re not indulging the flesh and bringing on trouble. They’re not becoming objects of needed chastisement. God is just teaching them a deeper dimension of His grace and His power. And we can share this and leave it between them and the Lord, to see whether every detail applies. But in the moment they’ll find His sustaining grace sufficient if they will throw themselves on Him.

Trials, difficulties, impossibilities, they are vital issues to share with people. To let them know that it’s built right into the Christian life. Value can come out of it. Maturing, spiritual growth, stamina can come from it. And God can get much glory through it too.

Another vital issue with some Scriptures to show us some of the dimensions of it are: hope, encouragement and assurance. Oh how many people need a word of hope, a word of encouragement, and a word of assurance!

Personally, in my own calling to discipling and counseling ministry, this is an arena I love to minister the Word to folks. It hit me one day in a period of hopelessness that it is harder to survive, progress, develop, to be fruitful and effective spiritually without hope, than it is to make it physically without oxygen. You just can’t do it. I really think there’s a kinship. With someone who is not getting enough oxygen, they just sense that they are dying from a lack of oxygen or they are suffocating. Spiritually it is a lot like hopelessness. It’s a paralyzer. It’s a killer. I mean it is just so hard to move on without hope.

One of the great blessings in the counseling ministry is to minister the hope of the Lord to people, and His encouragement.

I heard of an older brother in the faith who had served the Lord many years say that the number one destroyer of ministry through the years—and what he named was not what I ever would have guessed. You know, it wasn’t heresy, though that will destroy ministry. It wasn’t covetousness and money. That will destroy. Power and greed will destroy. Sexual immorality will destroy ministry. Sure. But he said the number one destroyer was discouragement. Makes sense, doesn’t it? We’ve probably all had our bouts with that. Personally, I don’t know anything I’ve faced in nearly as big in twenty-nine years of teaching the Word that measured up as big of a mountain as discouragement. I think he was right on.

We need to minister encouragement to people. There are a lot of people in counseling situations of great difficulty, the vital issue they need is just some real godly encouragement. Not “Keep a stiff upper lip,” or “Every cloud has a silver lining,” or “Always try to look on the bright side of things.” Not that kind of stuff.
Not that anemic kind of philosophical, psychological jargon. “Well, man, just stay positive!” “Well, I am. I’m positively hopeless!” They need real encouragement and real hope.

And they need assurance or a sense of certainty, where people are plagued with doubt. The Bible is filled with heavenly hope, encouragement and assurance. Sometimes when that person comes, you might hear what they have to share and you become hopeless. “Oh, oh, there’s no answer. You’re the one exception to the promises of God.” You can feel that way sometimes, just hearing somebody’s dilemma. Often the reason God sent them our way is just to be an instrument to share some of His hope, encouragement and assurance.

You might not have a clue what their next step today or tomorrow should be. But to be able to minister hope, encouragement and assurance, oh, it can change everything!

Like 1 Corinthians 10:13,

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

That is a word of hope and encouragement there. No temptation, no testing, no trial, circumstantial or invitation of the enemy, has overtaken you except such as is common to man. Oh, how the enemy lies here to people! A Christian gets in a tough situation, oh here comes the enemy to start bombarding them. “Oh my goodness, no—none of God’s so-called kids ever messed up like this. Boy, nobody ever got in a dilemma like you’re in.” He is trying to build fear and condemnation. It’s a lie. There’s nothing anyone gets into but God hasn’t seen it many times before. This doesn’t mean every person’s trials are identical to every other’s. But they’re common, you know. You have a thousand Christians and five are going through what looks like it is quite unique. Well, five of them are having the same thing and probably five hundred thousand and five have already gone through it. These things are common to man.

The Lord might use us to put away the lie of the enemy with someone who is maybe really buried deeper by the condemnation of the enemy than by the impossibility of the circumstances. But God is faithful. Boy, there is the hope. There is the encouragement. God is faithful and He is reliable. He won’t let you down. Yes, it looks impossible. Yes, circumstantially you don’t have a clue about how to adjust it. And you maybe haven’t seen anyone go through this exactly. But it’s common and God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted or tested beyond what you are able (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Have you ever doubted that truth? Have you ever looked at that and then looked at your circumstance and said—“Boy, God thinks I can handle this? He’s faithful. He will not allow me to be tempted or tested beyond what I’m able? Oh man, that really stretches my faith, because I can’t handle this.” Well, He knows where we are in Him. And He might want to stretch us beyond what we think we’re able to handle. But He knows where we are. He also knows that if He takes us beyond what we think we can handle, we’re ready to learn a new lesson of faith. We’re ready to learn a new dimension of trust. We’re ready to, as it were, be in the impossible situation and see that God is able to raise the dead and here I am dying.

It goes beyond what we think the parameters would be. But God knows what we can handle in Him. He knows where we are in the faith and our progress of faith and what we’re ready to trust Him for next. He knows.
And also with the temptation or testing He’ll make a way of escape. I was once thinking of this verse in likening trials and temptations and testings as kind of, you know, plowing through an under-the-street sewer pipe. And you are just crawling and clamoring trying to get through this slime and gunk. You can’t even see a light at the end of the tunnel. And yet you have this promise that with the temptation He’ll also make the way of escape. The picture I had was of a manhole right above my head. God’s going to open it any minute and just snatch me out of there, which He definitely can do. But this verse is not really talking about that because look at how it ends, “That you may be able to bear it.” Or it could be translated, “endure it.” The implication being that so often the way of escape, the way out, is through it. I think our favorite way out is, [whoosh] out. “Well, You see the mess I’m in. I know You can deliver.” Whoosh! Waiting for that quick snatch, you know, kind of a mini rapture. “Get me out of this mess and set me over here.” And praise God, He can do that. He’s done that in my life a few times. I praise His name for it. It’s my favorite way of deliverance.

But I tell you there have been plenty of other times when there was no manhole. The next manhole was three miles ahead and there was a truck parked on it. You know, I was going to climb out through there. But eventually, eventually down there when all the things that needed to be done, learned, gone through, people met, things said, heart broken, whatever—He provides the way of escape. He provides the way out and on but it does involve bearing or endurance, you know. And it hinges on the fact that God is faithful.

In 1 Peter 5:10,

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered awhile, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you.

Boy, this is a powerful verse…God of all grace! All the grace we’ll ever need. All the kinds that ever could be, all the amounts and measures we’d ever want or need for us or those we minister to, He is the God of all grace.

And He has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus. Heaven is our home forever and while we’re waiting and along the way, He’s going to do some perfecting, establishing, strengthening and settling. Aren’t those great words? “Oh Lord, yes! Do that in my life! Oh wait a minute. What’s this here?—“after you have suffered a while.”

It is kind of an exhilarating, but half scary verse too. It starts and ends just like dynamite, doesn’t it? God of all grace! He Himself perfecting, establishing, strengthening and settling. But you know so often He does that work right on the heels of, or as a consequence of, or tied into some difficulty, impossibility, some suffering.

Every one of these verses that I’ve shared with you, and the reason I began sharing them years ago with others, was every one of these had a life-changing impact in my own heart. That is why they were there, to share with others.

I was reading this verse one day in heavy anguish, during a period of intense suffering. And it hit me, “after you’ve suffered a while this God of all grace will perfect, establish, and strengthen.” I used to walk a lot in those days out alone, and when I couldn’t get into athletic things which I liked to do a lot, I would be out trekking and running. I used to like to run and walk and just go over this verse, every phrase, every word. Then pray about it. One day in anguish I was praying on this verse and it hit me, after you’ve suffering a little while, and it just kind of hit me that
maybe “the little while” is just about up. And maybe all the rest of this is just about to be put in place. Man, it just stirred hope in me, you know. And this is the God of all grace. He’s not going to stretch it out too far anyway. And as long as He stretches He’s got grace to sustain me. And when the suffering is done, kind of the plowing, the humbling, the breaking, look where it can lead! I want to be perfected. I want to be matured. I want to be established, and stabilized. I want to be strengthened. I want to get settled, you know, just locked into God and His Word and His path and His work. I tell you, it can stir hope within you!

I love to share that verse with people who are really suffering. I might not have a clue how to get them out of their suffering. But I can remind them, in the name of the Lord, what might come out of their suffering. And maybe at any time now! How do you know but what “the little while” is just about up. And look what is on the other side of it, if you look to the God of all grace. The God of all grace will perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you. These kinds of verses build tremendous hope.

Isaiah 41:10 is a great verse for hope. We’re not talking humanistic, psychological, power of positive thinking either. Look at this, Isaiah 41:10, “Fear not for I am with you.”

A lot of people who are seeking a word of counsel are paralyzed by fear. You do not have to fear. “It is easy for you to say.” No, no, God says this. Why is there no need for fear?—“For I am with you.” Yes, you’re in a tough situation. Yes, scary things are ahead. Don’t forget this. God says, “I am with you. Be not dismayed.” You’re just sick inside. Just mangled and thrown away. Don’t be dismayed. Why?—“Because I am your God.” I’m your God. I’m the God and I’m your God!

And then He gives some promises. “I will strengthen you.” Why? Because He knows in those things we are weak. Yes, “I will help you.” Why does He say that? Because He knows how desperately we need His help. Yes, “I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” Why does He say that? Because we feel like we’re falling apart. This is fantastic hope from heaven in these words.

Then one last one before we conclude. This is a great verse for hope, encouragement, and assurance. Romans 15:13,

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Boy, what a fantastic word for hope! I tell you again as a personal testimony. God has let me go through some times where I have literally hours before Him wept and read and cried out to Him in a verse like that. Where if there weren’t these kind of promises and hopes there would be no hope. Because I didn’t have any! But we serve the God of hope, the God in whom we can hope. He is the God who produces hope.

Remember what hope is in the New Testament, confidence, expectation, certainty and guarantees. I’m just sad we have this American English hope, cross your fingers hope. “Well, I hope so.” What does that have to do with anything? “Well, we’ve got our fingers crossed for you.” Oh thanks a lot, you might as well cross your eyes. I mean, what is this? It is total superstition. That is not hope. New Testament hope, expectation, confidence, and certainty are ours because we serve the God of hope.

This is a prayer. I love to pray this prayer for my own walk with the Lord, my family, those to whom I minister. I love to pray this verse. “Oh God, You’re the God of hope. Would You fill us?
Just fill us with all joy and peace related to believing. Lord, reveal Yourself to us. Stir faith in us to where we are believing You so much that we are just bubbling over with joy and peace.”

People will wonder what you are so happy about and why you are so mellow and tranquil and peaceful. I’m just believing Him. I’m just believing He is who He said He is. He did what He said He did. He can fulfill all of His promises. I am just believing Him. It makes you happy and it sets you at peace.

To what end can this work?—“That you may abound in hope.” It is that word again for waves rolling up, big breakers rolling up on a seashore. That you just might have waves of hope flood over you. The world has anxiety attacks, but just have a hope frenzy, just boom! I’ve just got so much hope, I’m just exploding!

How does that happen? It is by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God at work in us, stirring faith in the character and promises of God. Just bringing joy and peace, knowing it’s all from the God of hope and just can roll in like waves of hope. You have hope or confidence or expectation or a sense of certainty in God and His ways. It kind of rolls up, and kind of washes against your hip, like a three-foot breaker or something and the Lord just keeps working. Man, before you know it you’re on the pipeline. You know, just twenty-five foot waves of hope. Just sweeping over me and surfing me to all kinds of victory and progress.

This is a fantastic verse. I love to share it with people who seem like they’re suffocating spiritually from hopelessness. Hey, let’s just go back to basics. Let’s talk about the God of hope. Let’s think a little bit about how right it is—and really easy when we’re thinking straight with Him, to believe in Him. Who He is, what He has done, let’s think of these things. And in that believing, just let the joy and the peace start to well up inside. And even let it become waves that just start rolling on us, to where we just abound in hope. Our expectation grows from one foot breakers, to two foot breakers. “Oh, Lord, 25 foot or 30 foot breakers! How about a tidal wave! Overwhelm me with anticipation and expectation. You are the God of hope!”

Sometimes ministering a verse like that to someone who is buried in despair, it’s the greatest thing you could ever do for them. It is fantastic to minister the hope of God. But, by the grace of God may it be real hope, real encouragement and real assurance. And it will be if it’s this kind of hope, this kind of encouragement, this kind of assurance. This is a vital truth. If we never became known as Solomons of the Church, the great gift of the word of wisdom or wisdom in counseling beyond the others, if we could just bring to the hopeless a word of hope, we would have a ministry that would grow out of sight! And I believe as the days press darker, nearing the return of the Lord, we’re going to need to minister this more and more to people. And praise God we’ve got limitless measures of it to minister.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You for these vital truths. We pray that You would build into each of our lives, maybe some of these, maybe all, maybe others, but that personal list of deep ways that You’ve spoken to us and touched us, Lord, so that at any time we’re ready to just share these with others, especially when we don’t even have a clue what to tell them to do. Let us minister these things about Your resources and not ours and looking to the Lord and how normal trials are and what a great hope we have. Lord, work these in our lives and then out through us to others and we know we’ll be more equipped to counsel God’s way. In Jesus’ name, amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 13
In Adam or in Christ

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Let’s pray,

Lord, for those of us gathered here, those of us who study with us by video and audio, we just ask You to bless the plunging in together of the Word of God. Lord, as we come to this strategic part of our course, foundational truths for counseling God’s way, as we look into the heart of the New Testament in Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8, enlighten us, illuminate our hearts and minds. Touch us, feed us, build us up, counsel us, equip us, warn us, do all the things You want to do that we might be instruments in Your hands. And we lean on You now. We ask You to give the understanding we could never get. And also to work in us to will and to do of Your good pleasure. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Foundational Truths for Counseling

We now come to another section of our course. The major sections of Counseling God’s Way study so far have been: First, “What Counseling Is,” then second, “God’s Way in Counseling,” His means that He uses; third, “Counselors and Their Equipping. That is, who is to do counseling and how they get equipped in the body of Christ. And now our fourth major area of five sections in this course is “Foundational Truths for Counseling God’s Way.”

This really is the heart of the Counseling God’s Way study. I love to liken Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8 to a heavenly gold mine of truth. It is truth concerning salvation, discipleship, sanctification—the Christian life in general and enormously powerful central truths for counseling God’s way.

There are two vital passages, very much keys to orienting our minds to these studies on foundational truths for counseling God’s way are John 8:31. We’ve touched on this before, so just a light touch to remind us of the implications of it.

John 8:31-32; 36,

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.’ [Then verse 36] Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

Real disciples live in the Word of God. They feed on it. They stand on it. They make decisions by it. They have their lives guided by it. And living in the Word of God they get to know the truth of the Word of God. And the truth of the Word of God makes them free. It sets them free from confusion and bondage and bad thinking, bad habits, and bad relating. Then you add to that verse 36, “If the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed.” I mean, really free. All of the truth of the Word of God is liberating power. The ultimate truth is the truth about Jesus, the One who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And we’re going to look at a lot of passages that just anchor right into the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He who is the Truth Incarnate! And if truth makes us free, if the Son makes you free you are free indeed. You are really liberated spiritually.

Lives are too often so bound, so trapped, so restricted by lies, by confusion, by misconceptions, by religious tradition, and it goes on and on with the human philosophy and philosophical systems, the psychological systems of man. People desperately need the truth that is found in Jesus Christ. And these passages we’ll look at, hit at the heart of the truth of God’s Word.
Colossians 2:9-10, by way of introduction,

For in Him [in Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him.

In Christ all the fullness dwells. To say it another way—everything God has for human lives is found in Jesus Christ, all the fullness. And in Him you, you and I, every believer, has been made complete. It’s put here in verse 10, “and you are complete in Him.” We are complete, already accomplished, ongoing, spiritual reality. We are complete right now.

In Christ all of us have a full life, a complete life. There are no pieces or parts of spiritual reality missing. They are all there in the life of Christ and we are in Him where the fullness dwells. In Him we are complete.

We need that completeness because lives on their own are basically empty, so often broken, lacking, so aware of or trying to hide their own inadequacy. And it is all related to self-trust, self-hope, self-centeredness all the way around. And our need is to know of the wholeness that is available to us in Jesus Christ.

Now such matter as this—the Son setting us free and the fullness of life in Christ that is our completeness—these are gloriously revealed in Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8. The truths that we’re going to look at are foundational to the Christian life and therefore to counseling God’s way. They’re the heart of what discipling is all about, which means they should be the heart of what counseling is all about. Remember, counseling is not one thing and discipling another. Counseling is one way God discipies us, of the many ways. Counseling is discipling related to an issue, a need, a problem, a decision, something someone is sensing they must find answers to. And God wants to use that to disciple us. Christian life is all about discipleship. What’s discipleship? It is learning to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It is saying no to self, death to self, taking up our cross and following Jesus.

These truths are not available in psychological theory. That’s why we have been warning about that field of input for counseling, not just in the world. We don’t want the world’s counsel anyway. But even trying to bring it in the church and baptize it, Christianize it, dress it up. Psychology is all about self. Christian counseling is all about Christ. That’s the major difference. Psychology is man’s guesses from his own best wisdom. Biblical counseling, counseling God’s way is God’s absolute certain revelation of the problems we have the remedies He offers. There’s no comparison between the two. There’s no mixing of the two.

I think that you’ll see as we go through Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8 that what God offers in these chapters is so infinitely beyond what Sigmund Freud could come up with or Carl Jung, or Abraham Maslow, or Carl Rogers or Alfred Adler or Eric Fromm or any of these guys. Brilliant in the realm of human thinking, but minor league compared to God. Not only minor league, off base. Not only low in ability, but not even knowing what it is all about. And this is where we want to anchor our lives and our counseling ministries.

Years ago God laid on my heart, after I had been counseling years as a pastor, the Lord laid on my heart to counsel more with foundational truths and less with peripheral superstructure truths. There is nothing wrong with any peripheral truth in the Word of God. It is God’s Word. It is true. It’s there for a reason, but not every verse in the Bible is central to what the whole plan of salvation and discipleship and life in Christ is about.
A verse that always seems to come to mind in the seminars is the proverb that says it’s better to live on the corner of a rooftop than in a house with a nagging woman. Now I know that’s the truth. Why?—because the Word of God says that. But that’s not a central foundational truth. It is peripheral. Now I’m sure in some people’s lives, at some time that’s a critical verse, either for the husband explaining why he’s on the rooftop or the woman convicted that there need to be some changes in the house. But next month, it will be thirty years of marriage with my precious wife and partner and praise God I’ve never had to even consider that verse once! It has had no part in our lives. And I praise God for that. But I know that it’s important and true in certain times and places. But it’s not central. I mean, you know the Billy Graham counselors, you know the Greg Laurie Harvest Crusade counselors don’t take those new converts quickly into the counseling arena right after they’re saved and say, “Now here’s the verse that your whole Christian life will hinge on. ‘It’s better to live on the corner of a rooftop than in the house with a nagging wife.” Why don’t they don’t share that verse first of all? Because it’s not foundational. It is not central.

I tell you brothers, sisters, the verses we’re going to look at these next two weeks are absolutely bulls-eye central, and bedrock foundational. If we only share peripheral issues with people we’re dealing with one issue one at a time and most people are dealing with hundreds of issues. Not that we can’t help on individual matters. But the Lord showed me years ago there’s a more effective and profound and deeper way and it can progress on all fronts at once. And that is share foundational truths. Not if this doesn’t work, try that or when this, do that. Not that that is wrong if it’s in the Word of God, but be looking for more than that. Look for truths that somebody can receive and stand on like a foundation and have it work up through their lives in every single issue of life because it is changing who they are. That’s what we are looking at in this series of studies called “Foundational Truths for Counseling God’s Way.”

That’s all introductory for our entry into Romans chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. Romans chapter 5 has to do with being “in Adam” or “in Christ.”

Early in Romans 5 there is a word about being “in Adam,” which is by the way, where all of man’s problems source. That’s even what makes them vulnerable to the work of the enemy. They start out in Adam. In Adam, Romans 5 and I’ll just pick out some so we can spend more time on them and leave the rest there for your own reading and meditation. They just emphasize whatever we’re going to say further.

Romans 5:12, in Adam,

Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, and thus, death spread to all men because all sinned.

Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world. Rebellion against God became part of the experience of the family of man and death through sin. Because of sin, death came. Certainly physical death, though that didn’t strike immediately, but the certainty of it did. That didn’t come for hundreds of years later. But the worst kind of death happened the day Adam sinned. “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). And he could no longer relate spiritually to God. He was alienated from God in condemnation and separation. And then death spread to all. Generation to generation to everyone only born once in Adam, sin and death became their portion.

This is repeated a bit in the early part of verse 17. “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one…. This is why lives are so bound and so broken. It is not because of personal circumstance or mere human behavior. And that’s what everybody seems to concentrate on,
especially in the world’s counseling system. Hey, change your circumstance or somehow try to modify your behavior. That is not even near deep enough! It is so surface. Lives are bound and broken because of sin and death and separation from God and because death is reigning over people.

As our representative leader—some theologians would use the term the federal head of the human race, just as Christ is the federal head of the new creation—as our representative leader. Some theologians would use the term “the federal head of the human race,” just as Christ is federal head of the new creation. As our representative leader, that is where one person acts and affects all that are related to that one person. As our representative leader, Adam led us into, or you could say sired a race of (if you’ll excuse the expression) dysfunctional people. Yes, I will go wash out my mouth. I was kind of half kidding there. Dysfunctional isn’t near strong enough. The problem with the human race isn’t that it just can’t quite function the way it wants to. Or others didn’t quite function toward me the way I wanted them to. It’s far deeper than that. Adam sired a race of sinners. All of us! We are not sinners because we sin, but sinners who are unable to not sin. It is far more serious than it looks on the surface.

See, in Adam, man’s nature became the problem. By nature we are sinners, Ephesians 2:3, “…by nature children of wrath.” The problem is not just that we sinned now and then, but that we were sinners. In other words, that was our very character.

Behavior alone is not the problem with man. Again, that’s why behavior modification will always be inadequate. And that’s the big rage of the world. Sure, man can affect behavior modification in animals and humans. So what? It doesn’t change the heart.

Way back when my kids would say, “Daddy, did they have this back when you were alive.” Well, back when I was alive, really before I became alive, back when I was dead, they had the Ed Sullivan Show. I remember seeing a dog on there that some man taught to say “hello.” And I thought, it was very interesting, kind of fascinating. And you know a dog, “Hello.” Wow! But I noticed no one, including the trainer, sat down and had a conversation with that dog who was still a dog. He was just given a little outward behavior modification.

And you can even modify the behavior of human beings. I mean, if you were to beat them over the head enough or bribed them enough or some combination thereof, sure you can affect external behavior modification. But what about the heart, it’s not even touched by that?

That’s why man’s theories of counseling or so anemic and I marvel that the church of Jesus Christ has just gone crazy over people like B.F. Skinner, it is almost like they’re apostles! “Yea, but he’s got these are ideas that can change people’s behavior!” Just answer one question. Does he have anything that can change the human heart? Well no, be serious. Well then I’m not interested. It’s a distraction. It’s a false hope. It’s an interjection right in front of what God wants to do.

What man needed was a change in his parentage, a change in his life source. He needed a way to get a new nature or a new resource to draw on. So the problems come from being in Adam, the remedies come from being in Christ. And there are some verses there to look at. But let’s just continue in verse Romans 5:17. It’s so packed and catches the heart of all these verses. We read:

For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
Now we’re talking about being in Christ. The problems are in Adam and his offense and us being born as his seed, and him passing on to us his spiritual heritage, which was guilt, deadness, alienation and spiritual lifelessness.

Why is the world in such a mess? I mean if you’re short on your prayer list and can’t even figure out what to pray about, watch one national newscast. You’ll have a week of prayer right there. I mean, the world is just in a shambles. Why? It is because death is reigning over every one of Adam’s children.

Why do individual lives get so broken, so bound, so lacking the image and likeness of God who created them? It’s because death is reigning over them. There’s a cruel, tyrant dictator, here called death. Behind that name, of course is the prince of darkness, the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). He is dominating people, robbing, killing and destroying life after life. That’s why the world’s in such a chaotic shambles and lives get broken and bound and empty. Death is reigning.

And the death comes out in all kinds of symptoms: anger and fear and covetousness and selfishness, brutality and prejudice and unfaithfulness, wars and striving. People striving to get ahead of people, people using people, people devouring people, the symptoms of death and its reign comes out in so many ways. Virtually all of them could probably be tracked to self-exaltation. That’s how the enemy fell. He wanted to take the throne of God for himself. And he’s been enticing people ever since. Come on and enthrone yourself. Of course, behind it all, he’s in charge when self thinks it’s in charge. It’s all death reigning over people.

What’s the remedy? “Much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

It’s astounding how this one verse narrows the options of man down to two. Every human being is either in Adam or in Christ, there are no other options. In Adam there is sin and death and separation, alienation, problems, difficulties. In Christ there is life, peace, joy, resource, wholeness, fellowship with God. Everyone in Adam has death reigning over them. Everyone in Christ has the opportunity to be learning to reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. And the death reigning and learning to reign in life, they both come through another person that it occurs. One through Adam, death reigning. Or it is by learning to reign in life, through relationship with Jesus Christ.

Only those who have been born a second time, therefore they are in Christ and in the family of God, can be learning to reign in life. We’ll see next week even for those born a second time, born again by the Spirit of God from above through faith in Jesus Christ, even those people still face a choice, and many of them are practically letting death reign over them. Why? It is because they are walking according to the flesh, not according to the Spirit. They are still drawing on the same resource the world is drawing on. It is with Adam’s resources and natural humanity, man’s wisdom, man’s strength, man’s zeal, man’s resolve, man’s will power. They are not living by the mind of Christ, the life of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Can you not see the enormous implications of such truths to virtually every counseling situation? What it so often boils down to is this person having death reign over them because, one, they don’t know Christ at all. They only have Adam’s resource and Adam’s death. Or maybe are they born again but walking totally by human ingenuity, like a real Jacob in the modern era. Striving, manipulating, and scheming. They are not drawing on the resources of Christ, but the resources they receive from natural humanity. These are major implications for counseling ministry. Let’s
us sort out our own Christian walk and see how to grow and what gets in the way of growth. And then minister to others, help them in their struggles or their quest to know God by sorting out the same issues.

I love to watch for an opportunity in a counseling situation to shift from the smaller issue of what I’m troubled with right now or what I’m yearning after right now, to the bigger issue of what are the options and what are the resources anyway. And it is either, Adam and what he provided, or it is Christ and what He provides now. Those are the only two real choices.

It’s not as complicated as the psychotherapist theoreticians want to make it. They’ve got 47,000 options depending on who came up with what idea. God’s laid it out for us so simply. There are two: the resources of Adam or the resources of Christ. What do you want to draw upon? What do you want to live by? One is death, eternally if that’s all you know. Even if you’re a Christian and only draw on natural resources, it’s spiritual deadness now. Not reigning in life, but rather it is kind of life reigning over you.

Reigning in life is not living under the circumstances. Maybe you heard that conversation between two Christians. One said to the other, “Hey, how’re you doing?” The second said, “Well, pretty well, under the circumstances.” And the first one said, “Well, what are you doing living under there? I thought you were seated in heavenly places in Christ!” This kind of truth lets us reign in life instead of circumstantial life dominating over us. It changes everything.

So many people, even Christians, they’re just trying to change circumstance or modify their behavior. The Lord wants to show them a whole new resource to live by, whatever the circumstances are. And let that eventually become a Christ-like behavior. Not change from the outside in, but change from the heart out.

What is it that lets a person progress in the path of reigning in life? Well, there are two things mentioned here: “…much more, those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life” (Romans 5:17).

Every true Christian knows of one of these two realities or they’re not a Christian. Too many other Christians know almost nothing of the second reality. And I believe Biblically that’s why there are so many defeated Christians, instead of those who are learning to reign in life.

What is it that every Christian knows of? The gift of righteousness! If a person does not have righteousness from God as a gift, they’re not a Christian. How do you stand before a holy, righteous God? You’ve got to have the gift of righteousness. We’re talking justification, being declared innocent. Not guilty but righteous by a holy God. The only way to stand before a holy God is having the gift of righteousness freely given to us by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, made ours through faith in Jesus Christ. There’s no other way to stand before a holy God.

So every Christian, if they’re really a Christian, they have this gift of righteousness. But see, that doesn’t automatically cause you to reign in life. Haven’t you had times as a Christian, having the gift of righteousness, justified, able to come boldly before the throne of grace, that you’re still walking in defeat? Don’t you have Christian family, friends, relatives, neighbors and those you love? You know they know the Lord. You’ve heard it in their testimony and you’ve seen some fruit. And yet very characteristic of their life is defeat, not reigning in life. Just having the gift of righteousness does not automatically mean a person will be reigning in life, as they walk the pilgrim path to heaven.
That’s why this other issue is mentioned here. There is another matter along with the gift of righteousness. And it’s called here, “the abundance of grace.” See those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, they are the ones who reign in life.

Really now we are touching on the theme that the entire class on “Growing in the Grace of God” is all about. This is the heart of it. That gift of righteousness is part of the grace of God. It is by God’s grace that we are declared righteous in Christ Jesus. But this is talking about receiving an abundance of grace. Too many of us have too often thought that the grace of God for forgiveness and justification was what the grace of God was all about and that there was no other aspect of the grace of God but forgiveness and justification. Oh, the Scriptures declare quite the contrary! If God’s grace is not at work in our lives after forgiveness and justification we will not grow. We will not mature. We will not be fruitful. We will not abound in good works. We’ll just have dead religious striving or just straight immaturity and no growth.

There is an abundance of grace to be received. There is grace to learn, grace to be transformed, and praise God for the ongoing grace of forgiveness. We need it and thank God it’s available. But there’s more to grace than just being forgiven. God’s grace is not only His willingness to forgive. It’s also His resource of life to change us.

And many times folks coming to us for help, wanting a word of counsel, they need a chance to think these things through with God. Number one, do they have the gift of righteousness? If they do, are they receiving an abundance of grace? If they aren’t they won’t be learning to reign in life. If they are or are they willing to humble themselves before God to live by the grace of God, then they will begin to reign in life through the One, Christ Jesus.

Again, so much of the counsel of the world is self-sufficiency counsel. “You can do it! You know you can! Come on, try harder. Come on, cut yourself some slack. You’re better than you think you are. Come on, love yourself. Esteem yourself.” You know what all of that is doing? It’s making people candidates for God to be opposed to them because God is opposed to the proud. He only gives grace to the humble. Boy, in that little positioning of the hand of God the whole story is told. He is opposed to the proud; He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

There’s a counseling ministry right there. Just help people see the two options they have with the hand of God. He’s opposed to the proud. But He gives grace to the humble. And help people go from self-sufficient pride, which God must oppose, to humble, needy, trusting, dependent children, that His hand might hold out His grace to them. What a counseling ministry that would be, just right there!

Those who receive an abundance of grace, God’s undeserved enablement, as well as forgiveness, they will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Through the One, Jesus Christ, on the basis of who Jesus is and what He did and what He provides and what He promises and what He can do. That is reigning in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Those people reign in life, in the realm of life, the sphere of life. As contrasted with Adam’s death. Adamic human existence is spiritual death. Christians can learn to reign in life, in the sphere of spiritual vitality and aliveness and relating and responding to God.

In other words, Christians, by the grace of God and drawing upon it, can learn to live not out of the bondage and brokenness of Adam’s race, but rather, by the liberty and wholeness that is in Christ alone. People drawing on natural human resource, they’re going to show bondage and
brokenness all the time because death is reigning over them. Those who receive the abundance of grace, along with that gift of righteousness, can learn to reign in life, to draw on the liberty and wholeness that is found in Jesus Christ alone and reign in life. They can be a spiritual, royal priesthood, Christ-like overcomers. To reign in life, that’s a kind of royal term. Reign. It is for royalty and we’re children of the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Now we don’t reign by some of these false kinds of word-of-faith, presumptive, name it, claim it, speak it forth, you make your own reality. That is another way to keep yourself in charge, instead of humbling ourselves before God, we are kind of almost giving God His marching orders. Not that kind of proud, “I’m the King’s kid and I can get what I want.” That sounds very presumptuous and proud. It sounds like something that God is going to oppose.

How about humbly coming and saying, “Lord, You’re King. Thank You for making me Your child. Now work out Your will in my life. That’s all that matters. I humbly bow before You. Work Your will, Your way and Your timing. Here I am, Lord. Do what You want and use me.”

God pours out grace on that life and they learn to reign in life as a Christ-like overcomer, living in the life of Christ, displaying the life of Christ, showing forth His love, His joy, His peace, His meekness. And you know another thing? They also receive His victory over circumstance.

It hit me one day, praying, meditating on this verse, thinking of the life of Christ that we draw on, as Christ lives in us and we are in Him. Christ lived the only truly non-circumstantial life. See, it didn’t matter whether they were lying about Him, spitting at Him, killing Him or whether He was walking on the water and raising the dead. It didn’t matter. He had the same confession all the way. “I always do those things that please the heavenly Father” (John 8:29). Boy, you talk about non-circumstantial living. You know, give me a lake to walk on, give me a cross to hang on and doing both only in the pleasure of the Father. No one ever lived like that but Jesus Christ.

When we are drawing on that life we find in Him, we’re freed from circumstances. We’re not dictated to by our thinking and feeling and acting and deciding by circumstances, but by this resource of gracious life we find in Christ that lets us have love and peace and joy, sometimes in spite of the circumstances. That’s part of reigning in life through the One, Christ Jesus.

The problems of humanity are found in Adam. And here we are told that they are fully remedied by the resources that are ours in Christ. Remember the resources that are ours in Christ?

Ephesians 1:3,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us [past tense, already accomplished] with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

What a radical verse! What great truth! Oh, bless God! Why? It is because He has blessed us so greatly. How greatly? He has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

A man in one of our classes here some time ago said an interesting thing. He said, “Yeah, but I’m here in earthly places. I need the blessings here.” Well, that’s a good issue. But remember, heavenly places aren’t way off there and earthly places way down here. Jesus said, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). You can reach out and touch it, it is that close. Why? It is because the King was there. Now where is the King? He is in us! How close are the heavenly places now? You know, I mean, that’s pretty close. They’re right there to access.
So often the Christian life looks and feels like, in our own walk or in others that we’re down here and God is way off there. And we are screaming out for care packages. “Lord, please! That is, if You can even hear me. Please parachute a package.” Well, He is often merciful and gracious and provides and you know, we think it dropped in from far out there somewhere. But He is right here in us. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). And what He provides, He’s already given it all to us anyway. He has blessed us, past tense, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. All that heaven has to provide for man has been given to us because we are in Christ.

See, in Adam we had none of this. But being saved didn’t just create a pipeline to heaven where the Lord could shoot down the conveyor belt every now and then a blessing package. It is quite the contrary. God took us out of Adam where there were no blessings of life and reality and plunged us into Christ where all the blessings reside and He says, “It’s all yours in Christ.” Sure we need to experience it more, understand it more. But it’s already all ours in the Person who lives in us and in Whom we dwell.

The reality of it all is so much different than how it looks and feels much of the time. That's why we want to learn to walk by faith and not by sight. We have every spiritual blessing, so it’s great for us to be praying Ephesians 1:18, “that the eyes of our understanding would be enlightened.” Not, Lord, could You bless me? But Lord, could You just show me what You’ve already given me, so I’ll stand on it, draw upon it, appropriate it, avail myself of it through faith in You and Your promises.

You know, these are the things that counselors should point to. These are the things that we need in our own lives, whether we are the counselor or the one seeking counsel; whether folks are coming to us for help or we’re looking to someone else to give us insight from the Lord. These are the things that are needed. And ultimately it comes down in the kingdom of heaven to a matter of grace versus sin, our next heading. Grace versus sin. What has God provided to deal with the sin problem? Amazingly, it’s grace. Grace!

Romans 5:20-21,

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Why the law? It is because of transgression that it might be seen and known. But where sin increased—as it was stirred out into the open by the law of God, grace abounded. And as sin reigned in death, now grace can reign through righteousness. Sin reigned in death, now grace can reign.

What is God’s answer for sin? Grace! The natural thought is, law. No, law reveals sin. It doesn’t remove one from the power of sin. And grace can reign through righteousness unto eternal life, both in quantity and quality of life with God, forever in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It’s grace in Jesus Christ that overrules sin in Adam. Remember Romans 6:14? “For sin shall not have dominion over you.” What is it that breaks the dominion or power of sin?—“For you are not
under law but under grace.” See, grace both forgives, as well as transforms us, so we don’t have to keep repeating the sins again and again.

It’s being under grace that sets us free from the domination of sin. Under law, trying to relate to God by law, we are always guilty. Because the law says, be perfect, be holy, be just like God. We can’t do it, so we’re always condemned and alienated. But grace forgives the failure, the sin, the wrong, the rebellion. And the abundance of grace can change the very person we are, making us more and more like Christ, letting us walk more and more in practical righteousness.

Grace and what God wants to do with it. Titus 2:11-12 speaks of grace beyond forgiveness. Grace for shaping a new life. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” We’re talking about the same grace that saves us. But look now as it's written to Christians already saved. Verse 12, “…teaching us,” the grace that offers salvation to everyone can also teach us, Christians. Teach us, train us, shape us “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age.”

The same grace that brings salvation and offers it to all men can teach us. It can train us as Christians to deny ungodliness and to live godly. It is the grace of God that not only forgives us but begins to shape and change our lives. That is what Romans 5 makes very clear.

Now let’s come back to Romans 5, under the heading of “Much More.” In our seminar on Growing in the Grace of God, as well as the Bible college class by that title, we have a major section called, “The Much More Grace of God. Much.” His grace is more than we’ve ever yet found and much more than we’ve ever known. It is much more than we’ll ever need and much more than could ever be shown in time and space. That is why it’s going to take an eternity according to Ephesians 2:7, for God to demonstrate His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Boy, does that make heaven exciting? For eternity, God is going to demonstrate His grace. How? It is by being kind to us in Christ Jesus. Man, I can hardly wait! What is He going to do on top of what He’s already done? That’s what grace is all about. It’s too big! It’s the much more grace of God.

But I didn’t make up that phrase. “Much more” appears multiple times in Romans 5, tied into the grace of God. In Romans 5:15,

But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.

There it is. The much more grace of God.

In verse 17,

If by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Christ Jesus.

Then verse 20, “…where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” The grace of God really is the much more grace of God.
You know another interesting thing about this? It contrasts what we lost in Adam and what we get in Christ. If this happened to you in Adam, much more here is what happens to you in the grace of Jesus Christ.

It hit me one day, an exciting thought that in Christ and by His grace, God gave us much more than we lost in Adam in the Garden. Now if God, by His grace, would just restore us back to the Garden, hey, that would be great! But it is much more than that. We are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That is not where Adam started out. But just in these verses, we know we get more in Christ than we lost in Adam. God is a big God. He’s a gracious God. He does things “exceedingly abundantly beyond all you could ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).

Here is the problem in Adam: God didn’t match it and go one inch. “Here’s the problem, here’s the remedy.” Vroom! It is out of sight. See? “If by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those that receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life.” They reign in life much greater than the death they were bound in.

Oh, what a joy to sit with people seeking help and share these kinds of things with them! It’s like a glimpse into heaven itself and how to walk with the Lord. Truly it’s good, I think, to refer to these passages as a heavenly gold mine of spiritual reality. Next to it, I would contrast the psychological theories of man as a gravel pit of human wisdom. Let’s counsel out of the gold mine. Not give people a bucket of gravel to take home and try to get rich in Christ by it.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 14
United with Christ

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Let’s continue now in Romans chapter 6. We are looking at “Foundational Truths for Counseling, God’s way. In Romans 5 we saw the issues were being in Adam or in Christ. In Adam was sin and death and judgment and condemnation and sin reigning in death. In Christ there is an abundance of grace. There is the gift of righteousness. There is justification and a sanctifying work of grace that lets us learn to reign in life. Of course the counseling needs in people’s lives come primarily from being in Adam and they are answered and supplied by finding what is in Christ.

Now in Romans chapter 6, which is about being united with Christ, we see how God deals with our old life in Adam and it is quite radical. Hint: It’s not unto self-esteem. It’s unto crucifixion. And we also see how God offers a new life to us in Christ in Romans chapter 6 on “United with Christ,” it is this matter of knowing the facts.

Romans 6:1,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Feeding back on the earlier verses—where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. And of course the perversion of the flesh can think, oh, sin abounds, grace abounds much more. Wow, you know, maybe we can just continue in sin and all it’s going to do is to cause more grace to abound. You know that is really twisted thinking of the flesh. Shall we do that?

And Romans 6:2-4 says,

Certainly not! [May it never be or God forbid!] How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Verse 3, “Do you not know...?” The first item is God wants us to know the heavenly facts. Do you not know? Do we know this? So many Christians do not know the facts presented here in Romans 6. We want to learn these facts, count on them, live by them and counsel from them and share them with others.

I didn’t know much about these Romans 6 facts the first three years as a believer. I was saved the last week of 1965. God did some work in my life those first three years. Through the third year as a believer I was a youth pastor out here in Orange County at Evangelical Free Church in Orange. But I couldn’t understand or explain or even be motivated to get into Romans 6. I was still running on early zeal. Yeah, I appreciated what God did and boy, I was going to do everything I could for Him. Well, I mean the Lord is a wonderful heavenly Father, obviously. And He understands our immaturity and He’s not scoffing at that. But He knows that’s not what it’s all about. He knows this is what we need to get to know. The facts of what He has done that produce a whole new life for us. And then three years after I was saved I went from being a youth pastor in California to Dallas, Texas.

The little group in our home of three couples grew and I was urged by others to hold public meetings. We became a church that the Lord had me pastor there for fourteen years. But I’ll tell you, a number of the early years as pastor there I didn’t have a clue what Romans 6 was all about. In fact, I stayed far away from it. Give me James, thank you. I’ll just tell them what to do and
what not to do. And praise God for the Book of James. That’s a critical part of the Word of God. But there is more to the Bible than James, you know. People need to know that real faith works. But the reason real faith works is because real faith taps into a whole new life in Jesus Christ. And it comes out with fruit and with abundant labors.

Do you not know? We need to know these things. God wants us to know these facts. All the Word of God is not about “do this and don’t do that.” It’s also just about things God has done. And we need to know it and stand on it. Or things He has promised to do. Or things He is well able to do in and through us. In a lot of the Word of God are things we need to know and learn to count on. “Do you not know?”

Do you not know that all of us—or translated here, “as many of us as were baptized.” This describes every believer baptized into Christ Jesus. Baptized into is bigger than water baptism. This word baptism is not, innately in the spiritual use of it, a necessarily wet word. In 1 Corinthians 10:2 it says “All [of Israel] were baptized into Moses” when they went through the Red Sea. Now, did they go through wet or dry? The whole point is they went through dry! The ones that went through wet weren’t baptized into Moses. All of Israel was identified with Moses as the, the type of Christ, the deliverer to bring them, in the name of the Lord, out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. A great synonym for “baptized into” is “identified with.”

Now certainly water baptism beautifully pictures all of this. But God forbid, that we would ever think that water baptism causes all of this. That’s almost like the Roman Catholic Church or others who try to say that water baptism saves. In this verse you would almost say that water baptism then sanctifies. No that is not what we’re saying! No, no. But it beautifully pictures the whole process of justification and then the sanctification that can flow out of it as we are joined to Christ. We are not just forgiven by Him, but united with Him.

Do we know that all of us, every believer, baptized into and identified with Christ Jesus, have been baptized into His death? In Christ is our new realm of existence, our new spiritual place of residence. He is our position before God, our source of life. In Christ, we are identified with Christ through faith in Him.

The significance of all of that identification with Christ is beautifully pictured in water baptism, as we’re buried with Him and raised to newness of life in Him. Romans 6:4, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death.”

We believers were buried. This is past tense. It was already accomplished. We were buried with Him, crucified on the cross and put into the tomb with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. This is through baptism and through identification into death. That is His death becoming our death.

See, just as Adam acted for all who are in him that is the entire human race, so now has Christ acted for all who are in Him and all who believed in Him died with Him.

In the middle of verse 4, “…in order that,” this identification was in order that or to show God’s plan and His result for us. It is “in order that, as with Christ, so we too…” As Christ was raised from the dead, so we too might walk in newness of life. Just like Christ was raised from the dead, we can now live an entirely new resurrected life, above the plain of the deadness of Adam and his race.

Oh these are things we want God to counsel us with, then we counsel others with it and be warned against lesser substitutes than what we’re going to be looking at in these very moments.
Romans 6:5-6,

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, [or rendered powerless] that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Here’s the amazing thing: Every person on earth who was ever born or ever will be, starts out a slave of sin. And this is the only way to no longer be a slave of sin. It doesn’t matter whether the man is dying in the gutter in front of a crack house, or if he’s chairman of the board. If he’s not in Christ like this, he’s in bondage to sin. He just chose a different way to express his rebellion and self-centeredness and self-serving and self-exaltation.

Society looks on the man in front of the crack house and goes, “Oh what a poor sinner.” And they look at the chairman of the board and go, “Oh what an upstanding citizen.” This is the wrong framework of evaluation. If they are both in Adam, they are both in bondage to sin. No matter where they stand in society, they are slaves of sin.

But God has a way that we would no longer be slaves of sin.

Romans 6:5,

For if we have become united together in the likeness of His death, [and we have; His death is our death by faith] certainly [it’s absolute] we also shall be [that is, united together with Him] in the likeness of His resurrection.

We are united with Christ in the likeness of His death and in the likeness of His resurrection. We are united with Him, joined to Him, made one with Him and enmeshed together with Him.

By the very word itself you could almost translate it “enlifed” together with Him. It is kind of an awkward word, but I like to use it in private conversation like this. We are enlifed with Him. We are brought right into His life. Like a branch grafted into a vine, just united with Him. That is what the Lord was doing at the cross and the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for all those who would trust in the Lord Jesus. We become united with Him, fully benefitting and partaking of Him. His death is our death; His resurrection is our resurrection.

Aren’t you glad the person you were in Adam got crucified with Jesus Christ? And further, you got raised to newness of life. That is what changes everything.

Verse 6, this is another great fact to know, “Knowing this, that our old man [our old self life, who we were in Adam] was crucified with [Him]….“ The old us was already executed on the cross of Jesus Christ.

The old man in Adam is dealt with by God by the cross of Jesus Christ. God doesn’t reform him. He doesn’t put him in therapy. He executes him!

Knowing this, that our old man—and I’m not talking about our papa, I’m talking about who I was before I came to Christ—was crucified with Him. I’m so glad that that life that carried around the name Bob Hoekstra got executed. He was in bondage to sin. Oh, some people thought he was kind of respectable or a nice sinner. I remember enough of him. He was a scoundrel. He was so selfish, so self-serving. Let’s know this. The old man, the old life we had in Adam was crucified
with Jesus Christ. There is no remedy short of the cross that is radical enough to deal with the old life.

Why did God do it that way? “That the body of sin might be done away with” (Romans 6:6), or it could be translated, “rendered powerless.” That is, removed from its previous dominating role.

See, God created man to be alive in the spirit, indwelt by the Spirit of God. And that being expressed through the soul, the personality, mind, emotions and will and all of that which is resident in a physical body that did what it was told. In sin and rebellion, man died. The spirit is dead in humanity. Things are upside down. The body is in control. It is “…the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the [boastful] pride of life” (1 John 2:16). So people are slaves to sin. The need is for the body of sin to be done away with. Or literally, rendered powerless, or you might say theologically, knocked off the throne of control. Letting Christ again reign, by the Holy Spirit, through the spirit of man, the new creature is born again in Christ.

This is an interesting thought and we’ll get into this more in a couple of weeks, but the body you and I have right now is the same exact body in the same condition, spiritually, it was in before we were saved. Now think of the implications of that. See, our spirit is made new or born again. Our soul, our soulish life, our natural looking life, our human life, our mind, emotions and will and personality and all is in process of transformation in Christ. But the body is the same exact spiritual condition it was in and it will stay that way until Christ comes again.

Romans 8:23,

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

We’re waiting for our bodies to be redeemed. And aren’t we groaning together in these old bodies? We are awaiting the redemption of the glorified body. Our bodies are not yet redeemed. That is, brought into this redemption process. When we see Him, like He is, we will be given a body like unto His glorious body. Until then, we have the same body we had before we were saved.

One of the major implications of that is, by the way, we have the same physical organ the brain that we had back there. What did your old man, the old life pump into your brain? Don’t tell me, please. I got problems of my own. I know what mine pumped in to mine. And it’s a pretty full time task dealing with that. That’s why I can’t wait to get into the subject in a couple weeks, of the renewing of the mind. It is critical in the Christian life and in the counseling ministry. There is a way to let God change those thought patterns and repaint those ugly murals on the walls of our brain. This is about learning to think with the mind of Christ, from 1 Corinthians 2:16. But we’ll get to that.

But here now, we have the same body. And this body doesn’t want to do what it’s told to do. Next week we’ll see in Romans 7, sin dwells in this body. The sin principle is the tendency, the proclivity, the vulnerability, and the interest in sin that dwells in this body and in the physical brain part of the body.

So God has a way to render this body powerless. Verse 6 says, “…that the body of sin might be done away with [or rendered powerless] that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” Unless this
body can be rendered powerless, or done away with, knocked off the throne of the life, we just stay slaves to sin as we once were.

Now, how has the Lord provided this remedy? Let me tell you a little nursery rhyme, if I might. I’m not a nursery rhyme expert. I don’t encourage it even with kids. We started out telling our kids nursery rhymes, even though we were both saved. And I’m sure, you know, no lightning bolts are going to come from heaven necessarily, though some of the rhymes are pretty sick. But after a while we kind of caught on. Hey, wouldn’t a Bible story be better? So our kids were kind of nursery-rhyme challenged, I guess you’d say. It’s a severe childhood disorder, you know. It lingers with you all the way to glory. Anyway, let me tell you a nursery rhyme and it has a point here. I goes like this:

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men,
Couldn’t put Humpty together again.

Now, let’s say that Adam is Humpty. Ooh yes! Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. It was a major fall, and we can hardly recognize he’s an egg anymore. Oh, made in the image and likeness of God, but do you see much of it? It was a great fall. Splat! Now what is going on? Who are all those people gathered around Humpty there? Well, that’s all the king’s horses and all the king’s men. Looky, there’s Freud! He’s working hard to put the egg back together. Look, he thinks he’s got it. I found the id, the ego and the superego. Nah, that’s just the shell, what about the white and the yolk, you know? Oh no! Right next to him is Carl Jung. He’s listening carefully to his spirit guide, Philemon. So he can find out how to put Humpty back together again. There’s B. F. Skinner just trying to unscramble him probably. They’re working hard but here’s the truth—All the king’s horses and all the king’s men cannot put Humpty back together again.

Now here comes our Lord. Our heavenly Father walks up and says to all the king’s horses and all the king’s men, “Stand back. Let me show you the only remedy. Scrape up that egg. Nail it to this cross and let’s bury it in the tomb of My Son.” That is the only way to deal with Humpty, that ol’ egg. And in his place I will raise up a whole new Humpty Dumpty, in the resurrection.

See, here’s the thing, the old man that we were, living in this body, we could not say no to this body of sin. If something did not do away with this body of sin or render it powerless, we would stay slaves to sin. That is because we were dead in the spirit and the body controlled our lives and the sin that dwelled in us dominated.

The world wants to retrain, reform, put Humpty in a support group, you know. Get Humpty thinking like a positive egg. Visualizing himself as perfectly shaped and having never fallen, you know. It will never work. It’s not a radical enough solution.

God’s remedy was to crucify Humpty and raise a new Humpty in his place. And you know what? The new creature in Christ can learn to say no to this body and yes to God. That’s the thing. That’s the radical difference. A new creature in Christ can learn more and more to say, no to sin and yes to God. We can say no to the principle of indwelling sin and yes to God the Holy Spirit who dwells within.

How could man ever come up with anything like that? See, the only remedy must involve death and resurrection. Only God can provide that.
I believe in this chapter this is the issue that sets Counseling God’s Way a universe apart from anything that man could ever come up with. And it is another reason I say it is not only futile it is a crime, Biblically and spiritually before God, to try and mix the theories of the world, who want to patch up the old when God says “I’ve got to crucify it and raise a new man.”

This is right at the heart of the Christian life, discipleship, and therefore, Counseling God’s Way. If our counseling doesn’t anchor on the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ, our union with Him and new life in Christ, we’re counseling the way the world does.

Romans 6:8-10,

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

Since we died with Christ, we have faith that we shall also live with Christ now and forevermore. Live with Him. He is our life. Romans 5:10 says that we are “saved by His life as well as reconciled by His death.” Romans 6:9, “…knowing that Christ.” Our confidence in these matters is based on what Christ did. So we therefore also can live unto God. He died to sin. He lives to God. We also can be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In being counseled, in giving counsel concerning victory over sin, or being set free, growing in wholeness and sanctification, we must begin right here. Knowing the facts that the old man died with Christ; he was judged and crucified. And now an entirely new spiritual life is available in Christ. Not reforming. Not remaking. Not rehashing. Not investigating and repairing. That’s the theories of the world. “Oh, you said what? You think what? Oh my goodness, where did that come from? We better trace back through your history. Let’s start with your mom. Let’s start with your dad. Let’s get into your grandparents, your neighbors, your teachers” Investigating and trying to repair is absolutely the futile direction. There is no hope there. That’s all the king’s horses, all the king’s men standing around a splattered egg, trying to put him whole, back up on the wall. What a farce! There’s no way to do it. He’s irreparably damaged. He needs to be buried. He needs a new life, raised in his place.

Now verse 11 goes from knowing the facts to counting on the facts. Romans 6:11,

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Likewise or even so, as true of Christ as it is in verses 9 and 10, it is also true of us. We died to sin and are now alive to God in Christ. So consider yourselves such. Reckon it is right. Reckon it so. Even so consider yourselves to be such, to be dead to sin but alive to God. Conclude it so. Count on it. Rely on it. Depend upon it. That is what the word means. In other words, base our entire spiritual life on the fact that verses 9 and 10 are as true of us, as they are true of Christ. He died to sin and now is alive unto God forever. Well, we were with Him and in Him. We died unto sin in Christ and now live unto God in Christ.

Consider ourselves dead to sin but alive to God, in Christ, because of Christ and who He is and what He did. And now we’re in Him. That new life is alive to God in Christ. That old life dominated by sin died with Christ.
It makes me think of Hebrews 11:1. This is a matter to take by faith. I’ve heard people say to me, “Oh Bob, I don’t know if I can believe that enough to make it true for me.”

I want to just cry out quick, “Hold it. That’s backwards.” God doesn’t say believe it hard enough to make it true. He says, “Here’s what I did for you. I’m telling you the truth. Here’s what I did for you in Christ. I’m only asking one thing of you. Trust Me. Just trust Me. You don’t have to explain it all to Me. You don’t have to have positive power of thinking enough to make it real for you. I did this for you.” God is saying, “All I’m asking you to do just trust Me.”

Can’t we trust God? He’s telling us He took care of the old life in crucifixion. He gives us a new life in resurrection. He says, “Consider yourselves as such. Just trust Me. I’m telling you the truth.”

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

We just trust God in this, faith will be substantiating our desire to walk in this. The substance of things hoped for. We hope, expect, desire, and would like to walk in this. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Just trust God on this one. Just believe Him. And watch it become substantiated in our life with a resurrected victory kind of living. This is the evidence of things not seen. We can’t see all of this, but we trust God that He did it. Evidences will start to show up.

Evidences, you know like you get more excited about the Bible than a poker game. I’m talking about my own testimony, Man, I’d do anything to get to a poker game. The higher the stakes, the wilder the participants, the later the night—“Wow, yes I’ll be there!” Why did the day come when it was far more exciting to me to go to a Bible study than show up at another poker game? Faith is the evidence of things not seen. I put my faith in these workings of God on my behalf though I couldn’t even explain them, and evidences started to show up that Bob Hoekstra was a new man with new values, new motivations, and new interests.

Early on as a Christian I won’t tell you some of the things I still did. I don’t want to encourage you to do any of them. But boy, faith is the substance of things hoped for. I hoped for a new life when I was forgiven of the old one. I tell you, trust in the Lord began to substantiate those things I hoped for. I began to walk more and more in a new life. And it’s the same process going on today in my life and in yours.

In 2 Corinthians it says, which may be simpler than Hebrews 11:1, though it is a glorious way to think on it in Hebrews 11:1, but 2 Corinthians 5:7 just puts it real straight and simple about the Christian life. “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Yeah, we can’t see all of this that God did for us. But He did it and He’s told us about it and faith accepts it and we walk that way. We walk by faith not by sight.

Well, I don’t know if I’m behaving and I don’t know if the circumstances of my walk are a living demonstration of all this. Just keep believing what God did for you there in Romans 5 and 6, and you’ll find yourself walking in it. For we walk by faith not by sight.

The enemy is really good at pointing out where there is still lack or things that don’t match what God can produce for us in Christ. Let’s just keep believing what God has done. In it is forgiveness for failure and sin. In it is grace to transform and change. We just walk by faith not by sight. Just keep believing Him. Just trust Him. He’ll keep working it in us and out through us.
We believe on these things because they are true, not to make them true. They are true. “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

So, there were facts to know and then facts to count on. Then that leads to this wonderful growing process of presenting ourselves to God. Romans 6:12-14, presenting ourselves to God. You know, this is the decision, the choice the new man wants to make and can increasingly learn to make.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

The new creature in Christ can increasingly say no to fleshly impulses and no to sin. We don’t have to let it reign in our mortal body, even though it still resides there. We don’t have to obey its lusts. We can present ourselves, offer ourselves to God as those alive from the dead and say, “Here I am, Lord, alive unto You in Jesus Christ. Use my life for righteousness sake.”

And then grace, verse 14, is the power which motivates us and transforms us. It is not trying to be righteous; it is believing God for what He did to bring righteousness to us. And His grace begins to develop it in our lives.

That is how sin loses its domination over our lives. Not by trying harder to obey the law, but by believing what God did for us in Christ. We are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:15-18,

What then? Shall we sin because we’re not under the law but under grace? Certainly not! [Back to that argument. No way!] Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness. But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [teaching] to which you were delivered. [That is, the Gospel] And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

See, we used to be slaves of sin. Now we can be slaves of righteousness. We are giving our lives to God for righteousness’ sake and to produce a righteous life in us.

Romans 6:19,

I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. [You know, so you’ll understand these things] For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members [the members of your body and all that resides in them] as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

We were slaves to sin. We became obedient from the heart, a new heart, a new life in Christ. We committed ourselves to the grace of God in Christ. Not to the theories of man and his reformation programs. So now, we can present ourselves to God as slaves of righteousness. That gives God
room to work in us, like Philippians 2:13 says, “...to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Let Christ shine from us, and live out through us.

Do you remember how you used to fully present yourself unto sin and disobedience for unrighteousness sake? I think I did it with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. You know. Oh, I was dedicated to the path of sin and self. I was so into gambling and thinking I was becoming a hotshot because there was a long period there where I didn’t work. I just lived on money I got from poker games and gambling at golf. I would go home from an all-night poker game, bleary-eyed, coughing and hacking. I didn’t smoke. I don’t know why I never got into smoking in my life. It seems like I got into everything else. But my word, in those poker games I breathed in enough smoke to be a two packer a day, probably. I would go home with my chest aching, eyes stinging, and exhausted. Oh, but on a high because, of the four or five hundred dollars I made. I thought I had life in my pocket. No, really I had death around my neck.

I’d get home about four o’clock and you’d think, I’d crash for eight or ten hours? Oh no, no! That was because I might meet these guys at the golf course on Saturday. But I had to be there at five or six, because it’s crowded and I’m too stupid to make reservations because that takes planning. So I’d sit on the chair by the bed and kind of lean. Just rest and dare not lie down or I’d miss that wonderful opportunity to gamble outdoors to clean out lungs and my eyes. The alarm would ring and I’m sitting there in a half daze, you know, and stagger to the car and get out there. I was young and stupid and had enough adrenaline to get out there for five or six hours, grinding it out on the golf course. I was trying to get somebody else’s money. Sick. Was that dedication or what?

Now how about if we just present ourselves to God for righteousness sake with that kind of heart? To that degree of abandonment, you know? Ooh, what is going to take place? God is going to do great and mighty things! He is going to take us at our word. He’s going to use us for righteousness sake. He’s going to transform us into righteous living, presenting ourselves, the members of our body, as slaves of righteousness for holiness, for sanctification, and for godliness. Boy, that’s the path of growth.

So many people that are looking for help and seeking a word of counsel, they need to trek through Romans 5 and 6 to learn of the problems in Adam and the resources in Christ. Do you know these facts, what God did for you? All He wants you to do is believe Him. Then count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ and say, here’s my new life. Use it for righteousness sake.

It’s foundational truth. It goes all beyond the little, what about this and that, and if that and when this? Well, God has words of specific wisdom, but I tell you, this gets right to the heart of the issue. I have found often you can answer 50 different people questioning the struggle in their lives, with one same answer here, even though each of them might think their problem is different. Mine is drugs. Mine is pride. Mine is anger. Well, mine is this. Mine is that. Listen, are you reckoning the old man dead and a new life available in Christ? “What do you mean?” Well, let's see. Let’s find out what God means. These foundational truths can deal with a hundred issues simultaneously. Not [snap] like that and it’s all gone, but cutting away at each one of them. We need less doubt and more faith. We need less striving works and more fruit. It is a path of growth, but it’s a walk by faith. Take a step, in faith because God did these things for us.

Let’s close with Galatians 2:20. It fits perfectly in this context, doesn’t it? Galatians 2:20
I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh [in this flesh and bones body] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Is Romans 6 a great commentary on Galatians 2:20 or what? Don’t they go together like hand and glove? Praise God we were executed with Christ in that old life! No longer are we the ones producing a life, but Christ now lives in us. And this life which we go through now in flesh and bones bodies, we live trusting in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Oh, God wants to counsel us by these truths. He wants us to be equipped to share these truths. And He wants us to be very alert to psychological, humanistic therapies that want to substitute, get in the way, intervene and get Christians off on a side trail.

You know what? Psychological theory strengthens the very life that God wants counted crucified with Christ. They aren’t integral. One is crying out, “Death to the old man.” The other is crying out, “No, let’s help the old man.” One is saying “God executed him and it’s the only remedy.” The other is saying, “Oh no, we can patch him up.” They are diametrically opposed. God help us from getting into that trap. God use us to help multitudes in the church of Jesus Christ.

Psychological theory Christianized and brought in by loveable Christian leaders, is far more popular and familiar to the American church than Romans 5 and 6. That’s the state we’re in. Well, that’s the state I used to be in. But the Lord can change us. I believe He can change this sad direction the church has taken as well. I really believe if we gave ourselves to mining in this heavenly gold mine of Romans 5 through 8, and got out of the gravel pits of the world, we’d see mighty changes in lives. A lot of people are trying to live in that dump. That’s not life. That is just eking out an existence.

How about if we got back into Romans 5 through 8? What if the church of Jesus Christ took all the time, money, resources, man power, hope, and invested in psychotherapy, Christianized style, self-help groups, and just plunged all of that time and resources to communicate into searching out Romans 5, 6, 7, 8 by the Spirit of God? I know what would happen. I am sure this is what would happen. We would not only see a radical change in how the church counsels one another, we would probably have a revival like unto the Reformation of 400 years ago. I am personally one who believes we’re like overdo for that. And I not only would love to help any one brother or person that comes my way, I’d like to be an instrument in the hands of God to see a mighty change in the whole church. God’s done it before. He can do it again.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You so much for these mighty truths. They are breathtaking. They are exhilarating. They are mind-blowing. And yet they are the truth. Teach us to just trust in You and what You’ve done and what You’ve said that we might walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ our Lord. And we know the glory will be His and oh, the people we can help as we counsel God’s way. Lead us that path and touch the church of Jesus Christ as well to turn again to God’s heavenly gold mine here in Romans 5 and 6. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 15
Walking According to the Flesh

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Lord, we come again in Your mighty name. We come with hunger, with need, with expectation, with desire. We come seeking You, Lord. Seeking to be edified, built up, instructed, counseled, equipped, warned and guarded. There are so many things that pertain to counseling God’s way. Lord, we come with thanksgiving that You would draw us near to Yourself and that You would become to us our wonderful Counselor. Lord, we humble ourselves right now and confess our need for You, for strength and wisdom, cleansing, forgiveness, encouragement, direction, confirmation, all the things that come with You as our Good Shepherd and our Wonderful Counselor. And we thank You that You give grace to the humble. We ask You to pour out Your grace upon us tonight that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and thereby receive and give counsel that is Your kind of counsel. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

In this study together, Counseling God’s Way, we’re looking at our third study under the heading of “Foundational Truths for Counseling God’s Way.” This is item C, our third study, “Walking According to the Flesh.”

Remember in Romans 6 we saw how God deals with our old, spiritually dead, sinful life in Adam. He crucified it with Christ and then He raises us with Christ to a new life in Him. And we saw in Romans 6 that God wants us to know these facts and He wants us to count on these facts and then He wants us to present ourselves to God on the basis of these facts.

Sometimes Christians say or think, “Well I believe I have done that or I do that. But in many ways I still struggle and sometimes fall into sin or drifting in disobedience, with a lack of victory and progress and get to striving and straining. What’s the deal?” Isn’t there enough there in Romans 5 and 6 to live on all the way through time out into eternity? Yes there is. But Romans chapter 7 reveals an ongoing problem that we still must face and deal with. And that’s called the flesh. And Romans chapter 7 is about Christians trying to please God, trying to obey the law of God, live up to the standards of God on their own best efforts. This is walking according to the flesh.

Romans 8:4, talks about those who do not walk according to the flesh, but walk according to the Spirit. And Romans 7 is about the walk according to the flesh. And God’s answer for that is to learn to walk according to the Spirit.

In Romans 7:14-16, a fleshly struggle surfaces when a Christian attempts to walk according to the flesh.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin [or sold in bondage to sin, it could be translated either way]. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

Remember Romans 6:14? “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”

This person struggling in Romans 7 is battling the dominating influence of sin, which means they are, by inference here in Romans 6:14, probably trying to live by their own resource under the
law and standards of God. They are not drawing on the grace of God, which is the resource of God for victory and growth.

Christians are to live by grace, not by law. That is, living by law, trying to keep the law of God on their own best effort. When we try to please God by drawing on our own human resources inherited from Adam—even though we’re now saved, born again, new creatures—in practical experience we put ourselves under the law. That is, we’re living by performance. Hey God, is this good enough? If not I’ll try harder.

Well, that’s the way the law works. The law tells you the standard, commands perfection and gives nothing to help you do it. That’s the backdrop, really, behind Romans 7, already introduced in Romans 6:14.

Now the law is spiritual. It’s of God, given by the Holy Spirit. The law is spiritual. It’s heavenly.

Romans 7:12, “The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” And Paul wrote the law is good if one uses it lawfully, the way it was intended to be used. It wasn’t intended to be a standard that we strive to live up to. We can’t do it. That issue is what the class “Growing in the Grace of God” is all about. We cannot be justified or sanctified that way. We cannot grow that way. We cannot find victory that way. We cannot get out from under the domination of sin that way. It has to be by the grace resources of God.

“The law is spiritual. But I am carnal,” Paul writes. That is, me, myself and I. You know just my resources, just me. And he’ll elaborate on that in just a moment. I am of the flesh. I am carnal. And in that respect, on our own, left to our own resources, we can still say about us that we are sold under sin, or sold into bondage to sin. In fleshly, self-dependence even a Christian is bound to sin. They will sin, if they draw on their own resources. Even a Christian, on his own—that is, drawing on his own resources—is carnal. In fact that’s what carnality is all about, really, living by fleshing standards, fleshly resources. In any independent acts to impress God or live up to the standards of God, we’re of the flesh. Flesh here is human resources and human abilities. What man can do out of his best effort and best intentions. Then it is all the way to the other end of the flesh, the deepest of licentious indulgence.

Romans 7:15, this can baffle us as Christians.

For what I am doing I do not understand. [Why is it perplexing?] For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

What’s the matter with me? Aren’t I a Christian? I mean, what’s the deal here? Many Christians, when they first get into that mode after they’re saved, are really perplexed. Am I really saved? Why I can’t I do it and everybody around me seems to be doing it right? They are probably saying the same thing. It’s perplexing.

But the Scriptures reveal what it’s all about. But even in that striving, fleshly, failure it doesn’t mean the law is bad. If then I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. It’s not the fault of the law that we can’t live up to it. The weakness in the law is the weakness of human flesh. And we’ll read later on, in the second half of our study tonight, about Romans 8:3, that the law was weak through the flesh. Man’s resources couldn’t live up to it. So that’s a weakness in living under the law.
What is going on here? Why doesn’t this precede chapter 6 or chapter 5, back there when we were looking at the problems and the remedy? And then united with Christ and victory, why does this follow that? Well, though the old man was crucified with Christ, Romans 4, 5 and 6—the flesh remains. The bodily cravings and temptability remain. We still have the same physical body we had before we were saved. Romans 8:23, “…we ourselves are groaning [awaiting] the redemption of our body.” It hasn’t even started. Our spirit is totally redeemed, brought back fully to God. Our soul, that is our mind, emotion, will, the personality of man, once saved is going through the process of being brought back to the ways of God. But the body is exactly the same body we had when we were saved. We might treat it a little better. But we also might worship it a little less, you know. It might come into its perspective better, but it’s still the same body. And it will not be different until we see the Lord and we’re glorified and have those resurrected bodies. It’s going to be great!

Remember, along with those same physical bodies, the greatest culprit in the members of the body lie right between your ears. It is the brain, the physical brain. We have exactly the same physical organ, the brain. We can get a new mind. We get a new mind in Christ, but we have the same brain. It has all that same data logged into it, from the days before we ever knew Christ. All of that is part of the flesh. There is tons of input from the old man with sinful ways of thinking, sinful ways of reacting, and sinful, ungodly, humanistic, earth-bound ways of imagining and scheming and planning. So when we look to ourselves, when we put hope in human resources—even well intended, Christian, dedicated human resources—the flesh is turned loose. The amazing thing is the flesh behaves just so much like the old man did. Even though he got crucified on the cross of Christ, he left his ways behind him in the body in which he dwelled, and logged in that brain, you know. You talk about your computer chips. Oh, what he left behind!

This is another reason why psychological counseling is deadly to spiritual victory. It is another reason why you cannot integrate psychological theory with Biblical truth. Psychological theory appeals to the flesh. All the way from, “hey, you’re not as bad as you think you are.” No, that is not quite accurate. You’re worse than you think you are to the other side, the hoping in self and the pumping up and really exalting. Psychological counseling appeals to the flesh. Come on, you can do it. You know you can. Here. We’ll give you techniques. We’ll give you ways to think, to motivate you. We’ll give you new ways to think to give you self-justification and a false sense of liberty from guilt and condemnation. Psychological counseling is exceedingly attractive.

Why are so many Christians into psychological counseling? It is because they don’t want the flesh crucified. They want it pampered. They want to be pleased. Bless me. Please me. Coddle me. Don’t nail me! And God nails us, not out of cruelty but totally out of love. He wants that old life to be rendered in the place of the cross and just be left there. He wants us to find a whole new life in Christ, which can only be found and walked in by the Spirit.

Now Romans 7:17-20 speak about the fact that sin indwells our flesh. That’s why it is so deadly. The flesh is contaminated by the principle of sin. It is not only the physical body, but the human brain and all of its ways. Sin indwells our flesh, verses 17 through 20.

But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.
Verse 17 is not given to us to remove personal responsibility. “Hey, if I’m sinning don’t look at me. It’s not me. It’s sin that indwells me.” It’s not that kind of a thing. You know, that’s not what it is saying. We know there’s accountability. What a person sows, they reap. You reap the spirit, life or you reap flesh, corruption, and death. Sow to the flesh you reap corruption and death.

Why is this verse given? It is to reveal the cause of the problem. It’s that a tendency to sin dwells in our flesh. “Now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

One of the many reasons why I’m personally convinced that this second half of Romans chapter 7 here, which gets into personal testimony here with Paul and his struggle, was after his born again, saved days. Some Bible teachers, believers don’t agree with that. And I’m not saying I have all the answers, but in wrestling over that issue many, many years, I personally can’t see any real possibility but what it’s a believer. You know, someone looks at this and goes, “That can’t be the apostle Paul. That has got to be Saul of Tarsus.” Well, I believe, in the first case, if that were so it would be back preceding or in Romans 5 and not after 6. But far more contextually profound and Biblically important is, no unbeliever could ever say, “It’s no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” In the unbeliever there is no distinction between them and the sin that dwells in them. They’re dead in trespasses and sin. They have no righteousness. They have no other reality at work in them but sin and death. Only a believer, in their struggle and defeat, could say, “Now it’s no longer I, that is, the new creature in Christ, the persons we really are. It’s sin that dwells in me.”

Indwelling sin from verse 18, “Nothing good dwells in me.” What do you mean, Paul? Well, that is, in my flesh nothing good dwells. I know that in me nothing good dwells. That is, in my flesh. Remember what Jesus said? “None is good but God alone” (Matthew 19:17). Well, that settles the case. None is good. Even the apostle, essentially, inherently or innately, when you take God out of his life there is no good left. There are just varieties of badness, socially or culturally acceptable or not, but there’s no good. None is good but God alone.

What we are apart from the Lord living in and through us? That is our flesh and nothing good dwells in it. The NIV here I think translates this, “Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” I have never been able to figure out why they translated it that way. It’s the only major translation that does that. Every other one takes the basic, obvious, straightforward meaning of the word sarx, and that is flesh. Flesh. Time and time again it is obvious. In this chapter and in the contrast jumping to chapter 8, the difference between the walk according to the flesh and then the walk according to the Spirit. Putting sinful nature in here kind of mixes up what chapters 5 and 6 were talking about, the person himself. What’s God’s remedy for that person? Crucify him.

After doing that all the problems are solved, right? No. The new creature in Christ still has to deal with the flesh that remains. The cross is for the old man. The walk in the Spirit is for the flesh. Basically those are God’s pattern in Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8. Nothing good dwells in me—that is in my flesh. The wishing is present. Yeah, I want to do it. I wish I could. I really have the will, but the doing is not there. Having a God-given desire to live righteously does not mean we can do it in our own strength.

Romans 7:19, you could probably call this the common, average Christian experience. “For the good that I will [to do], I do not do, but the evil I will not [to do], that I practice.” That doesn’t mean it’s normal. It’s maybe just too common, too average. Normal infers what? It infers a norm that is correct by which it’s being measured. Average just means what’s going on. And this is what goes on among the Christian community and every Christian has their trek or treks through
Romans 7. We don’t have to live there. But I don’t know that there is any way for anyone to avoid walking through there.

It’s in Romans 7 we learn our desperate need of everything that is provided in Romans 6. Romans 6 can give the light and the insight and the knowledge of the victory and provision of union with Christ. But for so many—I believe all of us to some degree—we only learn our total need for what Romans 6 talks about when we’re struggling in Romans 7.

So the normal Christian life is Romans chapter 8, though that is not the average. The average is too much like Romans 7. But even if that has become non-typical as a way of living—not that a person is immune to ever struggling in Romans 7—but if a believer is less and less in that, you are living more characteristic of Romans 8, then that’s the normal Christian life and they might have some average experiences down the road too. But the Lord definitely wants us to go right on through Romans 7 being less and less there, and more and more in Romans 8, as we will see.

Now, sin dwells in our flesh. Think of that. Right in our body is the tendency to sin! This is including the physical brain with all these sinful proclivities and weaknesses and inclinations and understandings to pull it off. We carry this battle with us everywhere we go. You know, it’s just, it’s part of our flesh. It is the tabernacle in which we live and the human resources we draw on out of it, including the overwhelming despot of it all, the brain.

Now look at this. This gets worse before it gets better. Let’s not jump too quickly to where we think the victory is, because we will get caught in this territory that yet lies ahead. Not only is there a fleshly struggle if we’re trying to please God on our own resources and live up to His standards, we find out it is because sin dwells in our flesh. Now look at this, the picture of flesh defeated, dominated, drug off captive by the law of sin. It is not just irritated and tripped up, but hog-tied.

Romans 7: 21-22,

I find then a law, [this principle] that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

This is another reason why I’m personally convinced that this testimony is speaking of a believer. An unsaved person cannot delight in the law of God according to the inward man. Why? It is because the inward man is totally dead. He has no spiritual capacity to delight in the things of God at all. The inward man is dead. The spirit is dead toward God, but a believer, deep in the heart, deep in the inner person, deep in the spirit, delights in the law of God. You hear what the law of God says and you go, “Oh yes!” Even though you might look at behavior or present experience and go, “Oooh, yuck! The good that I will to do I do not do. But the evil I will not to do, that I practice!”

Delighting in the law of God according to the inward man. The inward man is the new creation, the real us. See, verse 21—“I find then a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.” There is a tendency, a vulnerability, and inadequacy concerning sin, which will always be in our flesh until our bodies are transformed. And even though the new man wishes to do good, the human resources don’t automatically cooperate. And even though the inner man delights in the law of God, the new creation agrees with the law of God gladly—Amen! That’s it. That’s what I want.
Romans 7:23 says, “But I see another law in my members....” This is another principle working right in the very members of our tabernacle. And again, I don’t think we can be reminded too much, including the physical brain. “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

Oh, this is a believer in the midst of warfare, trying his best. He delights in the law of God. “Amen! I love it! I’m going to do it. I’m going to throw myself into doing it.” But he’s not depending on the Lord, trusting in the Spirit. He is striving to produce it on his own. A different law in the members of the body is at work, fighting against that desire to please God. It is waging war against the law of my mind. It is warring against this principle in my mind that God has now stirred through the mind of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:16, we have “the mind of Christ,” believers are told. So in our minds, this mind of Christ resides. The mind is thinking of the realm of actually entertaining thought and all. The brain is where a lot of past thinking is just kind of logged, and wants to interfere and get in the way. It is warring against the law of our mind.

So this mind of Christ dwelling in us, Christ in us the hope of glory, stirs “oh yes” to the ways of God and the law of God. But there’s another law in our members. There’s something else dragging against us. And look what happens, “…bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23).

It is not a very exciting prospect, is it? It is making me a prisoner of this law of sin. You know what that’s saying? The new creature in Christ cannot whip this principle. We can’t whip the flesh on our own resolve. “Hey, I’m born again. I will not succumb to the ways of the flesh.” Well, that’s a fleshy statement, you know. It is self-confidence. “Pride goes before destruction [a fall]…” (Proverbs 16:18). Oh, you won’t? Okay, here let’s clear back. Give him plenty of room. We don’t want anyone injured, as they don’t do it!

Romans 7:23 is a sober verse. “But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin in my members.” The new creature in Christ is not designed to win the battle on his own, any more than the new creature in Christ is designed to live the Christian life producing that life on his own, any more than a branch in a vine is expected to produce the life that sustains it.

So what must we do? What is the way out? The way out is a cry for a deliverer. If I were writing that outline today I would add the word, humble cry for a deliverer. Maybe even a desperate humble cry for a deliverer. That’s the way out. It’s provided right here. How do you get out of this cycle? Humbly cry for a Deliverer. Not try harder. Humble quicker!

Romans 7:24-25, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ, our Lord!” And the rest of the verse rehearses the struggle before it goes on to assure us there is no condemnation in it. And then we see the path of victory in Romans 8.

But let’s dwell a little bit on this cry, “O wretched man that I am....” That’s what the Lord is looking to hear, a plea of wretchedness. The word has to do with spiritual weariness, spiritual helplessness, and an incapacity to produce righteousness. “O wretched one that I am.”

Oh wretched man that I am, in my flesh, on my own—in me dwells no good thing, that is, in my flesh. Me, I’m a wretch. “Well you sound like you’re teaching worm theology.” “No, no, no. Worm is way too high. We’re talking wretchedness. Wretchedness.
What a humble plea this is. Oh wretched man that I am. Weary, helpless, incapable of producing victory and righteousness. That’s me, God! I cry out, who will deliver me from this body of death? Who will set me free from this body in which sin and death dwells? It’s dominating me. It is bringing me down into a dead, lifeless defeated Christian struggle.

The integrative psychological, self-esteem counseling of the day that is all throughout the church world, actually tries to prevent people from saying this. The counsel actually builds a roadblock to keep Christians from saying, “Oh, wretched man that I am.” When someone struggling with sin and defeat comes into a Christian counseling clinic, or often to a staff pastor even, or someone helping in a church ministry, and in all kinds of ways they are kind of hinting that they think they’re quite a wretched person who can’t kind of see their way through this to victory and the counselor goes into emergency resuscitation of the flesh work. “Bring out the electric shock on the flesh. We’ve got to jump start this guy’s flesh. He’s starting to sound helpless. ‘Oh, you’re not as bad as you think you are. Come on. Give yourself some slack. Hey, you just need to feel better about yourself. Hey, who made you so down on yourself? Let’s find out and blame them.’”

So struggling Christians go in for counseling and instead of confessing “Oh, wretched man that I am,” and they are only allowed to say things like, “Oh dysfunctional one that I am.” “Yes, you could probably learn to function a little better. Oh, you mean you are a product of a dysfunctional world. Oh well, that makes even more sense.” Oh wretched man that I am, is not allowed.

Church groups are writing it out of their hymnals and finding the mellowest possible halfway synonym in their translations and paraphrases. We’ve got all kinds of Bibles, all kinds of Bibles. There are some good translations out, but some of these study Bibles! Man, you get the translation and then you get all the commentary built in. Even the Holy Spirit Bible, that one that I think was out recently, has all these charismatics writing in it. It is not really about the Holy Spirit. It’s about charismmania. We are probably going to have one someday called, “The Flesh Bible.” Why hide it anymore? Let’s just come right out front with it. “This Bible is designed to protect your flesh at all cost. We can re-explain every verse until the context disappears.”

Probably the subtitle will be something like: “You’ll never have to fear the cross again. In this one study Bible 4,000 detours around the cross of discipleship.” Oh, the world! It would probably be a best seller in the world and the church.

“Oh, wretched man that I am.” Boy, the popular one now is, “Oh co-dependent one that I am.” “Yes, yes, that’s it. Say it! Say it! That’s your hope.” And really one of the most popular of all now is, “Oh victimized one that I am. We all know any wrong you see in my life could no way be my fault. All I need is your help to find out who did it.” And boy, I tell you, there are professionals that are great at it. They can find blame where nothing ever happened, and it will be as real as if it had happened all your life long. It’s unbelievable.

Can you see heaven moved by this plea, “Oh dysfunctional one that I am. Oh co-dependent one that I am.” Why the heavens are brass to that! All of this prolongs the struggle. God’s waiting to hear a humble, bankrupt plea. “Oh, wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me?”

Now, I’m not inferring at all that is the way Christians must live every day. You know, you climb out of bed, “Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of sin?” Maybe as a Christian you aren’t in Romans 7 right then. This is not our automatic Christian discipleship daily confession. That comes from Luke 9:23 and elsewhere, where Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and [just] follow Me.” Just every day, “Lord, not me. Not my will. Not my way. Not my resources. Not my glory, but Yours.
Lord, may my self-life this day be on that cross where it died with Christ and be left there. Not dredged out of the fleshy ways of man. May I today have only one option, to just follow You for direction, for peace, for strength, for insight from the Word, for nurturing, for victory, for not being drug down by the law of sin and death that dwells in this body.” That’s the normal, daily approach to God and the Christian life.

But at times we slip from that, we drift from that. We really get into struggling. And the more we sense a struggle, we flail away the harder. “I will not get in defeat. I will do right. I love the ways of God.” And we eventually end up crying this: “The good that I will to do I do not do. But the evil that I will not to do, that I practice.” What is going on? It is struggling according to the flesh. And there’s only one way out. And it’s a humble cry for a deliverer. Oh may the Lord just revive, reform the church so that her counseling doesn’t build roadblocks to people getting to the place of escape!

Probably instead of saying, “Oh man, you’re not near as bad as you think you are.” Maybe we should encourage them, “Hey, you don’t know half how bad you are. You know, only God knows how bad you are. But He loves you and He died for you and He wants to deliver you.”

Oh wretched man that I am, who will set me free? Who will deliver me from this body of death? The Spirit wants to stir us to cry, “Who?” The flesh wants to ask, “What?” The flesh always wants to know, what can I do to get out of the mess I’m in? The Spirit stirs in you to need a “Who” and not a “what.” A “what” is something the flesh can do. “Who,” that is your mighty Deliverer, Jesus. Who will set me free? Not, what can I do to get back on top again? This is a cry for a Deliverer. Who will set me free? Who will deliver me?

The flesh of man goes into the counseling situation saying, “Just give me some procedure, will you? All I’m interested in is a program. Not a person and one who died there and I died with Him and they are now my hope today and forever. Just give me a program.” The program is the great hope of man now, not only in the world but in the church as well. The flesh says, “What can I do to get out of this?”

And the psychological integrative flesh-pumping, flesh-tempting, flesh-building counselor says, “Have you tried this?” And he or she has a thousand of “have you tried to pull out? “Have you tried visualizing a better life for yourself?” “Have you tried finding who messed you up?” “Have you tried trying harder?” “Have you tried not even caring?” Just, “have you tried, have you tried?”

And so often the answer is, “Oh no, thanks.”

“Well, you’re welcome. That will be ninety-five dollars.”

And they’ll probably be back because it won’t work. “No problem, we’ve got a drawer full of these things.” You can do this for ten years as long as your insurance stays in force. And sometimes the insurance runs out before the answers. Then you’re healed.

Who will set me free from this body of sin and death? This body of death that sin dwells in, brings spiritual deadness. It is sin indwelling the flesh. Who will deliver me? See, it is a humble cry for a Deliverer. Not a law, standard, performance, or works, hey try this. But, who will deliver me? We sang, “Deliver me, great Deliverer.” What a great song. But let’s not diminish the kind of Deliverer He is. He’s a great and comprehensive Deliverer. He has already delivered us from the penalty of sin. Already! Someday we know He is going to deliver us even from the very presence of sin. He will come and deliver us and take us to a place where there won’t even be a hint of sin, not a memory of sin. Not one little influence of sin. What a mighty Deliverer!
And what did we do to cause either one of those two deliverances to be assured? We trusted in the Lord. Now why, from here to there are we going to be our own deliverer? When we are struggling and striving and trying to get it all just right on our own capacity, with our own religious knack, He can now deliver us from the powers. He can.

How does one under the dominion again of sin, though saved and struggling, how do they get out? Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? That’s the person who has this song to sing: “I thank God, it’s through Jesus Christ our Lord.” That’s the victory. It is not a program but a Person. It is not a procedure but trusting in the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 15:57 it says, “Thanks be to God who gives the victory, [How?] through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Victory is a gift. It’s not something we create, earn or cause. It is a gift. We are talking grace again. It is a work of God’s grace on our behalf that got us out of the penalty of sin, and will remove us someday from the presence of sin, and along the way the grace of God at work is giving us the gift of deliverance from the power of sin.

Now in conclusion, in Matthew 26:41, Jesus said to His disciples, “Watch and pray [Why be prayerfully alert?], lest you enter into temptation.…” Well, what is this danger all about? “…the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

God just had His apostle Paul elaborate on that in Romans 7 for us. Jesus laid down the bedrock principle here, the truth. The spirit of those hanging around the Lord Jesus can be willing because of His influence. They are willing to go the ways of godliness, but the flesh is weak. Of course it showed up the moment trouble came. “Oh Lord, we will never deny You.” We all think of Peter, but they all were going, “Yeah, yeah! Amen. Me too.” One of the Gospels tells us that “Oh yeah, no. No way.” The spirit is willing. Yeah sure, willing, that’s great, but we can’t pull it off on our own, that walk in godliness. The flesh is weak. Well then, what do you do? Watch and pray. Be alert to depend on the Lord. Watch and pray. Stay alert to put your hope in the Lord. Watch and pray. That’s really what Romans 7 is about.

Philippians 2:12 says, “…work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” It comes in here as a critical reminder on this study. Why work outward the salvation that God has worked inward and why do it with fear and trembling, with awe and humility? It is because, “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for [His] good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). His good pleasure is the law, His will. It’s not enough to just say, “Oh yes, I hear the law! Amen. I delight in that.” It’s not over yet. Watch and pray. Don’t just leave it there. “Hey, count me in, God. I’m with You. Hey, let’s get on with it.” It’s not over there. “God works in us both to will and to do.”

What do you think is easier “to will” or the “to do”? And we often stop on the easier side. Not that there isn’t a battle sometimes there too. We’re struggling with the will of God. But even yielding to that, God working in us, wooing us, showing us why and encouraging us His way. Even saying, “Yes Lord! Your path is all that matters to me.” It isn’t time to stop praying. Isn’t time to stop seeking the Lord. Isn’t time to stop depending and looking to Him, because God’s got to keep working in us both to will and to do. Romans 7 is the struggling Christian who has the will to do and just can’t figure out why he can’t pull it off. I mean, he is trying harder than he ever did in his life. In fact, he probably thinks he’s trying harder than he ever saw a Christian try. “And why am I doing the very thing that I hate?”

The flesh is weak. We need God to work in us to will and to do.
Then Colossians 3:10 is talking about this “...new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him.” What is this new man, this new life in Christ all about? Well, there is neither Greek nor Jew. It doesn’t matter your nationally, or circumcised or uncircumcised, your religiosity or religious procedures, Barbarian, or Sythian. The most sophisticated or the worst, scoundrel of a man. Slave or free. Here’s what matters. Here’s what it’s all about, “But Christ is all and in all.”

That’s both humbling to the flesh and exhilarating to the spirit. Christ is all. “Hey, how about me?” Yeah, we had you in here before. In me dwells no good thing. You were mentioned. You were covered very well. “In my flesh, dwells no good thing.” (Romans 7:18). Again, it is death to the flesh. Nail that, mortify it, put it in the place of death.

Where is the hope?” Christ is all and in all.” Christ lives in all of us. And it is designed for Him to be all that we need all the time. And certainly that is so much what walking according to the spirit is all about. As we get into Romans chapter 8 we will see. When people are struggling according to the flesh, this is a great place to turn. Turn to Romans 7, help people see the way out of the struggle of walking according to the flesh is not trying harder and what can I do. It is a humble plea for a Deliverer.

And psychological theory will so consistently concentrate on the “what” not the “Who;” what to do or how to justify self.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 16
Walking According to the Spirit

By
Bob Hoekstra

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We are continuing now in this section of our course called “Foundational Truths for Counseling God’s Way.” We looked a few studies ago at the matter of being in Adam or in Christ. All the problems of man source in Adam and all the remedies of God are given in Christ. Then chapter 6, united with Christ, giving us everything we need for time and eternity. However, Romans 7 and 8 are critical in the process, because, as we just viewed it together, Romans 7, walking according to the flesh and the struggle that develops, is where we really deeply, personally, with an ultimate deep-hearted cry for help, realize how totally we need the provisions that are given to us in Christ in Romans 6. And Romans 7, really every Christian has some treks through there. And it really shifts you from sort of a theological head knowledge, yeah it’s all there in Christ and united to Him, and I die with Him and raise with Him and I’m dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, amen. But what is this struggle about, you know? It is about the flesh. That is why I need so desperately everything described in chapter 6, because I can’t just now go out and do it for God. No, you have to depend on everything provided in Romans chapter 6.

So just as chapter 6 shows God’s remedy for the old man in Adam is the cross, it will show in Romans 8 that the remedy for the walk according to the flesh is to learn to walk according to the Spirit. It’s really God displacing each by a whole new resource that comes from Him alone.

Remember the way out of the Romans 7 struggle. It is a struggle of self-effort to please God and serve God on our own best effort was the humble cry for a Deliverer, the desperate, humble cry for a Deliverer. “Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). And the answer is, the song that the heart sings, thanks be to God, it’s through Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:57, “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory [How?] through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Not by giving us some technique we manage to do and win or maintain victory, but through a person—relating to the Lord Jesus Christ properly. By faith and dependence we walk in the gift, the gracious gift of the victory God has given us over sin and death.

Now Romans 8 really tells us how this occurs day by day. As we learn to walk according to the Spirit instead of according to the flesh.

Now the law of the Spirit is described in Romans 8:1-4,

> There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus…

There’s the law of the Spirit, this principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—

...has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

In Romans 7, the righteous requirement of the law is not being fulfilled in that struggling brother. But those who will not walk according to the flesh, not walk by human resource, not walk by best striving self-effort, but by dependence on the Spirit, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them. We’ll talk about that in a moment.
Now praise the Lord for Romans 8:1. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” That sure comes at a great time in the text of the Book of Romans too. “The good that I will to do I do not do. But the evil I will not to do, that I practice. And I’m striving. And I’m pleased with the law of God. I will do it. I will, I will. But there is this other principle warring against this law of my new mind in Christ, the mind of Christ dwelling in us. Romans 7:23 brings us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members. And we’re struggling in there.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). In that struggle, God isn’t condemning us saying, “Oh why did I ever bring you into My family? I was so sure I could count on you. That’s why I chose you!” No. That’s totally wrong. That’s the way the enemy thinks. “Boy, did you let God down! Why He thought I would do great? He thought I would be the first one never to walk according to the flesh? Or that maybe my flesh would have some good in it?” No. He wasn’t surprised at all. He knows that nothing good dwells in our flesh, our own human resource. There’s no condemnation. God is not ready to cast us off or chuck us out or be frustrated and wonder why we can’t do it.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Why? Romans 8:2, because “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

There are two laws, two principles, two spiritual realities operating upon a person, a born again believer. Not a person in general. There’s just one operating in an unbeliever. That’s the law of sin and death. But in a believer there’s the law of the spirit and the law of sin and death. The law of sin and death dwells in the humanity of everyone, including the flesh of a Christian. Their bodily tabernacle and all their human resources, mind, emotions, will and especially so related to the physical brain that’s part of the flesh resource. The law of sin and death dwells there. This is the principle that humanity is fallen and is vulnerable and inclined towards sin, if left to him or herself. It is the law of sin and death. It is kind of like a spiritual drag, or like a deadly spiritual gravity, just yanking you down into defeat. We all carry it with us.

Of course the enemy likes to say it’s us. Why can’t you do it like these other Christians? Look at them. They’re so victorious all the time. What is it with you? He’s always working on us. He knows the law of sin and death dwells in us, so he knows he can make a connection. “Oh yeah, why can’t I?” Praise God it’s exposed in the Word. This dwells in all of us. It’s not some just get beyond that. You know, they kind of yank it out by the roots or something and others just can’t seem to get rid of it. No, it dwells in all of us, until we see the Lord and are glorified, transformed.

So the law of sin and death dwells in all, including the flesh of believers. But in believers also there’s the law of the Spirit. Another law. This is another principle called the law of the Spirit, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is the fact that the Holy Spirit can take the very life that is in Christ Jesus and make it our resource to live by, if we walk according to the Spirit.

And that law has made me free from the law of sin and death. Whenever I walk in that, I’m not dragged down by the other because that is more powerful than the other. Just like “Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NASB). Well, greater is this law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus than this law of sin and death. If I walk by the greater the lesser doesn’t drag me down. It can’t exert its influence. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. So we live by that, we walk in victory. We don’t
have to fall back repeatedly, habitually, daily into the Romans 7 struggle. We can just every day get up, like in Luke 9:2, “Lord, it’s not my self-life today. I say no to that. It’s death to self. I take up my cross. That’s my hope. All I have—the only option I have left today, Lord, follow Jesus. And that’s the path I want to walk. I want to look to Him for His Spirit to bring life and victory and fruit and all of that.” That’s the normal Christian life. Again, not the average, it is the normal. It fits the norm of Scripture. It’s what we’re called to. It’s what is provided.

Of course again, if we get bound up in that self-struggle to try to do all the righteousness on our own, the only way out is through a humble plea for a Deliverer. “Oh, wretched man that I am!” It’s like an accentuated Luke 9:23. It is no-to-self with exclamation marks added. “Oh wretched man that I am!” Saying “no” to self, every day and clinging to the cross. Follow Jesus. That’s sufficient.

But when brought down into that struggle and trying harder and harder, it’s like the Lord says, “Let’s go through that real clear now. Remember that no to self? Let’s put it this way now—Oh wretched man that I am,” It probes the depths of the reality of our spiritual bankruptcy. It is because God gives grace to the humble. God opposes all these prideful procedures to make victory happen. Whether it’s kind of a charismania, speak it forth, name it and claim it. Or some other, “Well, you try the hardest to keep the laws.” So whether you are going religiously crazy or very sober and serious and self-help, it’s all flesh. It’s self-help and self-hope. God gives grace to the humble.

This law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, living by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, is taking the resurrection life of Christ and letting us live above this drag of defeat of the law of sin and death that is in our members. That sets us free. This certain fact that the resurrection life of Jesus is available to and released through every child of God whenever he or she depends on the Spirit of God to be their resource.

I love to share this illustration of how this works in the spiritual realm. I don’t remember how many years ago I heard this, I have never forgotten it. Think of the physical realm, how a physical lower law can be overruled by a physical higher law. And it is a beautiful picture of this double spiritual principle in Romans 8:2, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Take these big intercontinental jet passenger planes. They are gigantic, so many thousands of tons. I mean, they are just enormous. And you think, “Yeah, what operates that gravity? What can that plane do on its own without any other force exerting, you know, just the plane sitting there? To get free from that law of sin and death, that law of gravity that just locks that big plane right down to the ground. If there’s not some other force exerted for it, it is just locked there. Why? It is under the dominion of sin. It is under the dominion of gravity. It was created to fly, but it’s locked to the ground.

But you put that same plane subject to the law of aerodynamics, oh hey, no problem now. That same plane that without another force exerted in there or introduced, it’s just locked to the ground. But if you put it subject not to the law of gravity but to the law of aerodynamics, and it just soars like an eagle. Seven miles above the earth. What made all the difference? It not being subject to that lower law that defeated it or drug it down, but subject to this higher law that is more powerful that lifts it up. That works against, that kind of gives victory over the law of gravity in that sense.
And that’s the way it is to be with Christians. We all have the spiritual law of gravity dragging on us, the law of sin and death. It is built in our members, Romans 7. And we can never remove it until we are with the Lord. It will be gone forever. And it is dragging us down into defeat, deadness, striving, lack of victory, self-effort, and human resource only.

But we don’t have to walk that way. We can walk subject to this other law—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. This other principle that the Holy Spirit can give to the trusting heart, the very life of Christ, the life that is in Christ Jesus to be their resource to draw on. So they are not trying to create victory, they’re just walking in a victory already given. It is the life, the victorious life, the glorious overcoming life of Jesus Christ. And that is when we—trusting in the Holy Spirit instead of human resource and our best effort—we then instead of defeat and bondage, can mount up with wings like eagles. We can be given “hinds feet on high places” (Psalm 18:33) and get up above the valleys of defeat. We can live practically, experientially, personally, daily, more and more as those who are “seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

Remember that story, I may have told you of the Christian who said to the other Christian, “How are you doing?” when they met. The second Christian said, “Pretty good under the circumstances.” And the first one had a wise response. He said, “Well, what are you doing living under there? I thought you were seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. What are you doing living under there? Aren’t you to be living looking down on those circumstances?”

Let’s see, what does God think about this? What’s God going to do with this? How can God handle this? I mean, that’s tremendous. That’s a person walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh. The one walking in the flesh is drug down by the law of sin and death. The one walking in the Spirit is set free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Jesus had the totally non-circumstantial life. Circumstance never dictated how He behaved or talked or thought or related. Whatever He was doing He could still have one common testimony. Whether He was walking on the water, raising the dead, or being beaten, betrayed, lied about and murdered; He could still say, all the time, the same thing, “I do always those things that please My heavenly Father” (John 8:29). This was a totally non-circumstantial life, total victory.

That is the life that is in Christ Jesus. And we can live by the law of the Spirit of life, the Holy Spirit that is related to the life that’s in Christ Jesus. And we can walk by the Spirit and be given a share in that life, drawing on that life. You know, it is kind of like people who can’t get enough oxygen. Give them that tank and they do great. New life, you know! Well, it is a whole new resource we get. It is the life that’s in Christ Jesus [deep breath] we share in, we trust in, we depend on. As sure as we depend on breathing and oxygen for our physical life, we can through prayer and dependence and trust and walking in the Spirit, draw in the very life of Christ Jesus, spiritually. Not in a mechanical type of procedure, you know, but spiritually. In the realm of the heavenly kingdom it’s as real as breathing air. We can walk in the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It sets us free from the law of sin and death.

That is why, when one cries out, “Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?” The Spirit of God says, “It’s Christ Jesus and here is His life. Here is the victory. It’s right here. Just humbly receive it.” Oh thanks be to God it’s through Jesus Christ our Lord! Thanks be to God it’s not through trying harder.

And I’m not saying we don’t throw ourselves into the Christian life. But it is a spiritually discerned thing. We throw our whole being into it. But the dynamic in it and behind it is not self-effort. It is the Lord working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).
Then Romans 8:3, what the law could not do, the commandments, the demands that say be holy, be perfect, be as loving as Christ. “What the law could not do, God did.” How? It was by sending His Son. What the law could not do—that is, it could not cause man to obey it. The flesh is too weak. What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh. What is the weakness of the law? It is the flesh of man. The law demands that man live up to this standard. Man can’t do it. There is the weakness of the law because the flesh can’t respond. That’s why Hebrews 7:19 says the law makes nothing perfect. It just demands perfection. That is a pretty tough code. That is a pretty tough way to live, demanding perfection but unable to supply it.

What the law could not do, God did. God wasn’t through with the law. It was just part of His revelation of man’s need and His holiness. What the law couldn’t do, God did. How? He sent His own Son. One greater than the law is here! The One of whom the law speaks, Jesus Christ. God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. He wasn’t sinful. He just looked like any other man and all men are sinful, but He wasn’t. So that death was not involving His sin at all because He had none. But on account of sin, the fact that sin was among the family of man and needed to be dealt with, He came on account of sin. Your sin and my sin! He became an offering for sin. Then He condemned sin in the flesh. He judged and dealt with this indwelling sin in my flesh. It doesn’t have to have control. We can be free from it living by the death, resurrection, and spiritually-supplied life of Jesus Christ.

And He did all this in order that—here is God’s purpose and the great result and benefit for us—in order that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

Remember what the righteous requirement of the law is? Holiness. Be holy. Or you could say, love. What kind of love? Agape love. What is that like? Look at Jesus. If you can love exactly like Christ did, then you know, you don’t need a sacrifice. You are keeping the law and you’re living. That’s what life is supposed to be like. But no one can do that on their own. Love is of God. God is love. Love is of God.

But the righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us, lived out in us. This is an astounding verse. You and I, in whose flesh dwells no good thing (Romans 7:18) can nonetheless grow in godliness and practical daily righteousness. We can be more like Christ tomorrow than yesterday, or next year than last year. The righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us, lived out in us increasingly. That is if we will not walk according to the flesh, but rather, according to the Spirit and not live by means of human resource.

And again, this verse is a total indictment of the psychological, integrative path the church has taken. The church is coaching people and even charging a fee for it, of how to stay in the place of defeat. Isn’t that astounding? When we introduce psychological counseling, which entrenches self, appeals to the flesh, wants to strengthen self. You can do it, I know you can! Come on, you can. Here, try this. Think about that. Explain it this way or that way. No. How about God’s way? It is God’s life in Christ.

Walking according to the flesh, that is what the psychological theory helps people master. How to do that better and better. Teaches them how to manipulate, understand, self-justify, self-glorify, self-affirm, and have self-esteem. We are not to walk by human resource. The only way the righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us is by walking according to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is supplying the resurrected life of Jesus Christ, right in and through our experience.
This is what we need to counsel other people with. Help them see the difference between the walk according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. And help them learn to grow in a walk according to the Spirit. That produces holiness, not self-centeredness. It produces a Christ-like life, not an indulgent, lazy, self-justifying, self-serving life.

So in the Christian life, whether we sit or run, whether we wait or go, whether we know it clearly or wonder what is happening, we are to walk through it all in dependence on the Holy Spirit. People say, “Let go and let God.” Yeah, but get up and go and let God too. The whole realm is having God at work in your life.

How do you do that? It’s a whole different realm. It is whatever you do, just do it in dependence upon the Lord. And there is a time to be very quiet and still and inactive. There is a time to be very much on the move and the go. How do you know? Be led of the Spirit. It is about being related to a Person, not trying to put into practice certain principles and ideas and procedures. It is learning to relate to a Person, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

To help us in this, this chapter just presses right on contrasting the flesh with the Spirit in verses 5 through 8. Contrast between the flesh and the Spirit in Romans 8:5-8,

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be. [That’s how radical it is.] So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Flesh versus Spirit. Oh here again are four verses that you can almost have a fulltime counseling ministry with, just helping people think with God together, listening to the difference between the flesh-life and the Spirit. See, we are told the will of God, the standards of God, the righteousness of God, the work of God that takes place in those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. And then God just launches into it. Here is the flesh and where it leads and here is the Spirit and what it’s about.

Those who live according to the flesh, verse 5, they set their minds on things of the flesh. Those living by human resource and for self, by self, they set their mind on things of the flesh. What do they think about? Me, myself and sometimes I, you know, it’s my will, my success, my money, and my entertainment. They set their mind on the things of the flesh.

But those who live according to the Spirit, they set their mind on the things of the Spirit. Instead of their mind always on self, it’s more and more on Jesus Christ. Instead of thinking about my will it’s I’m thinking about His will. Instead of just getting into religion, which self is willing to do, those who live according to the Spirit want to get into God’s Word and get into relationship with Jesus. Instead of thinking about success all the time, the mind set on the Spirit thinks of prayer. Instead of entertainment, we are thinking of worship, fellowship, and service. Instead of thinking about earthly things all the time, we think about heavenly things and heaven’s relationship to earth.

Verse 6, “To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.”
To be carnally minded, thinking with carnal thoughts, on carnal, human, earthly, time bound, self-centered things, it is death. It produces anxiety, worry, fear, futility, pride, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency. It is death.

But the spiritually minded, oh that’s life and peace. That’s love and joy and spiritual vitality and spiritual tranquility and humility and dependence. I mean they are just as different as night and day. And it is all the difference between focus on the flesh or focus on the things of the Spirit.

See the mind set on the flesh in verse 7, the carnal mind, is enmity against God. Literally it is hostile toward God. The mind thinking on self and my will and religion and success and money and entertainment and earth and all that, it’s a mind in hostility toward God, and it is in rebellion toward God. It’s not subject to God. It won’t submit, in fact it can’t even submit. It needs to be nailed and crucified.

Verse 8 says, “So then those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

You know, without faith it’s impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). What really pleases God? Not the fleshly things of man. Remember Matthew 3:17 where the Father said, “This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” I think one of the implications of that is when the Father looks down from heaven above now, and He looks upon us of whom Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren, who will be like Him more and more, what pleases the Father? I think you could say, by implication, when the Father looks down and sees His beloved Son being formed in us, His heart must again say, “Oh that’s it! That’s My beloved Son. Oh, that’s so pleasing. That’s what I want.”

But those who are in the flesh, they cannot please God. The flesh shows humanity and self and sin and defeat. Such God-pleasing living though is available to us because the Holy Spirit lives in us. And these next verses talk about the indwelling Spirit of God.

Romans 8:9-11,

But you are not in the flesh [the bottom line story about Christians] but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. [No Holy Spirit dwelling within, you cannot be a Christian. Christians, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you.] And if Christ in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The indwelling Spirit of God in verse 9, since the Holy Spirit lives in us, we are not in that sense, in the flesh, the way the world is just simply and exclusively in the flesh. That would mean there is no Holy Spirit in us, then we cannot be a Christian. The Spirit lives in every believer.

Now if Christ is in you, verse 10—and He is. Since He is, you could read that. Since He is, though the body is dead, it’s a sinful, fallen, dying body. Same body we have now, same one we had before we were saved. The law of sin and death is in it. It is wasting away. Sorry to spoil your day, but it will not be basically improving the rest of the way out. The outer man is decaying, but the Spirit is alive. The inner man lives. He lives by the life of Christ within.
The wonderful thing is even though these bodies of ours are fallen and fading and gravity is
winning, but look at verse 11, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in
you, [indwelling you is the Spirit of resurrection] He who raised Christ from the dead will also
give life to your mortal bodies [How?] through His Spirit who indwells.”

The indwelling Spirit can display resurrected life in and through us. Remember some of us have
studied together 2 Corinthians 4:7, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.” These bodies are
so earthen. But the heavenly, Holy Spirit of God lives in us. And He can quicken our mortal
bodies. He can give life to them. He can sustain us here on this earth in our physical bodies by
supplying a life that sustains. We Christians aren’t just running on natural human life. We have
the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of resurrection who can give life to our mortal bodies. You know, He
can just keep us going when the going gets tough by the indwelling Spirit of God.

And then of course in all of this, we want to be led by this indwelling Holy Spirit. Romans 8:12-
14, “Therefore brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh…."

We don’t owe anything to the flesh. You know, a man’s got to do what a man’s got to do. Well,
there are a lot of things a man’s got to do that he doesn’t have to do, that he shouldn’t do, you
know. And the Lord can prevent him from doing. Well, I’m just human.” Well yes, that’s why
you need to live by the life of Christ. “Well, nobody’s perfect.” That’s right! That’s why we need
to draw on that perfect life. We owe nothing to the flesh. We don’t need to excuse it. “I’m not
Christ, you know.” Yes, but He lives in us, doesn’t He? So there can be ongoing progress and
change and maturing and fruit and victory because it doesn’t depend on us. We are debtors not to
the flesh, to live according to the flesh. We don’t have to get locked into that pattern.

Romans 8:13-14,

> For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to
death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of
God, these are sons of God.

Being a child of God involves being led by the Spirit of God. Not charting our own course, but
letting the Spirit lead. We owe no allegiance, we have no reason why we have to give attention to
fleshly living or fleshly thinking.

Verse 13, drawing on fleshly resources. If you live by the flesh, if you aim at fleshly goals, draw
on fleshly resources, you’ll die. This is not just talking physical here, I’m sure, but spiritual
deadness, spiritual dullness. Spiritual defeat always comes with that. But, if by the Spirit you put
to death the deeds of the flesh—if by the work of the Holy Spirit in us we want those deeds of the
flesh crucified, the deeds of the body and the way of man, crucified. You know, take up your
cross daily and you will live. If by the Spirit, if our hope and resource is the Holy Spirit, and by
the Spirit we are saying no to the things of the flesh, agreeing with God concerning the
bankruptcy of the flesh, the deeds of the body, the desires of the ways of the flesh, we’ll live.
We’ll have spiritual vitality.

But again, it is by the Spirit. If by the Spirit you put to death. It’s not, “I will crucify myself.”
What are you going to do after you nail one hand? Well, there you go. It’s not comfortable but it
doesn’t solve the problem either, you know. We can’t nail ourselves. But if by the Spirit—“Oh
Lord God, by Your Holy Spirit, I want these fleshly temptations, these fleshly inclinations of my
body and my old brain, I just want them nailed, just to the cross of Christ. Just left there where
that old man died with Christ. That’s what I desire, Lord.” You’ll live. You’ll just find more and
more abundant life. As you are willing to walk that way and I’m willing to walk that way, we find more life.

It’s a matter, again, of life and death, not just religious procedure or holding a reputation or something. It is life and death, depending on flesh or Spirit, Spirit or flesh. Such people then, are the ones led by the Spirit of God and they are the sons of God. They are demonstrating that they are God’s children. They are being led by the Spirit.

A person led by the flesh gives no real demonstration or indication to the world or to other Christians that they are really believers. I tell you, I know I’m a Christian. I’ll prove it to you. I have the card I signed the night I walked the aisle, twenty-eight years ago. “Well, why do so many wonder if you’re born again?” “I don’t know because I can prove it right here.” Yeah, but are you led by the Spirit? “Well, who knows how that works anyway?” Well, God does. And He’s written to us. He wants to teach us. I mean, that’s how—“these are the children of God, those who are led by the Spirit. Not procedure. Not self-energy. Not human resource, but led by the Spirit and guided right through life by the Spirit of God.

My goodness, how do you do that? Well, “the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). Lord, by Your Spirit, be my shepherd and my guide this day. It’s not that complicated. It comes back to humility, faith, trust, dependence. Not I but Christ.

In conclusion, a few Scriptures just to restate very quickly, briefly here what these Scriptures have said.

Galatians 5:16, “I say then: walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.”

You mean I don’t have to fight and beat and struggle against the flesh? No. Walk in the Spirit and you won’t fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The Spirit leads us in victory over that.

In 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit [the life-giving Spirit of the new covenant] and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.” Where the Holy Spirit is given room to work in a life, a church, a work, a ministry, a family, there is liberty. There is just freedom, including freedom from the flesh, freedom from defeat.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, speaking of God, “Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

The letter kills. The legalistic, religious appeal to the flesh to be perfect like God. “Come on, try harder. You know you can. You’ve let God down. You’ve let us down. You’ve let your family, your church, the pastor….” Well, you know, it might produce all kinds of heavy motivations of guilt and condemnation and even striving to do better. But the letter kills. Hey, here’s the standard and you’ve got to do it, it kills. Because don’t forget the letter says, “Be holy, be perfect.” We’re back to the flesh again, the flesh trying to live up to the holy life of Christ.

It’s the Spirit who gives life. He gives it. We are talking grace. Not earning it He gives life. It is a gift. Eternal life is a gift from the Lord. Not only initially, sending is bound for heaven. But daily letting us walk in vitality instead of deadness of defeat.

Then last is Ephesians 5:18, “And do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation. But be filled with the Spirit.”
Crying out to God is so right in light of that verse. *Lord, fill our lives with Your life-giving presence, Your life-giving Holy Spirit. Flood us. Control us. Shine out through us. Pour the life of Christ into us and out of us toward others.*

These are foundational truths, knowing the difference between walking according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. Romans 8 is a work of the Holy Spirit. God’s answer to the fleshly struggling, defeated Christian who wonders, “Why can’t I walk in victory?” This is God’s answer. Thanks be to God it’s through Jesus Christ the victory comes. How is that supplied day by day, that victory in Christ? It is by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is there to reveal Christ to us and supply His life through us.

Can you see taking these truths to minister personally one to another in the church? Troubled, struggling people come you say, “Let’s go to Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8.” Or if some excited, eager, humble, hungry, wanting to move-on Christians come, you don’t just hype them up a little higher. Hey, get grounded on these things. God’s going to answer that desire in you this way. Not through your own flesh. Not through Adam’s line and resource, but in Christ. Yeah, you’ll find if you get striving in the flesh, you are on your own resource and you are drug down. But there is always this law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that’s made you free from the law of sin and death. What fantastic foundational truths to counsel people with because they speak into every situation of life. And again it is not that we can’t give specific, particular words, but even with that I think it is great to add this. And often you don’t have that Proverbs 18:12 or whatever come into mind, you know. How about running to Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8? Give them foundation of life to stand on.

Remember again, in seeking counsel, giving counsel, this is the kind of counsel God wants. Point here and watch out for psychological theory integrating the flesh right back into a life that’s to be only of the Spirit.

Let’s pray together.

_Lord, we thank You for speaking so profoundly on these matters in Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8. Lord, may we hear, believe, receive, stand on, count on, these glorious truths and may they be working up through our lives into every arena and extremity of our thinking, living, talking, relating. Our values, priorities, our resources we draw on, that we might be those, Lord, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. And have the Holy Spirit taking the life that is in Christ, making it our actual, daily, experiential, personal, walk on this planet Earth experience. Christ living in us the hope of glory. And teach us, Lord, how to share this with others when they come either struggling or excited and hopeful, that they might have the foundation of truth, the truth of Christ that sets them free. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen._
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 17
Who We Are in Christ

By
Bob Hoekstra

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All right, let’s pray.

*Lord, again we come seeking You. You’ve told us to pray without ceasing, pray about everything. And Lord, especially now as we come into Your Word, we don’t want to do it in as an academic exercise of the mind. We want to come by the Spirit of God, having our spirits exercised, built up in Christ. We come humbling ourselves, Lord, confessing our need for You as our Wonderful Counselor, our need to be counseled. Lord, we all need to have a word of counsel from You in many general ways and particular ways. Lord, we come desiring to be built up too. Others are looking to us for direction at times. And we’re coming to be warned. We want to be alert to the ways of man that are infiltrating the church of Jesus Christ on many levels. And we ask You to pour out Your Spirit in our time together in the Word and accomplish the big picture work You want to do, right down to the details of our lives. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

We’re continuing in the foundational truths for counseling God’s way. We are looking at our fifth study now, out of eight units of study, under “Foundational Truths for Counseling God’s Way.” Asking God to show us some of these foundational realities that we are to stand upon and grow in. And we are asking the Lord to equip us to use these when folks come to us for a word of counsel. And sometimes we won’t be able to share a specific, particularized word of counsel—when you are in this situation, here is what God says as far as how to proceed. And those are certainly great times to share foundational truths, but also, beyond that, these are great truths to share along with particular, specific counsel.

We looked at the vital issues, they are just great to have in our hearts and lives when we have no particular, specific word for folks and still be able to edify them. But these foundational truths, they are just great to share often, using the particular issue that stirs someone to seek counsel from the Lord, to take them beyond just the specific issue they are facing to just some of the bigger issues of life. Then they will be more equipped, not only to go through what they are facing, but for other things that come down the road. And it really is my heart that it’s great and it’s blessed of the Lord to be watching for opportunities to share foundational truths.

Here is a very important one in the Scriptures. Again, one that is not heard a lot in the teaching of the Word of God. I didn’t even notice it for years as a Christian, or for years as a pastor. Once the Lord began to catch my eye on it, I noticed that the Lord speaks in the Scriptures much on this subject. And that is, who we are in Christ. It is a critical foundational issue because that is the person the Lord is wanting to deal with, who we are in Christ. Any other perspective on ourselves the Lord just wants crucified, buried, and move away from that. And yet so many people, and many in the church of Jesus Christ, do not see their lives as what has happened now that they are in Christ. They are still thinking of that long history from physical birth up to today.

So many counseling situations involve confusion in the lives of believers concerning who they are. Sometimes people will be in a predicament and get a little hot tempered and they will say something like, “Well that’s just my Irish temper. I’ll never change.” Well, that is not right and whether that came to you from Ireland or elsewhere that is not your identity. It ultimately came from Adam and it is stirred up by the enemy. And it is sure not your identity. It’s just some problem you are facing.
Others say to people, “I’m sorry but with your bad upbringing or with your bad adult experiences, or with your years of not growing as a Christian, and on and on it goes. Then they might add, “You’re just marked for life the way you are. That’s just how it’s going to be.”

That is not right. That is totally humanistic thinking. It flies right into the face about who we are in Christ. The devil or others might pound on us and say, “You’re a failure. You always were. You always will be. That’s just you.” No. If we are in Christ that is not just us! Sure, we may have struggled with some defeats and might be struggling right now, but that is still not our identity. It’s just a matter of growth and learning and maturing and victory we have yet to experience.

Believers in Jesus Christ are not who they were before they came to Jesus Christ. They are not. They may struggle with some of the same matters, but they are not the same person and that is a vast difference.

I think right now people say in the twelve-step movements things like, “I am a recovering alcoholic.” Well, if you’re a born again believer, that is not your identity. And I would urge you, if others have coaxed you and coached you to say that, as you are trying to be set free or get or wiggle loose from something like that, that is not your identity. You may be a believer who is stumbling in drunkenness or temptation toward indulgence in alcohol, but you are not a recovering alcoholic. That’s not your identity. That’s not who you are.

We are not even who we were, maybe in carnal days before a deep commitment to Christ took hold of our lives. Our identity in Christ is not a fleshy, carnal believer. That is not our identity, that is a problem of lack of growth or disobedience or rebellion or other things, but it is not our identity.

Believers in Jesus Christ are not who other people say they are. “Oh, you are just the greatest thing to ever hit the kingdom of God.” No, that is Jesus! Wrong. Or “You are the most pitiful excuse for a Christian I ever saw.” Well, surely there is one worse somewhere. Anyway that is not our identity. That just might be where we are struggling or learning or growing, but that’s not who we are.

We are certainly not who Satan says we are. He’s a liar. He won’t deal honestly. He won’t tell us who we are. He’ll tell us everything from puffing us up like a hot air balloon, to trying to mash us out like a pancake under a steam roller, to try and immobilize us. But he won’t tell us who we are.

Who are we? We are who God says we are in His Word. That is who we are. We don’t walk by circumstances, by experience, even by our own history, or by feelings. We walk by faith. And faith is in God and His Word.

We also don’t have to get caught up in the crazy things that people do to, as they say, “find themselves.” You know, people do bazaar things. I often think of, what to me is one of the most bazaar kind of things and you see it a lot. You know a man married thirty years leaving a wife and six kids and going off to Tibet somewhere or something. You know and someone tracks him down and he’s sitting over there on mountaintops “oohming” and contemplating on his navel and thinking maybe the Dalai Lama might come by or something. Why would you do something like that? And the answer is supposed to be so sane, so contemporary, so intellectual, and so responsible. “Well, I’m just trying to find myself.”
Well, we can understand why the world would do insane things to try and find an identity. But Christians do things just about as crazy. That isn’t how we find out who we are. We find out who we are by God telling us who we are. And then we learn to walk in it. We don’t go out and try to walk some way that kind of works and say, “Oh that is what I am, a rodeo cowboy. I thought I was a preacher, but no, I’m a rodeo cowboy.” No, we let the Lord tell us who we are. If the Lord tells you that you are a rodeo cowboy, that’s perfect. But if you just found something that’s kind of fun and kind of works and kind of exciting, it gave you some kicks and everybody cheered you on—that is not the way to find a life. Let’s find what the Lord says we are.

For example, 2 Corinthians 5:17 is one of these amazing places in Scripture that tell us who we are in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

See, this is how we know who we are. We are new creatures in Christ because the Lord tells us we are. And sometimes that will seem to fly in the face of experience or feeling. “Hey, I don’t feel so new. I’m not walking so new right now. I must not be a new creature in Christ.” Wrong! You are a new creature in Christ, but maybe not walking in it in fullness, or significance yet. And the same with others who come to us trying to find who they are. Let’s take them to the Word of God.

And see the Word speaks straightforward. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ….” Okay, it is talking about every Christian. “…He is a new creation.” That is talking about identity. Not just what you do, but what you are. And we will see it’s important to know who we are, not for self-serving or self-centered reasons. That’s why the world wants to know who they are, or build an identity. It’s for self. We want to know who we are in Christ so we can walk in what God wants us to walk in. So we can relate to the Lord in the way He has created us to relate. That is why and it is not for self-serving, self-centered, self-introspective reasons. It’s ultimately to know and please and serve and glorify the Lord.

We are new creatures in Christ. If anyone is in Christ—it applies to every believer. If we are in Christ, then that is where we now live. We now live in Christ. Maybe we have mentioned pictures like this. But we are in Christ, living in Him and by His life and His resources, as surely as a fish lives in the ocean and on the resources of the ocean. We live in Christ. It’s where we live and how we live spiritually. You can’t see it. You can’t always feel it, but we don’t walk by sight, we walk by faith. We walk by trusting and believing what God has says.

We are new creatures. Christians, those who are born again are new creations. We are a new person. What often fools us is that we still live in this same old tent, the same body. You know, we tell people, “I’m a new person. I’ve been born again.” And they think we are talking religious reformation because they look at us and go, “You’re the same person.” You look the same. You walk the same. Talk the same, a little bit. Your talk’s getting a little weird. It is losing some of its color, but you’re the same person. No, we’re just living in the same tent with a new tenant.

And what fools us so often is not so much the same tent, this house we live in, the physical body, but what kind of gets us is that we still have the same physical brain that we had before we were saved. Boy, that’s where the rub is. And we will talk about that in our next unit of study, “Renewing of the Mind.” We still have the same old brain, but a new person now having to deal with that brain.
We are new spiritual beings. We are not the old person we were reformed or reshaped. We literally have a new life in Christ. We are new creatures in Christ. In Him, we are made new. And because we’re in Christ, we’re brand new people. We have a new life. We say it right, “I’ve been born again. I’ve been born of God by the Spirit from above.” And then we talk about ourselves, we deal with problems and issues as though we are the same old person we always were. And people are digging back in there to explain what’s going on here. That’s not God’s way, that’s the world’s way. And we’ll talk more and more about that. It’s a critical issue.

We say, “I’ve been born again.” Then we spend all our time talking about something that happened before we were born. You wonder if we believe in reincarnation or something, you know? I’m a new creature in Christ, born again. And then, “Well, let me tell you what happened to me back before I was saved. And I just can’t get over it and I can’t shake it. And it’s just shaped me. Wait a minute! Have you been born again or haven’t you? Are you a new creature or aren’t you? Well, I don’t know. What are you talking about? Well, what does God say about you? And are you spending all your time thinking and talking about things that happened to someone that got crucified on the cross of Christ?

I mean, it really changes things radically, knowing who we are in Christ. We are who God says we are. On the basis of who Christ is, what Christ has done, and what Christ has provided for us and our new place and position in Him changes everything.

“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). One of the great ways God sets us free from that old life is He tells us all about the new one, so we can walk in it. Not so we can spend all of our Christian experience trying to rehash, reshape, reform the old man in Adam. That new creature in Christ is the life that is to get developed.

How did we get in Christ?

Ephesians 1:13,

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

We came in Him through trusting in the word of truth, the Gospel. In whom we believed and then we are sealed by the Spirit, put in Christ and sealed, marked, possessed, gathered there, held, owned by God Himself. We got in Him by faith and we are to live by faith.

We’re new creatures in Christ. Back to 2 Corinthians 5:17, “And if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation….”. And here’s some of the implications. “…old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” The old things have passed away, which is the old life in Adam. The old life we had before we came to Christ. It has passed away. It is gone, as far as God is concerned. Sure, it might still be in our memory bank. Sure, it might be natural and easy to just fall into those patterns of walking, thinking, relating. But as far as God is concerned, He crucified that life and buried it and gave us a whole new life to develop before Him. The old things have passed away.

New things have come. Things in Christ are now ours: a new identity, a new us, new resources, new opportunities, and new lessons to learn.

Here are some of the old/new contrasts. In the old life we were dead in sins; in the new life we are alive in Christ. See the old and the new again. The old man was crucified; and then we were
raised to newness of life. Another contrast is that old/new. Old things have passed away; new things have come. In the old life, we walked in transgressions and were transgressors; now we are forgiven. In the old life we were spiritually blind; but now we see. Can you remember people trying to explain to you things about the kingdom of God before? And they may have even been yelling at you. “Don’t you see this; don’t you see this!” You know, we’re going, with no eyes, “No, I just don’t see it.” It is because we were blind! Now we are excited and talking about the things we couldn’t see then. We’re telling others and they are going, “What? What?” Now we see. Things that made no sense before at all, now excite us. We used to think people were weird. Now we are the weird ones.

Old and new again! We once were held captive; now we’re set free. We once were far off; now we are brought near. These are major changes. We once could operate in nothing but the deeds of the flesh. That was our best hope. Now we can walk in the fruit of the Spirit. We once were citizens of earth alone. Hell was our destiny. That has changed now, we are actually citizens of heaven.

You know that our hometown is actually heavenly Jerusalem? We are strangers. We are aliens. A lot of us are getting homesick. This world is not our home, the old song used to say, “I’m just passin’ through.” I mean, that is absolutely right. We are pilgrims. We are sojourners. This used to be our turf. This was where we belonged. And we learned how to survive here. Now we can’t wait to get out of here. We are waiting to head home. And we are on the way and there are a lot of things to learn on the way. There are a lot of things to do in the name of the Lord, but it has all changed now that we are in Christ. We are new creatures.

You might want to add here Colossians 3:3. See, we once had a life we got from Adam. And we and others kind of labored to develop it. Now look at Colossians 3:3, “For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Colossians 3:3 is an amazing truth. You and I are believers and we died. Who we were before, the independent, old, Adamic us, we died with Christ on the cross. And your life, your new life, is hidden with Christ in God. We will talk a lot about that also in our time on “The Renewing of the Mind.” Your life is hidden with Christ in God. The world says, “Find a life.” Well, the world is out scurrying to make one up. We are to find a life, but we are already told where it is hidden. Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The amazing thing is that the more we get to know the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we dig into who He is and what He has done and what He has provided, the more we find the life that we are to and can learn to walk in down here. We learn so much to make a way for ourselves with ingenuity and a knack here and a trick there and a little persuasion there and a little overwhelming here. And if need be, yeah, maybe now and then a little begging here. Whatever would work. And it’s too easy as a Christian to keep on trudging along that way. Where the life that is to be unfolded as our experience is found, your life is hidden with Christ in God. It is not one we sort of discover by putting it together piece by piece. We pursue Christ, get to know Him, who He is and what He has done and we find in Him the life that we draw on and walk in. It’s so different than we ever knew before. It’s too easy to approach the Christian life the same way we approach the old life. But we are new creatures in Christ.

We better press on here. We have a lot of things to look at. This is one you could just almost camp on until the Rapture. But we have to touch on the first part of verse 4 though, “When Christ, who is our life appears....” The verse is talking about the return of the Lord, but look at this
phrase of truth, “Christ, who is our life.” If anyone tells you to go find a life, the way to rightly respond is, “I am. I’m pursuing Jesus Christ. He is my life.”

Everyone knows that Jesus Christ gives us eternal life. But few Christians stop to notice the Scriptures defining that life as Christ Himself sharing His life with us. He doesn’t just say, “Boom, you’re alive forevermore. Now go make it work. Go turn it into a life.” He is our life as sure as the vine is the life of the branch. In fact, the Lord uses that kind of language. He is our life. We learn to draw on His life to walk and talk and think and decide and relate. Again, it’s Christ living in us and through us. Those are all implications of being new creatures. The old life died. A new life is given to us. But it’s hidden with Christ in God.

It may be a good point just to take a warning that psychological counseling cannot remove the old or provide the new in its place. Psychological theory cannot help develop the new life. All psychological theory can do is give you a shovel of introspection to dig into your own life. And maybe a baseball bat of blame to swing at others. That’s where psychological theory fits in. It cannot remove the old life or give a new life.

And again I ask you, at this point maybe rhetorically, but why is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ so intrigued and excited about psychological theory? Well, a lot of it relates to Biblical illiteracy. This is a shame on us! We are just not spending time listening to God, letting Him tell us the way it is and the way it isn’t. The American church is in a rage on this. I was on the phone this morning talking to my partner and friend that worked with me at Calvary Chapel of Irvine, and man after thirty or forty minutes on the phone we had each other so riled up we were about ready to go out and conquer the world in the name of the Lord, to clean house. Where’s our whip? We’ll turn over these merchandising tables of psychological counseling and all. When you just get to thinking out loud with someone on it, and you can kind of go nuts. Have we totally lost our spiritual minds? And the weird people in the church world, to other church people, are those who aren’t buying into and excited about psychological theory. Yet the more I look at it I can’t believe I wasn’t shocked twenty-five years ago, when I first noticed it being used in the church. I thought it was kind of clever. Yeah, clever of Satan! What a clever undermining of the Gospel and the cross of discipleship.

Just taking one look at who we are here in Christ, new creatures in Christ, how is Freud or Jung or Adler, Erickson, Maslow, any of them, how are they, who were godless geniuses and the Spirit of God not in them, how are they going to offer anything that can provide this or improve on it? They can’t. They are dealing with a life that must go to the cross and get buried. Not analyzed through therapy. Not worked on, but executed. And how about the new life in Christ? What can they offer to Jesus Christ to improve Him? He’s our life. Are we going to go to them to have them tell us how to live like Christ? There’s no way! It cannot be!

I don’t want to be a raving maniac, but I do feel like raving. I tell you this thing just pounds on my heart. The only thing that runs a close race in my own life of just perplexity to just wanting to shout, “Wait a minute!” is Christians and churches and leaders that want to build ministries and Christian lives by the law of God instead of by the grace of God. Both of them are just massively doubly perplexing to me. Now, I’m not condemning them because I did both. I’m not saying, “How could they do it?” I mean, but those who have had their eyes even slightly opened, you know, where you just get a peak, a sliver of light on these, you can’t stop seeking more or shouting out, “Whoa” when you see another path. It’s critical. We are not talking about the things that make denominations, you know. Are you going to baptize this way? Are you going to do your church government this way? We are talking about spiritual life or death. Oh, we need to know these things and walk in them and shout them abroad.
Here’s another old/new and it leads us to the next issue of who we are in Christ. We were by nature sinners. Do you know what we are now by nature? Saints. “Me?” Yeah. How do we know that? Not by some higher echelon of religious activity or wonders you have performed, but because God tells you that is your identity.

Philippians 1:1,

Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops [that is, the elders] and deacons [the church leaders].

That could just as well have been said to all believers in Jesus. It could just as well have been said, to all disciples following Jesus Christ. This is just a synonymous term giving a different aspect of the identity of a Christian.

I know we so often say things like, “Well, after all we’re just forgiven sinners.” A lot of dear teachers I respect greatly say that. I’ve said it. I personally don’t say it anymore because I don’t think that gets at the heart of our identity. Yes, it is our history, but it is not who we are now. We aren’t just forgiven sinners. That would be a weak identity. It would mean by nature you’re still a sinner and the basic thing about you is that you are just prone to sin. Now I’m not saying our flesh is not looking for a chance to be indulged and to sin. I’m talking about our nature. Who are we? We are saints. All it means is “holy ones” or “set apart ones.” We’re not in Adam anymore. We are in Christ. And since we are in Christ, who is the Holy One, we are saints, which just means “set apart holy ones.” That’s all. It doesn’t mean we have arrived. It doesn’t mean we never sin. It doesn’t mean any of that. It just means we have a different identity now.

See, if we were just sinners, forgiven, we could praise God say, my sin will never be held against me. But I have no hope of change because I’m just a sinner. And what do sinners do? They just sin, you know. So forget trying to change me if that’s my identity. That is not our identity. That touches on our history that was changed at the cross. And I know we still have a problem carrying about with us. I think the Scriptures call it “flesh.” Many speak of it as the old nature. I think it’s more accurate Biblically from Romans 7 and elsewhere like Galatians, to describe it as “the flesh.” But maybe we need to hear more studies on the new nature in Christ. That’s the one that has capacity in the Lord to mature and grow and become more and more like Christ. The flesh can never change. It never will. The old man had to be executed.

So where does the growth and development occur? In the new nature that can keep growing up in the life it’s receiving from Christ. It has to do with who we are, our very essence, our being, our identity. Sure, we still sin but we don’t have to sin tomorrow, as much as we did yesterday. We don’t have to sin next year, as much as last year. And this in no way says that we are going to be reaching sinless perfection here upon this earth. No way. Why? It is because the flesh will always be with us, including the fleshy brain. We’ll talk more about that.

But now that we have a new nature, a new identity, it does mean we can grow. We can. We can love God more next year than this year, and have more fruit five years down the road, if the Lord does not return, than we had the last five years because we are new creatures, joined to the Lord Himself. Saints in Christ Jesus. We are saints because of Jesus Christ. We’re holy ones. We have new righteous natures because of Christ. It is not our own. This is not us, it’s what Christ gives us. Philippians 3:9, the end of verse 8 says, “…that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law.”
How would you like to have a righteousness measured by how well you do before the law, and then that’s how you could relate to God. That’s what we were talking about earlier. That would just spiritually suffocate every Christian, because no one can live up to the perfect standard of the law. “Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.” See, that’s the righteousness we grow in, the righteousness which is from God. That’s why we can grow in godliness because it comes to us from God. It isn’t something we try to manufacture and paste on. It’s something we draw from our relationship with and in the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith.

The more we trust in Him, trust in who He is, what He’s done, what He has said, what He has promised and what He offers, we grow in that new life in Christ.

We are saints. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. That is credited to our heavenly account to stand before God. But also that righteousness is imparted to us now. Praise God for imputed righteousness! It lets us have a “righteousness account” acceptable in heaven before God. In other words, we can come before the Father clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But let me ask you something. How about down here on earth in daily living? It isn’t imputed righteousness we draw on, it’s imparted righteousness. And I praise God for imputed righteousness, that in heaven I’m righteous like Christ before the Father. There is nothing barring our relationship.

What about while we walk down here, to please and serve Him? It has to be related to the same righteousness. But not imputed in a heavenly account it is imparted in an earthly walk. The righteousness that lets us stand before the Father is the righteousness that’s in the very life of Christ. Well, what’s going to let us walk in righteousness down here practically? The same life imparted to us. The same life flowing through us that, as it were, was credited to our heavenly bank account. It is the same life drawn on and spent down here. That’s how we live down here. That’s how we grow.

Christ’s holy life is now beating in our spiritual heart of hearts, in our spirit where the Holy Spirit dwells. And that is where Christ can be our portion to draw on in thinking, in behaving, in speaking, and in relating. You know it is “…Christ in us is our hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). That is our hope of a glorious life down here. We are also saints. New creatures, it is part of our identity. It is who we are in Christ. We are also saints, not because of our great performance, but because of who we live in and whose righteousness is ours to draw upon.

Here’s another old versus new that leads to the next issue. In the old life we had no sufficient resource to draw upon. Now, we are branches in the true vine. It’s part of our identity.

Ephesians 2:10, old/new contrast. In our old life we tried to craft and shape a life for ourselves. We’ve touched on that earlier. Now we’re God’s handiwork.

Ephesians 2:10,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

“We are”—that is another way to know who we are in Christ, whenever there is a Biblical statement, inspired by the Spirit, confessed by us, the believing family of God. We are His workmanship. That is how we know who we are.
We are the saints, we’re told. We are new creatures in Christ. We also are God’s handiwork. It is our identity. It is who we are. It’s not what we are trying to do, it’s who we are, His handiwork, His artwork, His project. God is reshaping us. His poema. That is the word from which we get poem directly. Poema, we are His work of art. We are created in Christ Jesus. Created. Made new. And then we are developed by being placed in His Son. That’s how we are made new and made His handiwork, a creative work of God the Creator.

We are created for good works, not by good works. The two previous verses make that clear. “But for good works.” We aren’t saved by good works; but we are saved for good works, which God prepared beforehand. Before He created us and before we do any good works, He already created the good works that we are to experience. What does He want us to do?—“that we should walk in them.”

Part of our identity is we are God’s creative handiwork. See, in the world you have to shape your own life or maybe get others to give you a little help. In the kingdom of God you can become a handiwork of God. What are you essentially or in essence, innately? What is your very nature? This is part of who you are, who I am. We are God’s ongoing art project, in construction. It is kind of exciting isn’t it? It isn’t, “Hey, come on. Will you change yourself?” No I tried that for years. I couldn’t do it then. I can’t do it now. But here is my hope. I’m God’s handiwork. Yeah, I’m a jar of clay, but He is shaping me. Sometimes we feel the pressures here and there. “Whoa!” Yeah, well, that’s part of the shaping. All the while spinning, you know. A lot of those stresses and stretches, that’s just God shaping us, as He’s pumping that wheel of life and us on it. We are God’s handiwork. That is our very nature.

And then back to this other old versus new. We had no sufficient resource to draw on in the old life. Now in the new life we are branches in the true vine. In John 15: 1, Jesus says, “I am the true vine.” Verse 5, “I am the vine, you are the branches.”

See, it’s not some subtle kind of esoteric, “I’ll tell you who you are.” And then I grab some obscure phrase out of Numbers or the Song of Solomon or something. And this is your identity. How could it be more straight forward? “You are the branches.” Lord, who am I? I’m trying to find myself? Who am I? “You are the branches.” Lord, I just can’t get it. I’m just trying to find a life. “You are the branches.” I mean, it is just as straight forward as it can be. There is no mystery here. God just lays it out.

And even in light of the fact that the kingdom of heaven is unseen by the natural eye, He gives us physical, visible illustrations to help us understand. He is the vine. We are the branches. “He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). He’s the true vine, the true source of life. We are the branches. We find our life in Him. He wants us to be fruitful. We yearn to be fruitful, but we don’t produce any of the fruit. We just bear it on the limbs of our Christian life, the branch that we are. He produces it and we just let it grow there. How? It is by abiding in Him.

See, it is so critical to know who we are in Christ because it tells us how to relate to the Lord. It tells us what true life is and where it comes from and how it’s supposed to grow. If we don’t find out from the Lord who we are in Christ, you know what we’ll do? We’ll shape an identity around the guidelines and the rules that we grew up with. And our goal will probably be to be a self-made man, like every good American Christian longs to be. A self-made man! Doesn’t that have a hollow ring when you read that we are God’s handiwork? It’s like saying, “Lord, I’ll take over
the shaping of this vessel. Thank You.” I mean, that’s what it comes down to. We’re branches in
the true vine. We find our life in that vine.

Also, part of our identity—we are ambassadors for Christ. In the old life we had no significant
purpose in life. Why were we here? What were we doing? Nothing! Wasting our existence! Now
here is part of our identity that gives us purpose. We are ambassadors for Christ. People get so
excited, you know. And when ambassadors go from country to country. Oh, trumpets, red carpets,
armies.

Look at this, 2 Corinthians 5:20, there is our identity, ambassadors for Christ. Wow, “…as though
God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

What is our identity? We’re ambassadors for Christ. Ambassadors represent their homeland in a
foreign land. That’s us. We represent the heavenly kingdom in this foreign earthly land. Man gets
so excited over human ambassadors. My goodness, the King of kings and Lord of lords sent us!
And we don’t have to be offended that they don’t roll out the red carpet, you know. All we’re
asking is that they’ll let us wash their feet anyway. We are not looking for crowns, you know, just
let us serve. We are ambassadors for Christ. We are here to represent the kingdom of the Lord
Jesus Christ, live in His name, speak in His name, demonstrate His life, that others might leave
this dry and weary land and get a birthplace in the heavenly kingdom. It’s part of our identity.

Another old/new, in the old life we had no way to ever become a whole person. There was no
way. Well, old things like that are passed away. New things have come. Now we are complete in
Christ. This is a mindblower, this one.

Who are you? In Christ you are a complete person. It’s part of your identity, your very being.
Colossians 2:9-10,

> For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete
> in Him.

Complete. Whole. Are complete means a present, ongoing condition. You’re not trying to be a
whole person, in Christ you are. Why? It is because in Him all the fullness dwells. Everything it
takes to have a full life is in Christ and you and I live in Christ. So, in Him, we have a whole, full,
complete life. We are whole. There’s nothing missing. And to the extent that we draw on life
from Him, wholeness of life, completeness of life is expressed out through us. We want to learn
to draw on His fullness. Find our wholeness in Him.

See, it is futile to try to get it all together on our own. All these old bromides, you know—“Get a
grip on yourself?” Why? I’d just let loose eventually or I’d slip through my fingers or something.
Get a grip on yourself. How about rest in the grip of God? How about let His grip be the shaping,
controlling, guiding influence? Try to get it all together on our own. How foolish. That is trying
to patch up the old life again. Put that Humpty Dumpty back together again. Let him be nailed
and buried.

We do have a whole life, but it is in Christ. To the extent we draw on the life of Christ, our life
shows the wholeness that is in Him alone. The more we draw on that people will say, “Boy,
you’re really maturing, aren’t you?” Well, take Christ out of our lives we would be spiritual
babbling, just part of humanity. But the more we draw on Him we grow in Christ-likeness. Then
more of Him comes forth and less of us. That whole life is there already.
Oh, this identity. One thing it says is stop working on yourself and continue to find new life flowing from Christ. God’s Word tells us and it tells those who are coming to us for a word. We’ve got our fingerprints all over ourselves. We have our magnifying glasses and our mirrors to see “what am I’m like and how am I’m going to change?” Well, let God tell us who we are and how we change? We draw on His resources.

Finding our identity is critical. Oh, I can remember when the Lord started to open my eyes. And He did it through personal reading and prayer and some study and a book here and a Christian believer testifying there. When I first heard it, “who we are in Christ,” I thought it sounds weird. I never heard that before. Well, that’s weird, why don’t we hear these things? We just pay more attention to our own life than to the Word of God. We are working so hard on ourselves. And sometimes the more serious we are as a Christian, the harder we are working on ourselves. And the Lord is saying, “You are My handiwork. Just put your attention on Me. Relate to Me. Give Me free reign with My hands. Open up wide to receive this resource of life I am holding out. It is My Son I want you to live by. Here is what you need. Get out of that graveyard. Get up here among the living.” Find life in the living One, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are complete in Him. It’s part of our very nature, our very being, our very identity.

Now by way of conclusion, let’s conclude with this issue of Christ-esteem, not self-esteem. There’s a temptation for the flesh of the believer—and I have heard it actually taught this way by Bible teachers—to sneak self-esteem theology in through the side or back door right here on who we are in Christ.


But many times Christians hear these descriptions of who they are in Christ and the flesh vaunts itself. Or teachers trying to pump up and encourage people to make it sound like this is what you are producing. This is what you are doing. No, this is who you are in Christ. It’s quite a critical issue.

See, we have no independent identity. We have individual identity in Christ. You can always tell each of us from the other. But never again will we have independent identity. That is, a life on our own apart from Christ.

You know, people sometimes hear things like this. They hear, “I’m a new creature in Christ. I’m a saint. I’m God’s handiwork. I’m a branch in the true vine. I’m an ambassador for Christ. I’m complete.” Wow, I’m starting to feel pretty good about myself. Wait a minute! You’re not hearing the message. In every one of those it is in Christ. It is because of Christ. We are not talking about us, essentially. We are talking about Him, and then us related to Him. See, self is always looking to rear its ugly head, you know. The flesh is wanting a pat of the back. A “hey, you’re getting better and better.” Oh, right on. And the self-life is saying, “Oh I’m so happy to be down off that cross. It was killing me. And this a place where the flesh kind of has a religious—clears its throat, “I’m back.” No. That’s not why God tells us who we are in Christ.

You take Christ out of the formula here, out of the picture, a new creature has no independent identity. The newness is gone when Christ is gone. You take Christ out of our lives, there’s nothing saintly about us, in any way. You take the Lord out of our lives and we are not God’s handiwork, we are His objects of judgment and wrath. You take Christ the vine out, where is the
branch left? It’s dead! It has no independent identity. Individual. You can tell one branch from another. Jesus was talking to Moses and Elijah, not just two kind of blotches of eternality that once were humanity. I mean, there he stands, they’re in heaven and He’s talking on the Mount of Transfiguration. We’ll always have individual identity, but not independent identity.

Complete in Him but take Him out of the picture—glorious incompleteness. That’s all that’s left. Brokenness. Emptiness. This is all about Him and us relating to Him. It’s not something for self.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 says,

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—[He did all of this for us in Christ] that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let Him glory in the LORD.’

We’ve got plenty to boast about as long as we are boasting in the Lord. We were created to be boasters. You can see it everywhere you look around humanity. The image and likeness of God. We were created by God to be boasters. We were created to boast, but only to boast in our Creator. And we’ve got plenty to boast about forever. And we can be doing it now. That’s why we’re told who we are in Christ. It’s all about glory for Him.

In 1 Peter 4:11, again says that in all things God might get the glory.

…that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever—including now.

In 2 Peter 3:18, where’s the glory supposed to go? “To Him be the glory both now and forever.” That’s where the glory goes. This whole story about who we are in Christ, you know what you could write at the bottom of it? Glory be to God. Not, “Hey, hey, how about me? Finally, I found something I could feel good about me over.” No, you found some great things to feel good about Him. What about me? How about death to me? How about death to self? How about no to self? How about just boast in Jesus Christ. That’s what this is all about.

Someone said to me once, “My goodness, where does this leave me?” I went home and thought and prayed and wrote down some things. Here are some of them. It leaves us blessed, humbled, accepted, overwhelmed, fully satisfied, secure in His love, and provided for time and eternity. It leaves us praising the Lord, thanking the Lord, loving the Lord, glorifying the Lord, and serving the Lord. It leaves us in a tremendous place! You know one place it doesn’t leave us? Focused on self!

Who we are in Christ, it is life-changing, life-giving, and life-describing. And it is the kind of foundational truth that we can pass on to others when they come our way. I mean, this goes beyond, “Hey, how can I get my five-year-old to eat their oatmeal?” Listen, how can you show your five-year-old the life of Christ? That’s kind of the way I like to shift gears in a session like that, you know.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 18
Renewing of the Mind

By
Bob Hoekstra

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All right, let’s continue in our look at foundational truths for Counseling God’s Way. This time we’ll be looking at renewing of the mind, another critical foundational truth.

One of the great reasons why we must only offer counseling God’s way is that it is the only kind of counseling which will contribute to the true renewing of the mind. Remember, Romans 12:2 says that we are to be “renewed in our minds,” have our minds renewed. And we’ll look at that verse in a little while. There is great need in the counseling situation so often for the renewing of the mind. Great need in general, in our own Christian lives to have our minds renewed. So often with folks seeking counsel, the big issue that would help them specifically in what they are looking at immediately and comprehensively in their lives is to see what God has in mind in this renewing of our minds. We’ll see, as we go along here, God uses the renewing of the mind to really change people’s lives.

One of the reasons too many Christians’ lives are not changing is their minds aren’t being renewed. They’re still thinking the same ways they always did. They can quote you folkloric, humanistic, American proverbs shoulder to shoulder with the best heathen. And yet they’ve been forgiven in Christ and have a new life, but they’re still operating with that same old way of thinking. So their lives never change really. This is a critical issue. We’ll look at that much more when we get to Romans 12:2.

For a few minutes let’s think about our minds before Christ, that is before we came to Christ. In other words, let’s see why we so desperately need the renewing of our minds. And 2 Corinthians 4:4 is one place to begin. Speaking of the unbelievers,

Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

The god of this world, Satan, is working hard on the minds of the unbelieving—to do what? Keep them in the dark. Keep them blinded. Keep them from seeing light. Lest they see the light of the Gospel, which begins to open the way for all of God’s light to shine in. Satan is blinding the minds of the unbelieving.

This is where we were before we came to Christ. Satan was working hard to keep our minds blinded, in the dark. Our mind would involve our thinking about things, our perceiving of matters, our understanding, and even our filing and receiving and using of knowledge. Our so-called wisdom would be in the dark and our perspective on life, in the dark. Our ideas—“Ah, I’ve got an idea!” Yeah, straight out of the dark, you know. Imaginations are darkened. Our goals in life that the mind thinks up are like groping in the dark to set them with our dreams for the future, from a blinded mind. Our values as we thought through things, from a blinded mind. Our standards, our priorities—No wonder we wasted things that seemed to matter: relationships, time, resources and health. And you can go on and on. We were in the dark, our memories darkened. We couldn’t remember well, or remembered the wrong things for the wrong reason. Our opinions—and we had plenty of them—we were shouting them out of the dark of course. No matter, the more confused you are, the louder you shout. That is how you establish your opinion in the world of blindness. Decision making? Oh, we were something to watch in decision making, as we were feeling our way through an issue with great certainty.

This is Satan blinding the minds of the unbelieving. Oh, how our minds need to be renewed!
Ephesians 2:1-3,

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of the world, according to the prince of the power of air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we [Christians] all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, [and look at this] and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Now we’re talking about the identity of an unbeliever. Were then by nature children of wrath. We deserved God’s wrath. We often poured out wrath. It was just our nature. And we were fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind by walking according to the world, indulging the desires of the mind. Whatever we could think of, we indulged it as far as we could get away with, often only limiting just to protect self. This is not because we thought it was better to back off. But “Hey, this could be trouble for me. I’ll only go this far.” You know, great reasoning there, by indulging the desires of a darkened, blinded mind.

Ephesians 4:17-18,

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind [Sure, unbelievers have minds, but they are futile, ours were], having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God.

We were talking at break that man exists. And he exists because God is there and created him. And if God did not sustain him in existence he’d disappear. The creation exists by the power of God…even heaven and hell. But they’re alienated from the life of God. They exist but what the Scriptures call spiritual death, darkness, blindness. It is because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the blindness of their heart.

Boy, what terminology. Futility of the mind, darkened understanding, ignorance, hard-heartedness, excluded from the life of God. A desperate spiritual need here is described for minds to be renewed once they come to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

See, the new creature in Christ must deal with the old brain. The brain is a physical organ. We have the same physical components we had before we came to Christ. We looked at that, it’s Romans 8:23, we are groaning, awaiting the redemption of the body. It is the same exact body we had when we were dead and blind in Adam.

So that old physical brain was programmed by the thinking of the old man, by the old us. And what kind of programming was going in? It was the thinking of a blinded mind, a dead mind, indulging the desires of a blinded mind. It was a futile mind, a darkened understanding that was programming our brain, pumping all kinds of garbage in.

Oh how desperately we need our minds renewed. With all that data there in the physical bank of the brain, as it were, if we don’t get a new way to think we’ll just draw on all that stuff. You know, walking according to the flesh, it’s called.

So let’s talk about the renewing of our minds. Ephesians 4:23, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” To be renewed or restored to a proper condition as God intended, in the spirit of your
mind. It is the basic frame of mind, mindset, basic attitude, focus, disposition of the mind. Or you could call it the overall controlling perspective of the mind.

Oh, the spirit of the mind that some people have. They’re just totally skeptical toward God. It’s their mindset. It’s the spirit of their mind. It’s just their focus that is totally skeptical.

Others, their mindset is open to God. Some have a mindset that generally acknowledges that God exists and that’s it. That’s the spirit of their mind. Others know He is there and want to bow down to Him completely. That’s their mindset. That’s the spirit of their mind. Some have a mindset, a spirit of the mind that kind of goes like, religion is a good thing if it’s kept in its place. Or this God thing is okay if you keep it within its proper bounds. What boundaries are you going to put around God? What a sad spirit of the mind. Others just want to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). It’s the spirit of their mind. It’s the controlling focus of their mind.

We need a new mindset, a new spirit of the mind, a new focus, a new frame of mind. We need to see things as God sees things.

Now again, warning on the psychological theory and the offspring of it, the twelve-step, self-help programs and all that. They all came out of the old mindset. And I know that AA has kind of a religious background in one of the two founders. I am aware of that but it is not a godly, Christ-centered, spiritual background. It is just a “religious” background. Religious minds can be dead and blind too. If it’s not Christ-centered, anchored in the Word and of the Spirit, it doesn’t matter how much you kind of shape it with religious jargon or say, “I was a part of this religious movement in England and here is how I try to help people that are in trouble.” It still comes out of this whole mindset that is blind and self-centered. Therefore it is self-helping, or the self-help movement.

I again marvel that the church has gotten so excited about the self-help movement, when the Lord has told us what to do with self. Self can’t help us. Self is our number one culprit, you know. We’re looking for help from the source that Jesus said deny and crucify.

Well we not only need a new mindset, a new spirit of our mind—Ephesians 4:23. The language is more general in Romans 12. We need a whole renewing of the whole mind. No qualifications of any part of it, just the renewing of our minds.

Romans 12:2,

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

We’re not to be conformed to this world. Conformity, that is, pressured, molded, and shaped by the world. The world is pressuring us. They want to push us into their mold. They want us to be like them. We’re a conviction, an irritation to them, a reminder of sin and righteousness and judgment. We’re a testimony to the reality of Christ. They don’t like it. The world wants us to be like them.

We live in a world of toleration. But the path you and I have taken is intolerable. Tolerance is the cry for everyone. “Homosexual? Hey, let’s tolerate that. Born again Christian? Oh, are you kidding? They are so narrow-minded and bigoted. Wait a minute. What happened? We don’t qualify? Everything but truth qualifies for toleration.
The world is pushing on us, hard, in every level you can look at, personally, judicially, governmental. We’re not to be conformed to this world, though or shaped by the external pressures of man.

This world man’s ways. Think of that one phrase, “Do not be conformed to this world.” Don’t you think if we took that one phrase seriously it would radically change the church counseling approach? We’re not to be conformed to the world. We’re not to be having the world teach us how to counsel.

What are we to find? Instead of conformity to the world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Transformed, lives that are really, actually, radically changed. It is as radically changed as the old things gone and the new things have come. How? By the renewing of your mind, that is, learning to think God’s way more and more and more in everything, every way, and every day. The renewing of our mind is thinking God’s way.

Again, let me ask, why are there so many Christians whose lives are never transformed? They go on and on and on very much like they were before they came to Christ. Where they are born again and kind of excited about the Lord. And there’s like a little spurt of baby growth from infancy to toddlerhood. And then they just kind of level out and become stagnate. Here’s what’s behind it, their minds aren’t being renewed.

Be transformed. How? It is by the renewing of your mind. They’re settling with the thinking they’ve gotten up to that point or had before. And many a Christian is like that. Again, I marvel how the vocabulary of many Christians is just like the vocabulary of the world. Why? Because the thoughts that are unseen are the same as the world’s too. You hear all these bromides, all these clichés. And Christians say them and unbelievers say them. And unbelievers exist by them and Christians exist by them. It’s tragic.

We are to be transformed, really changed more and more to the image of Christ. How? It is by the renewing of your mind. Find in the Lord and His ways and His mind a whole new way to think.

Again, why do we take time like this and enter into a Bible college course and spend hours in classes in reading and studying and papers and thinking and ministering? Why do we do that instead of the things we used to do? You know about this time of night I’d be starting to get desperate if I hadn’t found a good all-night poker game. This is going to be a bad night, I might have to sit home alone with me! Why does that never enter my thoughts anymore? It is because my mind, in that arena, has been renewed. What used to be so exciting is so disgusting. I’m so glad that guy got nailed. He deserved to be executed, you know. He was a scoundrel. Out serving self and doing it in the most gross ways!

Why is this a joy now? I’ve been changed. I’ve been transformed in that area. How? By the renewing of the mind, I have learned to that extent and degree to think about those things. And this thinking like Christ is the renewing of our minds, it changing our lives.

Why doesn’t that happen in more lives—more Christian lives? Undoubtedly, right here in the context it is because their lives are not in the place they are called to in the preceding verse. Here is the condition of life that’s needed.
I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

The only reasonable thing to do with this new life in Christ is to lay it on the altar of God. Anything else is self-serving spiritual insanity. It doesn’t make sense.

Only the lives of Christians whose lives are placed on the altar of God is there real transformation, because those are the ones that have their minds renewed. Think of it. Too many Christians are out living their own life with their own thoughts, for their own values and own benefits. That’s the way the world lives. Their life isn’t on the altar of God and their mind is not getting renewed. They are not in a passion to find out how God thinks about everything. Why? It’s because it is still their own life. Oh, they might touch base here a little, you know, especially in times of trouble. But Christians whose lives are on the altar of God, they can’t get enough of the mind of the Lord. Those who have said, “My life is not my own. I’m bought with a price. What am I doing? My life needs to be on that altar. It’s Yours, Lord.” That life can’t hear enough from the Lord, because that’s how they know what to do here on earth with that life on the altar of God. And as they’re learning of the Lord and His mind and His ways, to serve Him and please Him, to live unto Him, their minds are just renewed. They get a whole new way to think. And it changes their values, their priorities, their decisions, their relationships, their vocabulary, their private thoughts, their public words. They just get changed.

Why aren’t more Christians putting their lives on the altar of God? No doubt it is because they are not being besought to do it, by the reasoning that is here. In the first place, most churches you go to nowadays, it’s not how to get on the altar of God. It’s how to put that far away from you. That could be uncomfortable. That could be confining. You might lose some of your own individuality. You might stop living for you. And in kind of the user-friendly, self-serving church world, the altar of God is hardly ever mentioned as a place to live from. It is because altars, that’s where things die. Yeah, but die to self; live unto God.

But too often in churches that even mention the altar of God it’s a very legalistic trip. “Hey, what have you done for God today? Oh come on, be serious. That’s not near enough. You think God’s happy with that? Now get out there and really try. You call yourself a servant of the Lord and you only witnessed to 85 people this week. Come on. Get with it!”

Praise God for witnessing to people and the desire to and to grow in it. But where’s the motivating dynamic behind all of that? What is it that is to call us to put our lives on the altar of God? Look at this: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God…. Not the irritation of God. It is the mercies of God. Not that He’s upset and you better do something fast to please Him. It's I beg you on the basis of the mercies of God. Stop and consider what He’s done for you and just do what is the spiritual, sane thing you’re led to do.

See, this comes after eleven chapters of our merciful God being proclaimed. It is justification by faith and grace, sanctification, the faithfulness of God to His people Israel, freedom from flesh, and walking in the Spirit. This is so much of the merciful provisions of God, eleven chapters of them. Then the Lord turns to us through the apostle and says, “Therefore, in light of that, I beg you.” On what basis?—it is on the mercies of God. What should I do? Just lay your life, a living sacrifice, on the altar. It’s your reasonable service. Doesn’t it make sense? “Come let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). Hey, doesn’t that make sense? Oh yeah!
This is what God has done and who He is and what is available to me. Mercy upon mercy! Grace upon grace! Oh Lord, why am I treating this life like it’s mine? You bought it. And You make it thrive or it doesn’t thrive. Oh Lord, I just want to lay it on the altar. It’s Yours. It’s not mine. You take it. You use it. Do with it what You want. That just sounds right. It’s reasonable. Anything else is unreasonable.

And often in our counseling ministry, to sit down and spend some time in Romans 12:1-2, is life-changing for people. Often no matter what hundred different reasons they sought you out for help. They need an opportunity to think things through with God and make a reasonable choice, spiritually. Their life not their own; it belongs to God.

And so often people are out seeking counsel in order to find the will of God and often it is because they’re in trouble or uncomfortable. Well, praise God for people getting interested in finding the will of God. But we don’t have to relate to the will of God crisis-to-crisis. There is something far greater described here. And that is, becoming a living demonstration of the will of God. See that at the end of verse 2? “That you may prove [demonstrate or show] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Our counseling can help people shift from chasing after the will of God in crisis decisions or dilemmas, to becoming a living demonstration of what God’s will is. Oh, how far greater that is. They can more and more prove, be an unfolding demonstration of God’s good and acceptable and perfect will. All by is by laying their lives on the altar of God because of His great mercies. And in that, having their minds renewed and their lives transformed.

Titus 3:5-6. We won’t turn there. But it just speaks of the washing and regeneration, the cleansing by the blood of Christ and giving of new life in Christ and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. It is kind of related to the renewing of the mind. The Holy Spirit is making life new, a work done in us by the Holy Spirit.

This isn’t what you would call a mind game, even though the mind gets renewed. The renewing process of God comes by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 it talks about us coming, unveiled to the Lord. “Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord and being transformed [same term again] into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Blindness is gone. You are able to see. Not hiding behind veils. You are coming, looking into the Word of God as a great reflection of the heavenly kingdom, from heaven, toward our lives. You are seeking the glory of the Lord. Seeking to see how glorious the Lord Jesus is, Himself, His ways, His truth. And then we are being transformed into those same glories we see. How? It is: glory to glory, area to area, degree by degree, step by step, day by day, and aspect after aspect.

What is the dynamic behind that? Just as by the Spirit of the Lord, it is the Holy Spirit changing us as we give attention to the glory of our Lord. How wonderful He is; His truth, and His ways as revealed in the Word. The renewing of the mind and the transforming of life that goes with it is a work of the Holy Spirit of God. It is all related to 1 Corinthians 2:16. Let’s read that verse.

In 1 Corinthians 2:16 it says,

For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.
Sure, we can’t be God’s counselors. We don’t know all the fullness of His mind. But you know this? We do have residing in us, the mind of Christ. See, Christ lives in us! Which means the way He thinks can function in our thinking. We can learn to lean not to our own understanding, but on Him. We have the mind of Christ.

We believers have the mind of Christ. And we have His Holy Spirit to teach us how He thinks. That’s the way to really learn to think. The transforming of lives by the renewing of the mind is having our minds renewed by thinking less and less like we do on our own, or would, and more and more as the Lord would think. And we have that mind residing in us.

This is related to Romans 7 is where the law of the mind that wants to please God is battled by this other principle, this other law in us, the law of sin and death. This is where the flesh wants to drag us down in self-indulgence or self-hope or self-help or self-resource or self-exultation. That law of the mind, that new mind in Christ resides in us. Why do we want to please God? Why do we want to serve God? It is because we have learned, to that degree, to think with the mind of the Lord. This is God’s mind on the matter that we’re here to know and glorify Him.

We want our minds renewed. We want to think more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. And here is where that mind is expressed. In Jude 3, the “faith once for all delivered to the saints.” What does the Lord think that He wants us to understand? Well, He’s put it right down for us to consider. It’s like if you had someone you wanted to unload your mind with and you couldn’t talk to them, so you wrote them a long letter. Just get everything off your mind on that page. And there it is. The Lord has done that! Not only that, but He and His Spirit live in us to guide us in implication, application, and understanding. This is the renewing of the mind.

What’s happening as we are having our minds renewed is we are getting from the Lord a new mindset, a new mind.

Colossians 3:2,

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Christians who are earth bound will be Christians whose minds do not get renewed. They won’t get a new mindset. They just keep that old earth bound mindset. We’re to set our mind on things above. If that isn’t pointed enough, it adds, “not on things on the earth.” Set our minds on things above, on the Lord. His will, His ways, His Word, that’s where we’re to set our mind.

Ever had anyone irritated with you because your mind’s on the Lord too much? Sure. Oh what a revelation that is! Who needs to change their mind? Well, not you! You’ve finally gotten on the right track. “Oh I’m sorry. What’s come over me? Please forgive me for being so heavenly minded.” You know that old bromide: “Oh That guy is so heavenly minded he’s no earthly good.” What a farce that is. The world gobbles that up. You know what? The church world gobbles that up. “Oh yeah, we have to stay in touch with the world.” Stay in touch with it? I’m trying to get out of it! The only good I can be to this world is the more I’m in touch with heaven saying, “Hey, this is the way.” Not coming down to where man is dying and in my mind thinking dead thoughts like dead men. I’d like to spread a whole new cliché. We can only be of earthly good to the extent that we’re heavenly minded.

Jesus was always in communion with the Father. That’s why He always did everything right on earth. It doesn’t make us detached and useless. It plugs us in to where all the resource comes
from. Set your mind on things above, not on things of this earth. What are the things of this earth? They are self, human plans, money, things, success, and fame. “Oh yeah, now you’re talking!” The world would say, “Now we’re getting somewhere.” No, now we’re getting nowhere. If that’s consuming us, if that’s on our mind all the time, we’re still operating with the old mindset. That is where we were, back in Adam.

Jesus didn’t sit around scheming on all these things and just get the perfect answers. He communed with the Father, walked with the Father. The Father in Him, and He in the Father, and the Father through Him did His works. In John 1 it was written, “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.”

We would like people to look on us and see Christ. Well, let’s be communing with Him, walking with Him, following Him, thinking with Him, learning His mind. Then they’ll see Him in us.

Romans 8:6 says, “The mind set on the flesh is death, [Death!], but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.” We want to walk in life and peace. We want to minister life and peace in our counseling. Well, let’s set our mind on the things of the Spirit, the things of Jesus, His Word, His salvation, His promises, His faithfulness. Let’s not set our mind on the flesh.

How many Christians go for a counseling session and the Christian counselor, with great psychological insight, helps them set their mind on the flesh? The troubled Christian goes for counseling and the counselor says, “Well, let’s talk about you for a while.” Really? That’s where my answers are? “Yeah, let’s talk about you. What’s going on in you? How’re you feeling? What’s going on? Oh, what do you think about that?” Oh my goodness. And it just starts rolling, you know. It’s death! They come for help and we kill them. And even call it a “Life Counseling Center.” It is death sold in the name of life. That’s what is happening.

We don’t think about it in those terms and so often those doing it don’t think about it in those terms. I’m not saying those are sneaky death peddlers who just can’t wait to kill people. So many folks out there in those fields really want to help people. They sacrifice. They labor. They study. They learn. They get degrees. They get certified. So the state can tell them whether or not they can talk about Jesus when and where and how much and whether or not it will work. How sad.

The mind set on the flesh is death. The counseling mind in the American church is so consumed with the flesh. You come in there and “We need to give you a personality test.” Why? “To see what kind of sinner died on the cross?” Does it matter? “Oh yes, because it is the key to your life.” Oh really? And believer after believer just buys it. I mean—and they do buy it. They pay a heavy price for it. I’ll tell you the personality type I want—Christlikeness. And I can’t produce and ounce of it on my own. So I don’t want to talk about me. I’d like to talk about Him. What has He done? When it gets around to me—who am I in Him? This means you’re going to have to tell me a lot about Him for me to find a life there in Him.

It is life and peace. This is the difference in our counseling ministries. It is whether we send people away with life or with death. And so often it is self-centered religious death.

Philippians 4:8, talks about good and beautiful things of the kingdom of God, the pure and lovely things. If there are any things like this and the good reports of God’s greatness and goodness, let your mind dwell on these things. “I can’t stop thinking about all the mistakes I made.” Well, you can just hear the death sucking you down. Let your mind dwell on these things. The Lord wants our mind used in the arena of godliness and righteousness and purity and truth and hope and His help and His reality.
Psalm 63:6 says, “I remember You... I meditate on You.” That is the ultimate thing that’s lovely and pure and true and righteous altogether. That’s the greatest use of the mind, right there, thinking on the Lord. There is no higher use of the mind.

Then Psalm 77:11-12, talks about remembering and meditating and musing. You know, using the mind. But on what?—God’s deeds, God’s wonders, the works of the Lord. These are great psalms.

Psalm 63:6. Let’s read that real quickly to see the new mindset, a heavenly one, on the Lord. “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.” What do we think about when we wake up at night? We’ve got an all-night assignment or something. “Lord, Lord, help me to set my mind on You.” I think one of the favorite times the Lord wants to get our mind active is probably right in the middle of the night, you know when you are probably half groggy, “Hey, now that you’re awake—Why don’t you think about this?” Zing, zing! Fiery darts, you know. Oh! When we waken, or in the night watches pray, “Lord, help us to meditate on You, think on You and Your presence here with me. Your love for me. Your sustaining of me. Your purity, Your truth. I remember You.”

And some of the things we can think about when we think on the Lord, is what He has done. Help people think in our counseling ministries—Let’s be instruments of directing people to think of the Lord. And that can also include not only who He is, but what He has done. Psalm 77:11-12 says, “I will remember the works of the Lord.” Not the works of man. Not my works or my lack of works, or my wrong works. “I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds.”

Now that’s a heavenly mindset. What does the flesh want to do? “I will remember my works. I will remember the wonders of old. Oh, those good ol’ days when I was so effective. I’ll meditate on all my works. In fact, I’ll find somebody and I’ll talk of my deeds.” That’s the flesh. It’s the mind set on the flesh and it’s death! This is a living, heavenly mindset, thinking on the things of the Lord, what He has done.

This is a great one too, Psalm 119:15-16,

I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

Boy, there’s a good use of the mind! Just think on things God has expressed to us through His Word. You know, it’s like having a great conversation with someone or getting a letter from someone and there’s just a phrase or a sentence of a term that just grabbed you. And you want to go back over it and over it. We get emails from our kids over in Hungary, Matt pastoring there at Calvary Chapel Veszprem, and precious Josie. And we get these emails, and I’ll guarantee you we don’t just read them once. “Oh, another email from Hungary. You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all.” I mean, that’s how we treat the Word of God sometimes. “I read that book once.”

Like the Roman Catholic troubled young person I was counseling with in Dallas, Texas once. He didn’t know what to call me. He goes, “Hello there, bro—brother priest.” I said, “Hi.” Later on we were in there and I said and he was sharing something I said, “You know I was reading today in Deuteronomy something I think God might want to help you with.” His answer was, “Deuteronomy? Isn’t that way back there at the start of the Bible?” “Yeah, it’s about the fifth book.” He goes, “How long you been a pastor?” I told him. He goes, “That’s all the further
you’ve read!” He thought you just read through once like other books and you know. He had never heard the Bible taught, so why would you want to stay in it? A lot of Christians treat their Bibles that way, you know. “Oh, I read that. I read that.”

Great thing to do is to think on the things the Lord has said. That’s a great way to exercise the heavenly mindset. A letter that is written out of a love relationship. You just want to hear from that heart that you love and that loves you. My goodness, here is a God who is love and look what He’s written us. It’s good to meditate on His precepts. Just think on, contemplate His ways. Delight ourselves in the things He has said and not forget the things He has said. That’s a heavenly mindset, right there. Meditate on the Lord. Meditate on His deeds. Meditate on His words. It’s part of the renewing of the mind.

In conclusion Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly…..” We’re to make much room in our lives for the Word of the Lord. Be yielded to the Holy Spirit to take its truth and to give us a heavenly mindset, a completely new mind in Christ. Just dwell in it richly and live there. Sharing such things as this, dear brothers and sisters, urging people in these things, helping them, praying for them in such things, in our own lives and others, renews our minds in the Lord. And that’s so critical to Counseling God’s Way.

And just remember with the psychological theory, the subconscious mind is the key. We’ll talk about that later on at the very end. That’s not the true key. The mind of Christ is the key. Not the so-called subconscious human mind. Or the inner healing of memories and you visualize Jesus back in there. That’s a mind game. That is not the renewing of the mind. Renewing of the mind is a mind set on Him, His words, and His works.

And also, a heavenly mindset, the renewing of the mind, again, is another world away from the so-called twelve-step, self-help Christian recovery group movement. And again, I’m not saying God never helped anyone ever in any of those groups at any time. Not at all! God is very gracious and merciful. He’s not a Pharisee. “Well, I won’t touch them.” They are just not doing it right. Oh look where they went. I won’t help them.” God isn’t like that at all. Some of you might have even been saved at an AA meeting. Praise God! Folks say to me, “Well, I was saved in an AA meeting. What do you say about that?” Praise the Lord, that’s terrific! What am I going to go, “Oh no. It’s better than I thought it was.” Praise God! I wish everyone at every AA meeting was saved. That’s fine. I’m not on a tirade against AA. I’m just getting a greater and greater passion for Jesus Christ, His word, and His ways. It’s not that God can’t do anything there. It’s He hasn’t pledged Himself to do anything there. He does. But He hasn’t pledged Himself. He doesn’t have to. But He’s pledged Himself to His Word, His Spirit, to prayer and life in the body of Christ. He’s called us there. Why dabble where He might do something in spite of the program? Why not flock where He said I want to pour out My blessing and fullness?

That’s a lot of what counseling God’s way thinking is about. Not condemning those who are trying their best to help the way they can. It’s just God has a better way. And He wants to renew our minds. And as He renews our minds, and that take us away from the natural mind that produced all these programs. He’ll change our lives and He’ll use us to help others do the same.

Let’s pray together, shall we?

Lord, we thank You so much for this great hope that You live in us and we can learn to think with Your mind. Oh, may we be in Your Word, and our lives on Your altar. And Lord, as You renew our minds, transform our lives, give us a
whole new mindset and help us to minister the same to others. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 19
Spiritual Warfare

By
Bob Hoekstra

Brought to you by
Blue Letter Bible
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All right, let’s pray together again, shall we?

Lord, we give You thanks for Your Word. We thank You that in and through it You can be changing our lives, renewing our minds and that transforms us. We thank You for the many foundational truths there, Lord. And we come again humbly with a sense of need and desire. We ask You to speak to us on this major arena of spiritual warfare that is all around us. And thank You for addressing that in Your Word. We ask You, by Your Spirit, to speak to us now for the developing of our own walk with You and equipping for ministry to others. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The next foundational truth arena is spiritual warfare. In many counseling situations, the difficulties that are there, the issues that prompted a quest for counseling, are often related to spiritual warfare matters. To put it another way, the person is seeking counsel because of the fact that even Christians are involved in a spiritual battle. War is not comfortable, not easy to live in and people often go searching for answers. That is behind much of the counseling situations that we find ourselves in.

By way of introduction look at 2 Corinthians 10:3-4,

For though we walk in the flesh [that is, in human bodies, flesh and bones. For though we walk in the flesh], we do not war according to the flesh.

Obviously it’s assumed there that we’re at war from verse four—

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.

Look at the terminology, war and weapons of our warfare. These are terms that remind us that believers are in a battle. Many Christians are not alert to this fact. Some aren’t even aware of this battle. They don’t know their enemy or his ways or how to have victory in spiritual warfare. Counseling God’s Way, in general and in particular instances of counseling, must address these matters.

The first word here, really, is about our enemy. We do have one. Ephesians 6:11-12,

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age [one translation gives it—“this present darkness’], against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Our battle in spiritual warfare is against the devil and his demonic forces of wickedness. Our battle is not essentially, basically against flesh and blood. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood; that is essentially, basically, fundamentally. Oh, that’s not to say that people don’t get involved in the battle. But when we sense a struggle with people, here’s the reality or what’s behind it? It is the enemy or the presence of an enemy. It is the devil and all of his hosts, here given in sort of their categories or levels of ranking. Principalities and powers, rulers of the
darkness of this age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. That’s what is causing the battle. That’s what’s behind the struggle. That’s where our battle lies.

Do you remember Ezekiel 28:12-17? There’s a lamentation about the king of Tyre. But the language soon goes behind the earthly ruler to the one who is ruling behind him and controlling his life. It uses phrases like him being the “…seal of perfection, perfect in beauty, full of wisdom” (Ezekiel28:12). It is beginning to speak to that one behind that human instrument. The enemy himself, a very formidable foe, seal of perfection, perfect in beauty, full of wisdom. Wow, quite an enemy. It is actually speaking of the power behind the king of Tyre.

Verse 13 speaks of him as being in Eden. The king of Tyre obviously wasn’t there, but the enemy was. But remember he has been created. He was created and verse thirteen speaks of him being created. Verse 14 describes his position in a way that he well could have been the highest of angelic creatures. Ezekiel 28:14, “You were the anointed cherub who covers [who protected]. You walked back and forth in the midst of the fiery stones [right there at the fiery altar of God].” Verse 15 blameless, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created till iniquity was found in you.” It was the first expression of sin in creation. Verse 16, he was cast out by God. Verse 17, “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor….”

What is this all about? Pride. The enemy got all caught up in himself. Can’t you see why self-exaltation is at the root of all of man’s problems? That is why the Lord says, “You want to follow Me?—Deny self. Take up your cross.” The cross for self. The first rebellion, the first sin in the universe had to do with self-exaltation.

In Isaiah 14:12-14, there is a similar kind of treatment, same pattern. Addressing the king of Babylon, verse 4, but really it goes far behind the king of Babylon. In verses 13 and 14 Satan gives five powerful “I wills.” Look at these. He’s the original overwhelming self-asserter. Amazing the churches now teach classes on self-assertion. It’s like, what happened to meekness, humility, lowliness? Self-assertion, we’re talking things basically satanic in their origin. Look at this:

Isaiah 14:13-14,

…I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation [the place of authority] on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.

Satan, making himself like the Most High. Feeling he was entitled to that place of exaltation and worship and attention. That is self-assertion and self-exaltation. This is probably the first deadly case of self-esteem.

Psychological theory, you can anchor so much of it right here in the “I wills” of Satan. I, ego, psyche. I will. I will. You’ve got to count on yourself, believe in yourself, make a life for yourself and put yourself forward. No one else will. No, how about put yourself on the cross. Look for a whole new life in Christ. We have an enemy and he was a wondrous creature. But he rebelled against God, asserted and exalted himself. And he’s been enticing man to do the same thing ever since. In counseling God’s way people need to see that they have a spiritual enemy. And they need to see that they are no match at all for this enemy on their own.
Psychological theory, twelve-step recovery programs, these are not our weapons. Those are weapons of the flesh. Can’t you just see Satan shuddering when we come at him quoting Freud. “Oh no, anything but Sigmund! I surrender.”

“Oh no, that person is going to recovery group. I’ve lost them.”

Those aren’t our weapons. The weapons of our warfare are mighty. They’re not carnal they are the weaponry of God. Our enemy is an awesome enemy when you look at it from human perspective. We have an enemy and he is so much greater than we are on our own. Can you imagine throwing human techniques at him? “You get your chains away from that person. They’re all right and I’m all right.” You know, “I’m okay and you’re okay.” Can you just see the chains bursting with that kind of philosophy? No way! We’ll get that person out of that bondage of despair and helplessness. We’ll teach him to highly exalt themselves. Well, we’ll call it self-esteem to make it more palatable, clinical and acceptable. Can you see the enemy going, “Oh boy, foiled again.” No, he’s going, “Oh yes. In fact I’ll give you a few ideas how to teach it to him.”

There are times when the enemy would love to cooperate with the church because the church is cooperating with his program.

Why do some of these programs flourish and all? Well, part of it is that the flesh loves it, and the enemy wants to increase it. Why stand against that which plays right into his hands?

We do have an enemy and it’s critical in ministering to people. If we sense they don’t know we have an enemy, God’s reminding us of something important that He wants to enlighten them with. They need to know the truth. The truth will set them free from that foolish place of thinking that life is a beach. Life is a battlefield, that’s what it is. And you can tell by talking to people, they just can’t figure out why it’s so tough. Christians, they’re trying their hardest. They’re doing all the right things. What’s going on? You want to say, “Someone’s out to kill you. Rob, kill and destroy.” That’s why it’s tough! Why can’t I get it all together? I’m doing this. I’m doing that. I don’t do that. What is the matter? Have you ever thought of warfare? “Warfare? What does that have to do with me?” You live on a battlefield. You can watch battlefields around the world on the news these days. Life’s tough on a battlefield. We walk on a battlefield every day as a Christian. We have an enemy. If believers don’t know that, if people we’re ministering to don’t know that, the enemy’s got them hoodwinked, immobilized, defeated.

All right, how about his ways? That is, his schemes. In 1 John 5:19. How does he work? The Lord wants us to know it, not to focus in and become, obsessed with the devil. But just so we’re alert and not fooled by him because the Lord wants us to follow Himself, the Lord Jesus. And many Christian get distracted and fooled, so the Lord tells us what the enemy is doing to keep us from following the Lord.

In 1 John 5:19, look at this,

> We know that we are of God and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

Isn’t that amazing? The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. That is, in the power of, or literally, in the lap of. It’s like he’s holding the world in his lap. Certainly, we know that Satan has the hands of God around over and bigger than him. But the Lord has granted amazing room and access to the enemy and to man who chooses the ways of the enemy. Yes, He can cause “…all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). But the world is under the sway of the evil one, the whole world. That is, all of the unsaved and all of their systems, called the world. It is under the control, the
influence of the god of this world, 2 Corinthians 4:4. All of the unsaved, all of their systems, are influenced by the enemy.

Think of that. The economic systems of the world are influenced by the god of this world. You know, there are Christians out crusading to turn the whole world into capitalism. We’re sent to call the world to Jesus, not to capitalism. Sure, God’s blessed people through capitalism. And the enemy has cursed people through capitalism, but that isn’t the answer. Getting it or staying away from it isn’t the key. The economic systems of the world are under the sway of the evil one.

Here’s one, the educational systems. Oh yes, come right on to school here. Let’s teach you and send Johnny too. And send them as young as you can. In fact, let’s get them a head start. See how quick we can get him into this stuff. Get him out of that home. Get him out here where the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one. Let’s get him in the education system.

The governmental systems are under the sway of the evil one. Yes, the Lord can turn the heart of the king. But man left to himself, and God often judges man by just giving him what he wants, what he deserves. The wrath of God that’s displayed in the second half of Romans 1 is letting man have what man wants. In the first half of Romans 1, the righteousness of God is displayed. The second half, the wrath of God being displayed and it’s an ongoing, historical, earthly thing. Letting man have what he wants to judge him for his evil desires. That’s governmental systems and religious systems of the world. Oh, there’s a big interfaith movement now. You know who’s the head of that? Satan. The chairman of the board of the worldwide interfaith movement is Satan. He has no shame. You think he’d stay away from religion. I mean, somehow people might think of God if they think religion. Oh, no problem. You can package that religious thing 78,000 different ways, you know. And keep people from really knowing the true and living God.

The scientific systems of the world, especially how it’s all interpreted, “Well, 47 billion years ago, we can see here that this happened and that, you know.” Brilliant. Where does that all come from? The whole world lies in the sway of the evil one. Here’s the data and Satan says, “Yeah, and I’ll give you the interpretation. I’ll let you know what it means.”

Communication systems, outside of email I am just exceedingly cautious. What are they doing? They’re surfing the cesspool of the world, they are. It’s called the world-wide web. Yeah, Satan’s web, you know. Oh, it’s pathetic what’s out there. Now see, God can use it. I mean, we’re blessed. I thank God for the internet. Thank God I can use it in the name of the Lord and communicate with a missionary son, pastoring half-way around the world. Take that, Satan! But through all the communication systems, the whole world lies in the lap of the evil one.

I believe the internet, this is going to be the biggest cesspool of wickedness that’s ever been trafficked among humanity. They call it the information highway. How about, hell’s highway! We can give it a whole lot better names than that. It’s astounding what’s going to happen there. But television, radio, the whole world lies in the sway of the evil one. Satan is a great broadcaster, He’s heavy into TV. He loves it. Radio he can use. But he’s kind of limited there because he can’t get the images. That’s probably why the Gospel has been more effective on the radio, because preacher’s flesh is harder to see on the radio.

You think of a verse like this, it’s astounding the implications of this. The whole world lies in the sway of the evil one. And people go seek counseling. “I’m having all kinds of trouble. Help me!” And we usher them right into the psychotherapeutic systems of the world. Oh we’ve Christianized them and the enemy is going, “Oh yes, let’s help them together, you know.”
Oh we need a radical reformation in this arena. Just from this one verse alone. Our enemy wants to work through all of these avenues to control unbelievers and to undermine, make ineffective and destroy believers. And often people seeking counsel need a word of God’s wisdom on this. Hey, life’s not a picnic! The ways of the enemy, they are so multitudinous. And many believers are just foolish about it. They don’t see them. They don’t know the enemy is just lurking everywhere. We don’t need to be going under every rock to find him. But just know he’s there. Why bother hunting for him. He’s around. He’s got plenty of henchmen.

1 John 2:15-17,

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world [You know, they’re living for the world], the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life [or as the New American Standard translates the word, the boastful pride of life]—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.

We’re not to love the things of the world, crave them, cherish them, pursue them. Do not love all those things out there in the world system and the things, its toys, its rewards, its values, its lifestyle. The church is on such a passionate dash to be “relevant” that it’s almost like we don’t want them to catch on that we’re different. “Let’s be so like them that they can come to our church services and go home and they won’t even be offended.” “Hey, that was pretty good. I think I can go back there.” Why? Why bother? For what purpose?

These three channels of earthly enticement our enemy uses to try to defeat us, by the way. Take some time and read the temptation of Eve and the temptation of Jesus. You can trace these three same avenues of enticement in each of those. The enemy, he doesn’t have to be clever and new. It’s the church that thinks it has to get creative and innovative. The enemy just uses the same old stuff over and over. It worked in the garden, it will work here. It didn’t work with Jesus so it doesn’t have to work with us. You know, it’s pretty simple really.

The lust of the flesh: if it feels good, go for it no matter who says what. The lust of the eyes: if it looks good pursue after it no matter who says what. If it will increase your ego or make you feel better about yourself, if it will give you self adulation, position, self-esteem, self-exaltation, it’s great for you. Go for it. And there is the pride of life. Think of this. Can you picture troubled Christians coming to churches for help and they say, “You know, I need you to help me here. I need you to help me, church. My life’s hurting and I know the answer is in this arena. You see, I see that my problems are related to the low level of pride of life that I have. And I’ve heard that you folks in the church now are just about as good as the world in helping me raise my pride of life level.”

And you know that churches help them. Oh, they’d never call it “pride of life.” What do they call it? Self-esteem. Self-love. That’s just a euphemism for pride. Can you imagine, people go to the church of Jesus Christ, already suffering with pride and think that their problem is their pride’s too low. Hey, make me feel good about me. I know that’s the only way to get out of my problems. How do we learn that? The world taught us that and now the church helps people feel good about themselves. That is, lose any humility they have left. Just feel they’re greater and greater and better and better. God is opposed to the proud.

Churches in the name of Jesus counsel troubled people into a place where God must oppose the path they are walking. Is that insanity? That’s where we are now. That’s how serious these issues
are. They’re not just a little less productive than they could be. They are in opposition to what God has taught us.

Oh the enemy is clever! But God is exposed him in the Word. We don’t have to be fooled. Yeah, he’s amazingly clever until you measure him up to God. Then he’s a fool who thought he could rebel against God and get a throne right next to God. How dumb can you be? And yet he is fooling the whole world and major parts of the church world.

Look at 2 Corinthians 11:13-14,

> For such are false apostles, deceitful workers [There are such in the church world] transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. [They say they’re apostles of Christ, they sound like, look like one] And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms into an angel of light.

One way the enemy deceives people is to get religious leaders, even in the true church, who are deceitful workers, who change what they really are to look like they are servants of Christ, and people get fooled. And no wonder that works. Why? Because even Satan, the epitome of darkness and evil, can appear to be an angel of light, a messenger bringing light. You know, with all these after death experiences, they are “drawn to the light,” or “close to the light,” or “my trip to the light.” You see the enemy back there shining the light, saying, “Here’s the way. Here’s the way.” And Christians get all excited. “Light? They must have seen heaven, right? They saw God. God is light.” Not even! The enemy transforms himself. Hey, he pumps up his own false light. What looks like light.

We need to be particularly alert in religious areas. False apostles are around who are deceitful workers disguised. And no wonder, the prince of darkness can do the same.

Oh, the ways of the enemy, they are so many and so varied. And yet the Lord has exposed them. We don’t have to be an expert on Satan. Just hear what the Lord says about him and it will alert us. It will let us pursue the Lord, not get distracted off on a rabbit trail thinking we are following after the Lord when it’s the enemy going, “Hey, come on. Here’s the way to life. Here’s the way to abundance. Here’s the way to self fulfillment. Here’s the way to wholeness. Here’s the way to victory.” All the while just reeling people in, hooked on lies and deceit.

These remaining verses—Matthew, John, Revelation—in each one there are statements about the enemy of the Lord and His people. Kind of titles that let you know how he works.

Matthew 4:3, the enemy is called “the tempter.” He tries to entice us out of God’s will and into his ways. It is the tempter enticing people.

In John 8:44, he is called “liar.” He wants to get us to believe what is not true. Oh, he’s had a great success there in the whole counseling theory approach of the church in the last twenty or thirty years. He’s lied to us. We shouldn’t have been listening to his genius theoreticians anyway. But he’s lied to us and we bought the lies. He’s a liar and he lies to people.

A lot of people seeking counseling, are in a mess, in a turmoil, or a torment because the enemy’s been lying to them. And they’re thinking and acting and feeling as though all of that was the truth. He is a liar. Often just to sit with people and where they are repeating the enemy’s lies, just ask God to show us His truth and the truth can set them free from the lies. He is a liar.
In Revelation 12:9-10, a number of terms are used to give insight into the enemy. Let’s just read that and pick up a few of those.

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and [or it could be translated even] Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’

He’s called the devil, that is, “slanderer.” He maligns people’s character. Who do you think is the one he wants to malign the most? God. He’s the slanderer. He certainly wants to malign the people of God, you and me and others. He loves to malign the character of God, making us think we can’t trust God, that He’s not loving or faithful.

He’s called Satan that means “adversary.” He wants to oppose the people of God. He wants to oppose lives. Get in the way, obstruct, limit progress. He deceives the whole world. He loves to trick people. He loves to fool them. He’s the accuser of the brethren. He thrives on condemnation. Oh, you are awful and God sure sees it. Oh, God’s sick. He’s just so fed up with you. That’s a lie, a condemning lie. These are characteristic of his tactics. We’re not to be ignorant. 2 Corinthians 2:11, “…we are not ignorant of his schemes.” Too many believers are ignorant. We don’t need to be ignorant. God has exposed him.

In conclusion, 1 Peter 5:8,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

We don’t need to panic. We don’t need to live in fear. But we should be sober and vigilant. Why? It is because there’s an enemy roaming about, an adversary, one who stands against us. Notice he walks or stalks about like a roaring lion. He isn’t really a lion. There is a lion, the Lion of Judah and He’s ours and we are His. But the enemy, the antichrist, the imitator, he’d like to roar about like a lion. When God really shines a light on him and shows him the perspective between God’s might and the enemy’s impotence, it’s like you know a hundred pound house cat against a three ounce mouse. Now, between us and the enemy, we’re the mouse, he’s the cat. But we don’t ever have to face him that way. It’s not intended that we face him on our own. See, here’s the truth—We’re absolutely no match for him. But he’s absolutely no match for our God. So we want to always leave the battle there between the enemy and the Lord.

So we just need to be sober and vigilant, alert. Not goof-offs, paying no attention to what’s going on. Just sober and alert because the enemy is prowling about. And look at what he wants to do. He doesn’t want to just stub our toe. He’s looking for someone to devour. He doesn’t want to, give us a hangnail. He wants to eat us alive. So be sober, be vigilant. Just be alert. The devil is prowling.

But we can always keep this kind of truth in mind. 1 John 3:8,

He who sins [that is characteristically, as a way of life] is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.
Yes, the enemy has mighty works against man, but the Son of God has appeared to destroy the works of the devil. He’s done that and is doing that in our lives. He destroyed the devil’s grip on us, the devil’s claim on us, the devil’s hold on us, and the devil’s case against us. He destroyed these things. He appeared to destroy the works of the devil. Sure with us against the enemy it is like maybe a mouse against a lion. But that’s not the way it is. Our Lord is come to destroy the works of the devil, the destructive enemy, who came to rob, kill and to destroy. Jesus came to destroy that activity. That is why we are redeemed, rescued, set free, and brought back to God, and being built up in Him. Sure, he landed some heavy blows on all of us. His destructive work, we don’t have to have great memories to say amen to that. Praise God, Jesus came to destroy those works, the impact that he has on lives, to turn it around the other way.

There are great implications in that. Our Lord is alive and ever able to turn those things around. He’s done it in the biggest sense. He brought us out of darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from hell to heaven, from blind to seeing. I mean, oh the Lord has destroyed so many works of the devil for each one of us and He can continue to do that.

In 1 John 4:4, what a critical truth this is to remember,

> You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because [How do we have overcoming walk as the children of God?] He who is in you [Jesus Christ] is greater than He who is in the world [the god of this age].

That’s our hope. We have the Greater One living in us. See, there are not two great gods out there fighting, the god of good and the god of evil. There’s only one God, the true and living God. He is the God of righteousness and truth and love. This is a false god, a usurper. This is a creature, not a god. He once did not exist and God made him. Oh yes, made him very special. He gave him a special place of fellowship and service, but he fell in self-exaltation and self-service and self-assertion and self-worship. And now it’s a fallen creature that fights against us. Oh, more awesome in his own resources than we are, but we don’t have to fight him on our own. We rely on the Greater One who is in us, so much greater than the one in the world.

Spiritual warfare, the enemy, it’s a critical part of counseling God’s way. We need to be sure that people we are ministering to understand these things or they will just be dominated and chained and fooled otherwise.

But also watch out for the counseling ways of the church world that have come from the world system. You cannot defeat the foe by taking the tactics of the foe and trying to set people free from the foe. We’re using psychological theory in the church to try and set people free from the enemy and the enemy’s going, “Yes, I invented that. Wail away with it. I love it.” And then he tells you, “You’re on the right track.” No way that it can change people’s lives or set them free from his influence.

And all of this is sort of anticipating our next section, and it’s about victory in spiritual warfare.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 20
Victory in Spiritual Warfare

By
Bob Hoekstra

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All right let’s continue on the matter of spiritual warfare. We’ve looked at kind of the heavier side of spiritual warfare. That is, the fact that we have an enemy and all the ways he works through the world system. Actually now, we’re going to look at the more exciting side. We’ve had a couple of glimpses in expectation of victory, but our subject now concerning spiritual warfare is victory in spiritual warfare.

Romans 8:37 is a great spiritual warfare victory verse. “Yet in all of these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

Listed here are many difficulties in the “all these things”—tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword (Romans 8:35). Verse 36, “killed all day long, like sheep led for the slaughter.” These are pretty tough things to think about and talk about. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors. Not, if we can just get out of them. But in all these things, right in the middle of them, we are already more than mighty winners. Not through ourselves, but “through Him who loved us.”

And consider the way the enemy works throughout the world system and comes at us using deceit and disguises and lies and temptation and condemnation and on and on, that’s part of all these things in which we are more than conquerors. Even while he is flailing away at us, or trying to, we may know it or not, but through Christ we’re already more than conquerors. And we’ll see how that unfolds in a tremendous way in these passages that we look at in this section. It is through Him who loved us because Christ was victorious, we can be too.

Let’s look for a while now at Christ’s victory. We looked at the battle, our enemy and his techniques and all, and some anticipation of victory. Let’s read for a while about the great victory that’s ours in Christ.

Hebrews 2:14-15,

Inasmuch then as the children [that is the children of the family of man that God created] have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Christ] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

All of the children of the family of man, and we even of the children of God, if it were not for the work of the Lord, would live in the fear of death. By dying for us, which Christ did—He died for us—and by His rising victoriously, Jesus took away Satan’s “death weapon,” you might say. You know, his neutron bomb. The Lord just took it away from him. The threat of death is kind of the ultimate weapon of the enemy.

The fear of death is the ultimate fear of man, though he tries to avoid it and not talk about it. Or if he talks about it, come up with deceitful philosophies that make it the greatest adventure in life, you know. You hear about things like that on the news. You get some weird philosopher that’s facing death, and “Oh, this is the most exciting adventure of my life.” It very well may be in the most critical point in his existence ever, but if he doesn’t know the Lord it’s not going to be what he thinks it is.
By dying for us and rising victorious, the Lord took away that fear of death. Without this everyone would be slaves to the fear of death. But the Lord took away that heavy weapon of the enemy, holding it over our head. “You cooperate or I’ll kill you. As a child of God, you wouldn’t be flippant and cocky, but in a sense you could say, “You mean and then I’d go straight to the Lord, right?” There is something missing in that threat. Not that we’re looking for our own exit time. But when it does come sooner or later, it’s not like a dreaded thing. I mean, that’s what we are looking forward to, is being in the presence of the Lord.

So the Lord, by dying and rising victoriously on our behalf, where death can no longer conquer us, what is a weapon that has been taken out of the arsenal of the enemy! Death for us is not separation from God forever. It is entrance into the very presence of God. And for those without Christ, who don’t have that victory, it’s the most dreaded thing of all, where you have to either ignore it, scramble up crazy philosophies to kind of talk yourself into a comfort zone.

Colossians 2:13-15, more about Christ’s victory and in the realm of spiritual warfare, I hope we understand we are talking right now about the critical arena of it. Yes, it’s important to know we have an enemy. Yes, it’s important to know we are on a battleground. And we are not to be ignorant of his schemes and we don’t have to be. The Lord has revealed them, exposed him right in the Word. However, that’s all kind of preliminary for what really matters. And that is, Christ has won the battle. That’s the big issue. That’s where it all hinges, right there.

Colossians 2:13-15,

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, [verse 15]…Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [that is, in the cross].

In this same cross and resurrection victory, the Lord triumphed over all demonic forces, “having disarmed principalities and powers.” That is, the hierarchy of fallen angels and the evil cohorts of Lucifer himself. And all the while He is granting us forgiveness and new life in Him at the same time. What a great victory!

Yes, the cohorts of the enemy will not admit their defeat yet. But the cross, burial and resurrection of Christ, and ascension, guaranteed that He and His kingdom would end up ultimately, and forever far above all principalities and powers.

In John 16:33, Jesus said,

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; [There’s another one of those promises of God you can just stand on], but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Sure, you’re going to have trouble there, but I’ve already whipped it. You know, so it can’t ultimately take you down and overcome you and take you as its own. I’ve won.
In Me and in the world, two interesting phrases there. In Christ, knowing Him, living in Him, related to Him, we can have peace. Even though while we’re still in the world awaiting to be with Him face to face, we will have tribulation. There will be plenty of troubles. But we don’t have to be all bummed out by it. Oh no, troubles, be of good cheer. The Lord has overcome this very world that is troubling us.

The god of this world system fired all of his weaponry at the Lord Jesus Christ, but He overcame it all. Never caved in, succumbed, or lost one confrontation within or without.

There’s a lot of victory here already we’ve just read in these few verses. If you add to it Romans 7 and 8, where we saw victory over the flesh by the work of the Spirit of Christ in His children, we already see here that there is victory available in Jesus Christ over the world, the flesh, the devil, sin, self and death. It is astounding the victory that is available in Jesus Christ.

Revelation 20 is talking about victory, the final eternal victory that is guaranteed for us. It’s always great, as they say, “Read the end of the story.” Though we know, don’t we, this is really the beginning of the story. Revelation. I mean, the story is eternal. So much of the Bible is about sort of the prelude to the story, in a sense. Like the preface to a book called Eternity. We are living in now to get entrance into the rest of that book, which is ours through Christ.

Revelation 20:1-3

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up and set a seal on him so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things, he must be released for a little while.

What a wonderful demonstration of the victory that is available in Christ during the millennium. Where, for a thousand years the enemy is put into a practical, personally experiential place of defeat for him, not just certainly of ultimate defeat, but for a thousand years. And yes, he’s going to come out briefly. The Lord lets him out again to show the heart of man. And some will even choose unrighteousness and the flesh and man’s way, even when the enemy is locked up. And their hearts will be revealed when he is released. They will have the leader they want, to serve self instead of Christ.

However, verse 10 says,

The devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

And the torment may take all sorts of shapes. But obviously the greatest torment of all in hell is not to be able to know and enjoy the presence of the true and living God. Now, He’s present throughout His entire creation. God is omnipresent. David said, “Where ever I go, if I even go to the depths of hell, You would be there.” But here is the thing, He cannot be known there in His love and grace and mercy and glory. But rather can only be
known in the consequences of rejecting His righteousness and holiness. Total defeat is coming for the enemy. I mean of the most severe kind.

Here’s the question for us and for our perspective of thinking together through the Scriptures in counseling God’s way, because spiritual warfare is such a big issue in counseling ministry. In our own lives, all of us as Christians, but in ministering to people personally, spiritual warfare is a big issue. So often people going through very rough things, a lot of it is related to the enemy just pounding on them, shooting darts at them, trying to trip them up, pull them back and wipe them out. We can often help one another in reminding each other of that.

Here’s the question, though, at this point: How are we to benefit now in the victory that Jesus Christ offered in the cross and the resurrection?

Well, certainly not by becoming expert in psychological theory. Can you imagine throwing psychotherapy at Satan? “Like ooh, let up. Please, no!” No, it’s like, “Yes, give me some more of that! I think you’re improving in fact.” The only time he’s encouraging us is when it’s a path that doesn’t lead to life. It’s not going to be psychological theory of man. How sad when many Christians seeking a word of counsel end up often in the so-called “Christian integrative psychotherapeutic clinic.” And what they are really suffering greatly in, maybe, is the enemy planting a defeat of lies and deceit and domination and temptation and accusation and condemnation. And if those hurting believers are given maybe some Scripture…but so often they get heavy, heavy doses of humanistic theories and philosophies and ideas on how to make your life what you want it to be. How sad. It doesn’t even begin to get to where the issues are.

We want to be able ourselves, to the glory of God and what He’s offered in His Word; and for the help of others, as we minister one to another, to help people see in the Word how to benefit now in a godly, Christ-like, God-pleasing, life-developing, church-building way. They need to see how to benefit now in the victory that Christ has already won.

And basically you can bring it down to a short phrase. Stand in that victory that’s already been provided. Let’s think for a little while of our next heading: Our Stand in His Victory.

Ephesians 6:10-12 is our stand in His victory,

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God [Why? To what end?], that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

This is talking about all the hierarchy of evil cohorts the enemy has. Verse 13, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God [Why? To what end?], that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.” Literally, withstand is “stand against.” This is the same exact word we saw earlier concerning standing against in verse 11. Withstand. It is just a little bit different form. “In the evil day,” when, as they say, “all hell breaks loose.” The evil day is when evil seems to overwhelm and surround.
“... and having done all, to stand,” Ephesians 6:14 says, “Stand therefore.” I think the point is pretty strongly made. Verse 11 says, “stand against.” Verse 13 says, “withstand and having done all, to stand.” “Stand therefore.” I mean, that’s the point the Lord wants to get home to us. In the warfare we take what God has provided—which is victory—and stand in it.

Having girded your waist with truth. Having put on the breastplate of righteousness, all of the provisions of the armory of God in this great victory that’s our in Christ.

Ephesians 6:15,

And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Verse 10 calls us to trust in the Lord and His strength. Not our own strength. Not the strength of man. Not the strength of impressive looking theories and ideas. But stand in the strength of the Lord. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. There is no strength or might that will ever be sufficient for the battle, short of the Lord’s strength and might itself. That is what we must be strong in, trust in, lean on, and count on.

Verse 11, “Put on the whole armor of God.” Count on that armor. Use with reliance God’s battle resources. Why? It is so that we might be able to stand against the wiles, the schemes and tricks of the devil.

Verse 13, Stand or, it could be translated, “stand firm.” What’s involved in standing spiritually on the battlefield, in the victory and the provision of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, some aspects of it would no doubt include being alert. Christians who just kind of drift through life with their eyes closed, paying no attention to what is going on. It’s like the enemy is looking for them. “Hey, there is a good morsel to chew on.” They are not even paying attention. “They don’t even know or have forgotten I’m around. I think I’ll start chewing on their life.” Being alert is part of it, standing, you know. You can just see someone on the battlefield standing. They’re alert! This is a battlefield. They’re not swinging in a hammock, thumbing their nose at the enemy or saying, “Oh you believe in that fairy tale?” They’re standing and they’re paying attention. They are ready. They are certainly not cowering or fleeing either, but standing and not running from him.

Also, interestingly enough, they are not chasing him down either. If you’ve already won, why chase a loser? A lot of the spiritual warfare examples in the American church is kind of chase the enemy until you get a death grip on him, and choke him. No, he’s lost; we’ve won. Stand in the victory.

Knowing we are at war, that would certainly be a part of standing in this context. Not being shocked when there is attack. That would be part of it. You know, can you imagine a soldier, all outfitted for war. He’s on the battlefield and he goes, “What are those noises? Why is the ground shaking? What is that smell of explosives and all?” You’re at war! You thought there’d be no bombs? No attacks? Certainly not being shocked when
there is an attack that is just part of it. It’s part of standing. Absolutely though, being increasingly certain of victory in Christ. That is part of standing in what Christ provides. And taking our place on the battlefield, knowing that He has won and we can be instruments of the application of that victory in people’s lives.

Aware of our position in Christ, that’s certainly related to standing. How are you going to stand there if you don’t know you stand there in Christ? If it’s just us against him, standing won’t do it. He will just trample us down. If it was just us, running would be better. Hiding would make more sense, but being aware of our position in Christ. We’re in Christ; He has won. Hey, we can just stand here. Sure, he may flail away. He may throw darts. He may lob bombs at us. But we can stand knowing our position in Christ.

It is being about the business of serving and witnessing and edification. Doing what soldiers are called to do in this battle that’s certainly a part of standing.

It is being ready to persevere. No one said the battle would be over in ten days. I was in Israel years ago, just a few weeks after the Six Day War, they called it. There was the uprising and they took much territory, including the old city of Jerusalem. I had a Friday night Sabbath meal in the home of a Jewish family. The daughter had been working with my dad over here and had come to know Christ as Messiah, and had just gotten back home and hadn’t told her family yet. But she told them that the son of this man who had been such a gracious employer and that she had worked with in some ministry and translation things was in town, and they had me over. We had a tremendous evening. The father took me in the den after the meal—which was quite an event in itself—and was pulling out all of their pictorial magazines. And included a lot of the Six Day War. And he’d show me a page and point up. He’d turn another page, he would point up again. He didn’t know the Lord personally, but he knew enough to know where that victory came from.

But not every war is a six-day war! Some feel like a six hundred year war. So being ready to persevere, sure that is part of standing. We don’t know. “I’ll stand but only 72 more hours.” Wait a minute, who is the Commander in Chief? To whom does the battle belong? There is only one who will tell us when there is some respite even on the battleground.

And certainly it includes paying attention to our Commander, listening to Him and asking Him by His Spirit and His Word to sort out the accusations and confusion of the enemy. It is because he will want to be talking to us too. “Hey, let’s think about this battle together.” And he’s got it. He can really reason to conclusions of our defeat. Be listening to our Commander. Just abiding in the Lord and abounding in the work of the Lord. That is all part of standing.

A little side-note question: When we’re standing there in the battle, where does this warfare often surface or make its appearance? Not maybe like a Hollywood producer would show it, with smoke and noise and all that, and advancing troops. But it does appear, and it appears in a lot of forms and places. It often appears in heavy measures of fear or anxiety or doubt or confusion. See these are all things the enemy loves to do. These are all things he’s master at stirring up. Boy, when those things seem to cloud over us it’s like the battle’s intensifying. He will want to point it all to us. “That’s just you. You can’t get your head straight. You can’t get your act together.” And he’s the one shouting and screaming confusion and kicking and tripping and shoving, and going,
“What is it with you?” You can’t seem to get it together. He knocks us down and he goes, “Boy, you’re clumsy.” Accusation and condemnation! And it is often enticement to indulgence in wrong goals and wrong priorities. It is the enemy pounding away to get us to move in the wrong direction for self.

Often strained relationships and resentment and vengeance is a sign of intensive spiritual warfare. And a person may be caving in a bit to it. It is because these are not the things that the Lord produces. These are things the enemy magnifies. They are already resident in the flesh of everyone.

Distraction. We just cannot keep our attention on what the Lord has for us and what He’s doing and what He’s saying and where He’s leading. It is because the enemy is working hard on us. “No, no, no, think on this. No, no, no get into this.”

Disappointment. That’s an interesting warfare thing. A symptom of warfare is disappointment. The Scripture says whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed. When the enemy comes hard and gets us hoping in ourselves or others and we or they let us down and waves of disappointment sweep over us, it’s like the enemy’s on the prowl.

Now all of these things can be stirred to some degree, just by the flesh of man. If the enemy left us alone our own flesh could conjure up a lot of this, you know. But the intensifying of these things, where they just become major and kind of overwhelming or seem like they’re about to, is an absolute sign of the enemy stirring up the things of the flesh to a crisis crescendo.

Discouragement. “Those who wait [hope] in the Lord, shall renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:31). They mount up with wings like eagles. They draw on the victory that’s in Christ. When discouragement overwhelms us, it’s usually sign that warfare is just raging.

False teachers and false teaching, absolutely is where warfare often surfaces. I mean, what better way? The enemy will send out people in the name of the Lord Jesus who might be teaching, as we were talking before, all the way things from just self-worship, to New Age—which is kind of cousins together anyway. But we’re going to be the god and then go through all kinds of bizarre ways to manipulate reality in our thinking. False teachers and false teaching, definitely is where the warfare often arises, surfaces, and can be seen.

Also in a sense of oppression or depression, coming upon the children of God, who have eternal life and forgiveness and have every right, spiritually, to have abundant measures of joy often. Well, when heavy doses of oppression or depression kind of hit, where do you think that is coming from? You know, right out of the pits of the enemy’s camp. He who came only, John 10:10 says, “…to rob, kill, and destroy.”

Now there are all kinds of other arenas. That’s the marvel of it all. You know, we have covered a lot of territory there in a few minutes, but that’s not all of it. But it can surface in ways that don’t look like warfare. Just looks like bad circumstance or having a bad day. Someone tells you have a nice day, and you’re thinking, “Yeah, that’s what I’ll do.” And the enemy’s going, “Yeah, you’ll have a nice day. Not if I can help it.”

If we’re not standing in the victory of the Lord we probably won’t have a nice day. And even if we are standing in the victory, the day might not have the nice circumstances
we’d like. But we can rest assured the victory is available. These things do not have to
wipe us out and pull us down. And to stand there in all this work and provision of Christ,
let’s us draw on, believe in, thereby, as it were, wear the armory. We need the whole
armor of God.

Ephesians 6:14 says, truth is a great part of the armory. Certainly that would include
the truth of God’s Word, but also living out the word in truth. You know, living truthfully.
See, this part of the armor protects us from lies, and deceits from the enemy. Boy, what a
great part of the weaponry and the armor truth is when you’re dealing with the father of
lies!

Also in verse 14, righteousness. The righteousness of Christ, of course, this would be.
Both imputed and imparted. Imputed, that relates to justification, a stand before a holy
God. Imparted, that relates to sanctification, righteous growth daily. All of that—I mean,
“none is good but God alone.” If our life is going to develop in good things, where is it
going to come from? First the imputed righteousness, credited to our account, so we can
even begin to relate to God. But day by day we need to draw on that imparted
righteousness, given to us and through us for a godly life.

And that righteousness resists things like condemnation and accusation. When the enemy
tells us how awful we are, we don’t have to try to do verbal battle with him and convince
him and us and others how great we are. It is like, “Hey, you haven’t even touched on
half of it. I’m far worse than that. But, that’s why Christ died for me.” And “in my flesh
dwells no good thing” (Romans 7:18). And “Christ in me is my hope of glory”
(Colossians 1:27). Christ is my righteousness, so I can deal with that condemnation and
accusation from the enemy.

Ephesians 6:15, the Gospel of peace. The Good News that is in Jesus Christ that brings us
peace. First of all, of course, it is peace with God. But it can go beyond that too. It can
flow down into relational peace with others and all the while, inside, peace within. Peace
from worry. Peace from strife.

Verse 16, faith. That is, trusting God. Oh how this combats fear, doubt, and despair. Just
thinking again, is God trustworthy or not? Oh yes! Then I think I’m just going to trust
Him. Not pumping up something that looks like faith, but trusting in God. “I don’t know
if I can.” Well, consider the Lord. Just consider who He is and what He’s done and faith
grows. Oh yeah, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, my heavenly Father, Lord God
Almighty. What has He done? He sent His Son, the cross, burial, resurrection. We’re
joined to Him. “Oh yeah, I think there is a lot there I can depend on.” Faith combats fear
and doubt and despair.

Then in verse 16, of course that is faith, the reason we need it is that fear and doubt and
despair comes from all these, verse 16, all these fiery darts of the wicked one. I don’t
believe the Scriptures at all indicate that Satan can read our minds. God absolutely can.
We can, but we misread them. But the Lord can read them. And I don’t think the enemy
can. But he can put in our heart, in our thinking—He put in David’s heart. Hey, count
Israel. God didn’t tell him to. It was kind of like a numbers thing, you know. God didn’t
tell you to do that. God at times said to number. And there’s nothing right or wrong,
especially in numbering things or people. It was like David was apparently kind of, “I
wonder how strong we are? 480,000 troops! Oh yes! Maybe it was sort of that kind of
trip. God took census of His people and often, for many different reasons, including the
land He would give and other things. And how many would be chosen to serve and this and that. And the Scripture says Satan put that in David’s heart. He can’t read our minds, but he can provoke our minds. He can shoot fiery darts, kind of like our mind is like a target. And it’s kind of like, okay, think about that for a minute. At that time he has a pretty good hunch what is on our mind, even though he can’t read our mind. Well, he’s not omniscient like God. He is a creature. But he can provoke our minds. He can make us think about certain things or try to get our minds on such things.

But faith is just like a shield. I’m going to trust God. I am not going to get caught up in that dead thought, that life-destroying, life-shredding thought. The shield of faith is trusting God.

Verse 17 is salvation, the helmet of salvation. Salvation, assurance of, and hope in God and His delivering work on our behalf, which gives great hope and assurance God has saved us. We need that protection in our thinking and wear that everywhere we go.

Then the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. I think the word here is actually rhema. If fact, they can speak it quite dramatically, actually, at times. It’s like it’s supposed to have a special power in it. There’s a bit of a difference between the written and spoken word, but if it’s the Word of God they are both backed with the life of God. It’s not like one’s weak and the other is mighty. Probably the best example of rhema, God’s word spoken for the occasion, would be, remember Matthew 4:4, 7 and 10, when Jesus being tempted by the enemy said, “It is written.” I think that’s the ultimate example of what rhema, the eternal incarnate Word, speaking the written Word. Now that is the rhema. It’s the Word of God spoken by the will of God with the power of God behind it for the occasion. It is not some spoken, great pronouncement some man makes. That is kind of back in that “Word of Faith Movement” that believes the words of your mouth create your reality and all.

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, led by the Spirit, fitly applied to a given occasion. What a great weapon that is! It is inspired by the Holy Spirit. That is why it is the sword of the Spirit, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit, not by us. It is written. In that situation with Jesus, it drove away the enemy. The same thing can happen to us, as we minister to one another and rescue captive lives. Speak forth the word of the Lord as the Spirit leads and as it’s built into our lives. It seems like it’s a part of the offensive weaponry here, as well as being defensive.

Then in verse 18, we are to wear and use all of this armor at all times with all prayer. That is, calling upon the One in whom is the armor and the might and the victory and the life. In the Lord’s might and in His armor, that is how we can stand in the battle in Christ’s victory. We take, believing what He has offered and provided and just stand in it, rely upon it, and count on it. And when the moment calls for it, in the proper sense of the word, use it. When the enemy is lying to us, turn back to the truth of God. When he is intimidating us with fear, again, think of why we can validly hope in the Lord. And just right down the line. Whatever he is doing, God has provided in this victory and resource of Jesus Christ that which will let us stand in the victory and not get blown away.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, we pick up this very language and make some powerfully insightful statements.
For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

These are powerful words on spiritual warfare. It speaks of the weapons of our warfare.

Verse 3 says yes, “…we walk in the flesh.” That is not according to the flesh though. Galatians 5, and Romans 7, where you are drawing on human resource. But we do walk in the flesh. That is, in human flesh and bones bodies. Yes. Unlike this part of this crazy Toronto Blessing thing and all, that has kind of got the manifest sons of God built into its doctrine, where the time is going to come pretty soon where it will manifest who the real sons of God are. They will be walking on water and raising the dead. No, we are not some kind of super-saints that, just stand out. We walk in fleshy bodies, human bodies. But we do not war according to the flesh. We do walk about in human bodies, but we don’t fight the battle drawing on human resources.

And the world doesn’t understand that and sometimes we forget it. They look at us and see human people. “Oh, you are just religious weirdos.” Well, we may look weird to the world. And they say, “You are just human too. What are you talking about, God’s children, living forever, and victory over the devil and all that? Look at you.” They might even pinch us, you know. “Look, you say ouch just like I do.”

Well, though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. Yeah, we have this same physical tent we walk in that the world does, but the resources we draw on are not human ones. “For the weapons of our warfare,” what we draw on, and by faith use and stand in and on, to fight the good fight of faith, they “are not carnal.” They are not of the flesh. They are not human.

Again, this is another of the how many hundreds of warnings we have had along the way not to put our hope in human psychological theory. I mean, think of this, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. Psychological theory, at best you would have to say it’s carnal. It came from man. It didn’t come from the Bible. It didn’t come from the Spirit of God. It came from man’s best ingenuities. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are not human, but mighty in God, divinely powerful for pulling down strongholds, (2 Corinthians 10:4).

For the destruction, the tearing down of strongholds could be translated “fortresses.” Think of the strongholds, the spiritual fortresses that are in people's lives and the enemy wants to build around our lives, or over our lives, or mar our lives. Think of the strongholds that the weaponry of God can pull down. Strongholds, we might call them collections of, developments of, deeply entrenched ungodliness. Fortresses. Not just a passing unrighteous act or thought or issue, but deeply entrenched, demonstrations, developments, accumulations of ungodliness. Like perversion.

You get into Romans 1 and sinful man is rebelling against man and suppressing the truth in unrighteousness and it just goes downhill from one degree to another. And the end of the chain there is really human sexual perversion, now called “alternate lifestyle.” Now we are supposed to recognize a marriage union in what’s on the bottom of God’s scale of ungodliness in Romans 1, where His wrath is poured out against man. That is how blind
we can get in our sophistication. What is that? All of that? That’s a fortress of evil. It’s not a sociological development. It’s a fortress of evil, perversion.

Prejudice. I was watching a bit of the news and I saw everything all the way from burning church buildings, to hate music and the skinhead movement and all that, with the white supremacy and all. It’s pathetic. It’s tragic. It’s just another demonstration of self-exaltation though, which was the enemy’s original sin. And he’s been enticing people into it ever since. Prejudice. What a wicked fortress of unrighteousness and deeply entrenched ungodliness. Drugs would fit that category, which are habits and addictions that overtake people. It is not just that they have a proclivity, a tendency, or weakness or struggle, but it just all of a sudden dominates their whole being. That is a fortress, spiritually speaking.

Well, praise the Lord, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are not fleshy. They are mighty in God, divinely powerful, for the destruction of fortresses, pulling these strongholds down. They don’t have to keep dominating lives. Some of these things probably dominated our lives. Some of these things dominated my life before I came to Christ. Probably you too, but the weapons of our warfare are mighty of God. They can tear down these strongholds.

Casting down arguments in 2 Corinthians 10:5, or it could be translated “destroying speculations,” that is, vain imaginations, rationalizations, even systems of it like evolution and humanism and psychology. The weapons of our warfare can cast down such arguments, destroying speculations.

“And every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,” could be translated “every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” That is every lofty thing, rebellious, prideful, self-sufficient, self-exalting, self-esteeming thing of man. These are lofty things, prideful things raised up against God. “Who does God think He is? I’ll be my own god, I will,” as Satan said in Isaiah 14 and also in Ezekiel 28. He was exalting himself like God.

The weaponry of God can destroy these things and pull down lofty things in our lives. And we can go in in the name of the Lord and see them pulled down in other lives. Some of counseling God’s way is, in the name of the Lord, sharing the resources and the salvation and the victory of the Lord, and seeing strongholds pulled down and high lofty thoughts of man yanked off of human pedestals. These are things raised against the knowledge of God, against the truth of God, with Jesus at the core of it all, allowing us then to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Not humanism or human thought or self, but taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

“Taking every thought captive”—again, here is another clue how much of the battle is in the mind. No doubt for most Christians, most of the time, the place the spiritual warfare arises, appears, surfaces the most is right in the mind. It can appear in a lot of ways, but you can just see it again and again in the Scriptures that the battle rages between the ears. The battle is in the mind, you know. It’s like sometimes World War III is going on in there. And you wonder if everybody walking by is hearing it. “Why aren’t they all looking at me? Don’t they know what’s going on in my mind? This is raging warfare in here.” And everybody just calmly walks past.
But we can take those thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, by reevaluating every incoming thought, every internal thought, by Christ’s way of thinking. It is rejecting thoughts or embracing thoughts on the basis of His truth and bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

This is God’s description for us of standing in the battle by His resources because He’s already won the victory. The 1 Peter 5:5-10 and James 4:6-10, they’re pretty long passages. But I’ll just make a comment about them and you can look at them as you have time. The context and the focus of those two passages both include resisting the devil. But the context of the verses has to do with spiritual life, humility, purity, knowing God, growing in God, being alert. The focus isn’t rebuking and shouting at the enemy. The context is spiritual life. The focus of these two passages is the Lord not the devil, though we are told to resist the devil in both of them.

Resisting the enemy is sort of an outgrowth of walking a godly life that is focused in on Jesus Christ. And again, too much of the caricaturized spiritual warfare in America kind of comes from religious television, which is the biggest broadcasting operation in the history of the world. There is nothing to match it ever; it goes all over the world now. You know, the program comes on and they come marching in and right away start screaming at the devil. And it’s like the louder you can yell or the more you can insult him, because that’s how you get the victory. What a distraction. What an off-center perspective.

We are to focus in on the Conqueror, the Victor, in whom we have victory. And then stand there. If there’s going to be yelling and berating, let’s let the loser to that. Let the enemy yell. “If I could just get my hands on you.” These are religious programs that start with, “Oh, we’re going to get the enemy mad tonight. Oh, we’re going to get the enemy on the run tonight.” It’s like, he’s whipped. What do we care if he’s happy, sad, glad, or mad? Just tell me this, is he whipped? I don’t care about whether he’s having a nice day or not. Is he whipped? And don’t teach me how to bait him and yell at him. Just tell me, who has won? That’s the ultimate issue in the New Testament when it comes to spiritual warfare.

Sure there are times when we are out there in the world where there are deep, dark entrenchments of wickedness and demonic forces. In the name of the Lord we can rebuke demonic forces and in the name of Jesus they’ll be gone. But that is kind of an exceptional aspect of the Christian life. You see it in the New Testament, but it’s not the central focus. And sure there may be times when that’s appropriate, but every day it’s not, “let’s go chase down the devil.” We’ll have some brushes at times that we will be calling on the name of the Lord and “get thee behind me, Satan,” maybe. But we are not to be out chasing after him, rebuking him, yelling at him and obsessed with him.

And I think these two passages, I commend them to you. They are classic. They both exhort us to resist the enemy. But it says, “…and he will flee.” You are in the victory and in the armor. If you are being hassled, just say no to him. You don’t have to scream an orator’s curse at him or something. Just say, “No, I’m not taking part in that. My Lord has won. I’m standing in Him.”

Stand in the victory. Yeah, there is a battle and it rages, but Christ has won the victory. He wants us to learn to stand in it.
Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You so much for being the mighty Conqueror, the Victor. Teach us more and more, Lord, what it means to be more than conquerors in all these things we face in life. Lord Jesus, we honor You, even right now, as the mighty Conqueror, the Victor, the King of kings, the Lord or lords. And we want to learn to stand in that great victory and from that position of victory, to please You, serve You, be used of You; not drug down by the enemy, not reduced in effectiveness by the enemy, and not obsessed with the enemy, just standing in Your victory. Teach us that, Lord, and make us instruments of sharing it with others, as they come to us for counsel. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 21
Forsaking Our Wonderful Counselor

By
Bob Hoekstra

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All right, let’s pray together.

Lord, we come again, seeking You. We come with hunger for You. We come desiring to hear from You. Lord, You’re our Wonderful Counselor. All of us at times, Lord, have drifted away and kind of leaned to worldly counsel with its enticements. We ask You now, Lord, to show us the critical issue of not forsaking our Wonderful Counselor. And just speak to us tonight, Lord, about these threats, the big threats to counseling God’s way. Just unfold them. Open them up in Your Word that we might be warned and protected and guarded, and be used of You to help others in that same way. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

V. Major Threats to Counseling God’s Way

Two units of study together have to do with worldly threats to Counseling God’s Way. This is our fifth major section, really our last major section in this study—“Major Threats to Counseling God’s Way.”

This study is about “Forsaking Our Wonderful Counselor.” This really, I believe, is the major of two main threats. I think you can boil it down—if someone said, “What really threatens the church counseling God’s way?” I would say there are two aspects to it that everything else fits under. One is forsaking our Wonderful Counselor, then that always leads to the second one, turning to worldly counsel. But we’ll concentrate on this one for a while—“Forsaking our Wonderful Counselor.” That is the main threat. The church’s failure to counsel God’s way that is the main threat, is our failure to look to the Lord Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor. The church in many ways is drifting from the Lord; disobeying and neglecting His Word and thereby often being left open to deception. And basically, to take the phrase out of Isaiah 9:6, where Jesus is called our “Wonderful Counselor,” many in the church are forsaking our Wonderful Counselor.

Let’s look at this first heading of forsaking the Lord. We can see it in Jeremiah 2:13.

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

An appropriate reason to look at Jeremiah 2:13 is that in that verse there are two evils that Israel got involved in that are very similar to what’s happening in the church world today in the counseling field. We are told in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 10, that the things that happened to Israel are written for our admonition, for our instruction, for our warning.

Many of us only learn certain lessons by doing it wrong, but we don’t have to learn everything that way. Life wouldn’t be long enough to learn all we need to learn or we wouldn’t survive it, as they say. We’d get wiped out by the enemy if we had to do everything wrong and then learn, that there is another way to do it right. We can learn from others and by watching others.

We all have our own lessons that seem to only come by us doing it the wrong way and then God showing us there was a better way. We go, “Oh, wow, yes.” But these things that happened to Israel are for our instruction. We can take heed. We don’t have to follow every error of those that came before us.
Jeremiah 2:13 speaks of two such evils. “For My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters….” That’s the first evil. And that’s our first application of study here in these two units of “Worldly Threats to Counseling God’s Way.” Then the next threat is, “…And hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” That’s the other aspect applied to our study, turning to worldly counsel.

First is the issue of forsaking the Lord Himself. “My people, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,” God said through the prophet to His people.

Israel had the Lord God Almighty pledge to them to be their ever-flowing source and supply of spiritual life. Kind of like the Lord Jesus is now to us as described remember in John 4:13-14, where that living water we find in salvation becomes a well-spring that just springs up in us of living water. Well, the Lord God Almighty was pledged to Israel His people to be their fountain of living waters. To be their source of supply of everything they needed. But they turned from the Lord. They drifted from God to the idols and the ways of the nations around them.

It’s an amazing thing, too, that this apostasy of Israel was prophesied in a song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. This is a prophetic song God brought to the people through Moses. It often uses the prophetic past tense when speaking of things in the future. When God ordains and prophesies something will happen, it’s a done deal. And this song is looking ahead to when they get in the land and all—because they’re not in the land yet, here in Deuteronomy. They are about ready to go in. Look at this song.

Deuteronomy 32:15-18. And there’s a real parallel here with many in the church world today.

But Jersherun [one of the nicknames for Israel] grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! And then he forsook God who made him. [That fatness, a picture of abundance, having more than needed]. And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, To gods they did not know, To new gods, new arrivals That your fathers did not fear. Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, And have forgotten the God who fathered you.

This prophetic song. Israel prospering, growing fat, sleek. And that’s when they forsook the God who made them. Oh they stayed very religious. They just forsook God.

There are many in the church world today in America that are very religious, but they’ve been forsaking God. And we’re not just talking about the so-called apostate churches or liberal denominations. We are talking even about those who still cherish some of the truth of the Lord. You think about evangelical churches who no longer think of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Wonderful Counselor. Oh, they are glad He forgave their sins. But when they need counsel, they go to the wisdom of man. That’s a forsaking of the Lord!

They forsook the God who made them. They scorched the rock of their salvation. Their strong foundation of divine rescue and deliverance, the Lord God Almighty, they scorched Him. They got into strange gods, foreign gods, abominations and worshipping demons. “New gods” in verse 17, “new arrivals,” or as one translation puts it, “gods who came lately.” You know, late arrivers that want to be called god.
All of this fits Israel’s idolatrous worship. But it also fits the roots of psychological theory. Terms like strange gods, abominations, demons, gods who came lately. All these theories sure arrived late on the scene to have their source in God. Where was Freud when God created the heavens and the earth? Where was Carl Jung when Christ died on the cross? Where was Abraham Maslow and his theories of self-actualization and behavior modification and all when Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead and the apostles wrote the New Testament? Where were these people? They are like new arrivals. And yet they are getting worship from man and allegiance. These are people putting their lives on the altar of psychotherapeutic thought and even inviting it into the church.

Israel was warned about these things in this prophetic song and eventually totally got into these things. In the church world today the Lord is often being subtly forsaken. And to an increasing number in the church world that is even born again He is no longer the passion of their lives. He is no longer the rock of their salvation, the focus. Too many Christians don’t think of the Lord Jesus Christ as their fountain of living water. And yet He is! Yes, He is our Savior. Yes, He is God who came in the flesh. But on and on the Scriptures just keep magnifying how great He is. He today is our fountain of living waters. He’s our Wonderful Counselor. But are we considering Him in these ways? No, in many ways we are forsaking these realities of Jesus Christ.

Israel forsook the Lord, in spite of His presence among them and all that He did for them. Many in the church world have been doing that for decades now and certainly in the last three decades. The last thirty years in the American church world there has been a forsaking of the Lord when it comes to His role as Wonderful Counselor.

That leads us to our next issue. Not just forsaking the Lord, but of course, what goes with it is forsaking God’s Word.

In 2 Chronicles 12:1,

Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom [speaking of Israel here now] and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him.

Look at that picture. The kingdom was established and strong. That is when they forsook the law of the Lord. How often that is the pattern? When people think they have it made, they stop looking to and leaning on the Lord. That is one of the great values of trials and impossibilities. It gives us what you might call a bit of a boost to throw ourselves upon the grace of God and the faithfulness of God.

The American church, oh, so often our view of ourselves is we are so strong, we are so established. We are the ones who go around the world and tell the church how to be the church. But so often we are pulling the church into directions that aren’t even of the Lord. When the kingdom is established and strong, that is when they forsook the law of the Lord. Many today are doing the same thing. The church world is less and less looking to God’s Word as fully authoritative and fully sufficient.

I am personally amazed even, at how what you might call relatively good pastors of evangelical churches, the way they speak of the Word, the way they teach it, the way they want to supplement it with other things. Respected Christian leaders are sadly illustrating even what the leaders of Israel did back then. They are just diminishing confidence in the Word of the Lord. Oh yeah,
maybe saying it’s great and good and from God, but in word and deed indicating they think it is inadequate. It is not enough and that’s why we’ve got to have these theories from the world. That’s why we need to have worldly-wise men teaching us how to really affect and touch lives for Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 28:4 gives an interesting implicational warning to that kind of thinking. It speaks about this matter of forsaking the Word in kind of an interesting perspective.

Proverbs 28:4,

Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But such as keep the law contend with them.

To apply this to the church world today in the counseling field, it seems like those who are losing their grip on, or diminishing their perspective on Scriptures—they get weak concerning the Word, the time, the attention they give it, the hope they place in it, they commend psychological theory. They accept it. They want to integrate it into their ministry. And those, it seems, who are just convinced that the Word is not only inspired and authoritative but sufficient, they resist this integration. They expose it. They warn about it. It’s sad sometimes to look out in the church world and see people who give all kinds of evidence of loving the Lord and having some confidence in His Word that they’re kind of cozying up to psychological theory. I mean, the roots of psychological theory are anchored in human wickedness, if not Lucifer’s self-exaltation.

You know, psychological theory didn’t come from Biblical study and Biblical theology. It came from humanistic, godless men imagining what life is all about and what man is and how to help him and all. The roots of all this is anchored in wickedness. It is humanistic self-centeredness. “Those who forsake the law, praise the wicked.” Many in the church are forsaking the Word of God to praise these geniuses in the world and say, “We’ve got to train leaders in the church, bring it back in the church, to kind of take advantage of the great things they are doing. Those who forsake the law praise the wicked. Those who keep the law—they cherish it, they hold to it—they strive with the wicked. They battle against the wicked. They say, “No, we don’t want that in the life of God’s people.”

These are theories that came from godless men. Forsaking God’s Word is even taking place in the evangelical church. The evangelical church that is the part of the church that still professes allegiance to the Word. It is happening in many ways. One of the ways it is happening is the subtly of hearing the Word, but not being interested in walking in it. Kind of dead orthodoxy and sometimes even dead and watered down orthodoxy.

James 1:21-22 kind of touches on that kind of danger we don’t want to get caught up in. We want to stay away from and warn others, and we often need to do that in our counseling.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness of overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

In humility we are to receive the Word of God. This is God speaking to us. We are to come humbly to the Word. Not with self-assurance, not thinking we know it all, not thinking we can just read and go out and make it happen. But come humbly and receive the Word meekly, the implanted Word which is able to save our souls. God can take His Word, that is that seed of life that He just imparts in speaking to us, and plant it in our hearts. It can save our souls, not only
rescue us from hell, but deliver us day by day from the things we need to be out of and unto the things God has for us. We are to be humbly receiving the Word. Laying aside filthy things and wicked things and just humbly receiving the Word.

But then being doers of the Word, wanting to live it. Not just hear it but living by its truth. Not just listening to it. It’s great to listen to the Word of God, that is, if we are humbly receiving it. If we are just going through the motions, counting the moments till it’s done or thinking, “Yeah, I got to log one more message.” That is not what it’s about. But if we are humbly receiving it, it’s great to listen to the Word of God, but we want to be convinced that it’s something that we are to stand on, live in, and live out. What God says it is to become where we walk and what we do and how we think and how we talk. Living the Word out, not just hearing it talked about.

We are to “be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” There is a real deception in thinking that just hearing is all that matters. No, we want to hear it with the desire that it change us, that what we hear becomes what we are in life. We become a listening and progressive doer. In other words, we live out the Word that God is planting in. We want it to change our lives.

For example, we’ve been hearing things like Colossians 3 and Romans 15 that say we are to “counsel one another.” We have been hearing that. Well, the Lord doesn’t want us just to hear and say, “Amen, I believe that. Count me in. I’m orthodox.” Or even against the trend of the church world, I say, “Yes, we’re to be counseling each other. I hear it. I agree with it. Praise God for that. That’s good. That’s well done.” But we want to do that, you know. We want to walk in that. We want to actually be the instruments through whom the Wonderful Counselor can pass His counsel one to another. Not just hear it and say, “Amen.” And never walk in it. That is a delusion and we are deceiving ourselves. God doesn’t tell us these things just so we can know what’s right and wrong, but so we can avoid the wrong and become more and more walking and practicing the right that He’s speaking of.

We have heard in Psalm 19 and 2 Timothy 3 and elsewhere, the authority and sufficiency of the Word. Do we believe it to the sense that we act upon it? That we make decisions by it and it changes what we say or don’t say? Or where we look or don’t look for counsel. Are we looking elsewhere, personally, for counsel beyond the wisdom of God?

We’ve heard these things. The Lord wants us to be walking in them. We don’t want to be self-deceived. It’s not only wrong just to hear the Word and not want to walk in it, but it is trouble! It leaves one open to deception and deceiving ourselves.

On this issue of open to deception, let’s look at 2 Corinthians 11:3.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted [or led astray] from the simplicity that is in Christ.

What a verse this is. The apostle Paul, early in the history of the church, had a concern or an apprehension. I must confess that I have it as well. Maybe you do too. And that is, that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, the church might be deceived, which is the implication here. It is that our minds might be led astray or corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

How did Eve get pulled down? She was deceived by the enemy’s craftiness. He’s so clever. He’s so ingenious. She was deceived by his craftiness.
It’s one of my personal convictions that psychological theory is one of the most crafty tactics the enemy ever came up with to plague, bind, wipe out, pull down, distract, swallow up the human family. It’s almost like a way to live with God left totally out of the picture. A way that is so satisfying to the mind and so enticing to the flesh. It is crafty!

I have mentioned at times when I was in college, how intrigued I was at psychological theory. I marvel that I didn’t get totally swallowed up in it. I’d just read it and I, oh, I just couldn’t read enough. My mind was just feasting on it. Oh here, gorge me some more, you know. Everything I’d read it seemed to make such sense. “Oh yeah, that’s me. Oh, that’s the hope. And oh yes!” It’s clever. It’s crafty and many give their whole life in the pursuit of it and they think it is the great hope of humanity and so much so that the church now wants it in her life. Crafty and clever!

What happens in all of that? Our minds get corrupted or led astray. You could translate it either way. They get corrupted or led astray. From what?—from the simplicity that is in Christ.

There’s a wonderful simplicity that is ours in Christ. That is, it’s not complicated in the sense that all we need is right there in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is all there. It’s not some of it there and some of it elsewhere. Or some of it’s there, but you’ve got to make it all work yourself. You’ve just got to figure out the jigsaw puzzle. It’s simple. Life is all there in Christ and it is ours by faith and trust. We are obeying our Lord because we are believing and trusting our Lord. It’s simple. In Christ is all the fullness. In Him we are complete. It is simple.

It is not simplistic, but it is simple. Simplistic often used in the sense of non-substantial, you know. Oh that’s so simplistic. It’s like there’s nothing to it and there’s nothing there. No. It is simple, yes, in that is it is not complicated.

I often think of my precious little seven-year-old granddaughter. She loves to talk about the Lord. She loves to sing songs about the Lord. She understands profoundly significant things about the Lord. She says, “Daddy, am I going to go to Christian school next year?” Because they’re praying about it and she wants to go there. And then she says, “Grandpa, they don’t talk about Jesus in my school.” At seven years old, she knows that’s not right. There is something big missing. No life in it at all. It’s like a wasteland. And this is first grade, where little lives that should be feasting on who the Lord is.

It’s simple and yet it’s not simplistic. You can take the greatest genius, the greatest brain among the family of man and if he gets to know the Lord, God can share the simple reality of Christ with him in a way that will just use up every circuit in his brain. It’s not simplistic, it’s just simple.

This verse hit me many years ago. I have prayed and thought on it many times. We don’t want to get led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ. Often when I travel and teach the seminars on counseling God’s way, one of the popular responses to those who are skeptical or resistant is, “Yeah, a lot of good information there, but it’s too simple.” You can almost hear it coming and usually they mean it is too simplistic. “It’s insubstantial. I mean, come on. This mountain of theory on man and you are just setting it all aside and staying it’s just all there in one Person and His Word. There’s not enough there. Come on, be real! It’s too simplistic.”

One day I was thinking on this and my imagination ran wild. I’ll tell you what happened. I found myself in a conversation with a fish—candidate for therapy, right? I trust the Lord will give fruit to this and keep me out of the institution. I was talking to Mr. Fish and he was troubled and felt empty and needed help and wanted his life changed and was unfulfilled.

And I said I knew just what he needed.

“What’s that Mr. Counselor?”
“Mr. Fish, all you need is the ocean.” He thought a moment. “Oh come on. That’s too simple. I need the mountains. I need the deserts. I need the valleys. I need the hills. I need the canyons. That’s too simple. I need to get better counsel than that.”

I was stirred to say to Mr. Fish, “You know what I perceive by your answer is that it has been a long time since you really considered what is in the ocean. If you don’t think there is enough there to have a full, whole, complete, abounding, abundant, exciting life, you just haven’t been looking at the ocean very carefully.”

I think the application fits many Christians who hear a teaching like this and they say, “Yeah interesting. It’s kind of helpful. Yes, maybe. But bottom line, let’s face it, it’s too simple.” I can sense they’re meaning it is non-substantial, you’re not giving us enough. One Person, one book, come on.” I want to say to that Christian, “You know, I perceive by that answer that you haven’t really been considering the Lord Jesus Christ. You don’t know how much is there in Him. You don’t realize what that ocean is to that fish, Christ is to you.”

You think of Ephesians 3:8, which speaks of the unfathomable riches of Christ. They are unfathomable! You can’t fathom them. You can’t measure the fathoms and ever get to the bottom. And yet you proclaim to people the resources they have in Christ and our Wonderful Counselor, He has it all. “Oh, come on. That’s too simple. That’s too simplistic.” I think it’s a strong indicator they have not been seriously, consistently, earnestly taking a look at the Lord Jesus Christ, finding out who He is, what He’s done, what He offers, and who they are in Him.

And look at the danger of this. “But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). Sometimes when a person says to me, “You know, Bob, this is interesting and kind of helpful. But it’s too simple.” Inside, I kind of go, “Yes!” I think I said it pretty right. Maybe it didn’t sound real complicated. It had a simplicity to it. “Yes!” I mean, I don’t celebrate outwardly with them. And I get burdened for them immediately because I see a real problem of underestimating who Christ is. To say that it is too simple, you know what’s happening? The crafty techniques of the enemy are leading our minds astray from the simplicity that is in Christ. Sure the wisdom of Christ can go beyond the human comprehension, but it is this simple. What we need to know is in Him and He has revealed it in His Word. We need to have our lives changed, full, abundant, fruitful and it is in Him, as He’s described in His Word. It is that simple. May we not be open to deception, not have our minds led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ.

In 1 Timothy 4:1,

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

This is prophesied in the first century that later on this would happen. People would be departing from the faith. What is the faith? It is the content of truth in the Word of God in which we put our faith. The Word of God, this is the faith in which we put our faith, and the Lord who is behind it and described in it. When we start shifting our hope and our help in other directions, we are departing, at least to that degree, from the faith. Not necessarily becoming a total apostate, but we are departing. We are moving away from the faith which provides all we need for life and godliness.

Even “giving heed some to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” I shudder at that. I think immediately of Carl Jung. Remember he said that he got all of his theories from Philemon who
was his spirit guide. Philemon. This genius. What an amazing thing that this genius would get it from, well, a greater genius. One who is even greater than him, in devilish thoughts, self-centered thoughts and in self-exalting thoughts.

Can you imagine a philosophical theoretician like Carl Jung—very religious, in a sense, maybe a better word is spiritistic—that the church of Jesus Christ would be all excited about him because he uses spiritual terms and even talks about Jesus some. And yet he got all of his ideas from the pits of hell, from the enemy himself and from the agents of the enemy. I mean, how specific can you get in prophecy? Later on, people “depart from the faith, giving heed to [paying attention to] doctrines of demons.” Demons taught the doctrines to Jung. The church has read them. And now we are giving heed to them. He is maybe one of, if not the most popular of the theorists who were trying to integrate into the Christian message. I mean, he talks about Jesus as the great archetype of a savior and things like that. And obviously that’s another Jesus. We don’t need an archetype, an ancient symbol of salvation. An ancient symbol reminding us we need help, by the way, to which the answer is, “you can help yourself, if you reach deep enough. In fact, if you reach deep enough you will even get some spiritistic help.” We don’t need that kind of message. That undermines the entire heart of the Gospel. Doctrine of demons. They’re in the church heavy.

A good place to maybe wrap up this section of our study before we go into our brief conclusion is 2 Timothy 4:3-4, earlier on it says to preach the Word. Why is it so important? Because—

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heed up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

One of the things about psychological theory is that it is filled with fable and myth. And the church, in many ways, has come to the place where she won’t endure sound doctrine. It is like doctrine has become a dirty word in the church world. Doctrine means teaching. We want the teaching of the Word of God and must adhere closely to it.

The time has come when many won’t endure sound doctrine. They would rather have their ears tickled. “Give me another theory, a self-improvement theory, self-enhancement theory, self-actualization theory, or a self-justification theory. It tickles my ears.” People are turning away from the truth and to myths.

When people turn from the Word of God as their absolute source of the things of God and the knowledge of God for life and godliness, they are turning away from the truth and they are turning to myths, fables, theories, and guesses of man. We will talk more about that in our next unit of study.

In conclusion, perhaps the strongest warning verse in the New Testament on this whole matter of psychological theory is Colossians 2:8,

Beware lest anyone cheat you [or it could be rendered, take you captive] through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of man, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

We are to be alert, aware, watching out, lest anyone whether it is a worldly, psychological practitioner of humanistic theory or whether it is some beloved Christian leader who is dedicated
to integrating psychology with Bible. Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy. Anyone!

Folks often ask when I’m out teaching around, “Well, what about Dr. Dobson? Are you for him or against him?” I first like to tell them I don’t think that’s the right question. Why would you be against a man that loves God? The question is: Does his message and his method match the Word of God? That’s the question. As a brother in Christ I’m totally for him. I want the best for him. And he has a powerful aspect to some of his ministry, when he stands for righteousness, against abortion, and for abstinence and things like that. He is fearless. He is one of the most courageous Christians that has ever spoken out in the American community on issues like that. Why is he so mighty? Because the only place he can anchor himself on those issues with that conclusion is right in the Word of God. And he has touched multitudes of lives because of that.

That doesn’t mean we close our eyes to another aspect of his ministry, as a second major part, his counseling, family, child rearing and all. And it is heavily seasoned with psychological theory. He’s totally committed to self-esteem as the way to raise your children. Well, I want my kids and the Word of God wants our kids raised esteeming Christ highly. Not self. Self-denied. Self-crucified. Self-humbled. Not esteemed. He is totally off base there. I am not saying I’m smarter than him. I’m saying, at that point, he has been fooled. He just missed the mark. And he may see some that I miss. And he has total spiritual right and responsibility to tell me. But he’s missed the mark there. He didn’t learn that in the Bible. He learned that at school. He learned that from the wisdom of man. He became a doctor in that stuff, right? Where he has no doctorate he is mighty. He’s just a disciple who believes the Word. He’s bold and it blesses you totally. And lives have been touched everywhere because of it.

So it’s not are you for or against a person or even a ministry. It’s how does the ministry and the method measure up to the Word of God? And sometimes it’s all strong or all weak or sometimes, most often, it’s some combination of the two and hopefully much stronger than weaker. But in this case it’s kind of like two prongs: one is mighty in God because it’s anchored in the Word and one is just contaminated with wisdom of man. I believe he’s totally well-intended, though I’m not his judge there. I can’t know his heart. But my impression is he hangs on to these things because he thinks they help people. And the more you hang onto something like that—it is tough to let go of a vested interest of twenty some years—being the expert with the answers from human wisdom. And he is in a real tough spot. I pray for him regularly, that he’ll get stronger in the places he’s anchored in the Word. And that he will totally lay down the wisdom of man. Can you imagine? It would be like part of a new reformation probably.

Dr. Dobson said, “You know I want to add something to my ministry that should have been there years ago. Self-esteem is of the flesh. Psychological theory is the wisdom of man. Family of God, forgive me for urging you in that direction.” Can you imagine? Oh, wow! Men have done things like that. Like Martin Luther and others. They faced that they were caught up in a wrong system and stood against it. People turn away from the Word and they go to myths, fables. We are not to get caught up in that. Why? Colossians 2:8 says it’s philosophical.

See, counseling God’s way is not anti-scientific or anti-intellectual. It is just that we know the answers don’t lie there. Sure, true science can show the glory of God. We will talk about that after break. We do have an intellect and God says, “Come let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). We can think with God. We just don’t think the ultimate answers are in any of those fields. And we know they are all open to error. But we know Christ and His Word are not open to error. And has all that we need for life and for godliness.
The Scriptures don’t warn us against true science. I mean, the heavens and all of creation, rightly explained, what do they do? “They declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). True science would just show creation the way God made it and we would go, “Wow, glory be to God. Glory be to God!”

I used to love to watch those Moody science films. That was before you guys were ever born. What? Moody, I heard of him. What are these science films? Well, some of you have seen them. They’d be like half-hour films about some aspect of the scientific realm and fascinating. And from that could be bridged right into our Creator and how He does things and His wisdom and even sometimes spiritual application. It’s great. It’s wonderful. But science is not our hope, and the big danger is in philosophy. See, there are some arenas in psychological theory that are somewhat scientific. And personally, I’m not giving a warning at all in those arenas. I don’t think the Scriptures demand that we do.

For example, there are those in the psychological field that would study with child development and take fifty, a hundred, or two hundred five-year-olds and experiment with what they can learn or can’t learn. And you kind of get a picture of what five-year-olds can and can’t learn. That is not philosophy. That is just kind of a scientific estimate. God creates five-year-olds to be able to do this and not do that. That’s all. If that blesses you, if that helps you with your kids, or somebody is into that, there’s no problem with that. You don’t have to have it. It’s not essential. But you don’t have to stay away, “Oooh, five-year-olds. I don’t want to hear it.” It doesn’t matter. If you want to hear it, hear it. If you don’t want to hear it, you don’t have to hear it.

But philosophy, stay away from it as a way of life. Don’t let it shape decisions, values. See it. “Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy” (Colossians 2:8). That’s the warning segment of this course. To a vast extent psychological theory is philosophy. We call them the social sciences. I believe it is deceptive. I think we should call them the behavioral philosophies, in which a bit of scientific methodology exists. Something like that would be much more honest and accurate. It’s philosophy of life.

Freud, “Oh yeah, man, the id, the ego, the superego!” Who said? Where did he find that? He didn’t get that in a laboratory, heating up chemicals and watching them react as creation would cause them to. Scientists can work with chemicals and they will always react in a certain way because God made them that way. But id, ego, superego, those are totally philosophical concepts. And God warns us about philosophy. Don’t let anyone influence our lives with human philosophy. Beware lest anyone, brilliant or loving, or Christ-loving, through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of man, according to the basic principles of the world influence you and not according to Christ. We’re to be captivated, led by Christ, not by the traditions of man. These are the basic elements.

Psychology is the new tradition in the world today. Oh, it’s anchored into American tradition now. We are such a psychologized country. You can’t watch a newscast without them interviewing the psychologist to tell you what that event in history meant. Fifty years ago they would go to the pastor in town. What does this mean? Where does this come from? And he could give a word from God. You never hear that anymore. You can’t go through a day if you are reading or hearing news or anything like that, without getting some psychological interpretation on the times. I mean, it is our new tradition. And we are told not to be taken captive according to the tradition of man, the basic principles of the world.

Psychological theory is all about the basic principles of the world. Sure, they can effect change in behavior. Sure they can build empires. Sure they can get more out of their workers. Sure they can
get people hyped up on themselves and more productive or active or expectant. But what do these things mean in the kingdom of God? Nothing. In fact, they become a false hope that gets in the way.

Psalm 1:1-3 speaks to this whole arena of worldly threats to counseling God’s way and forsaking our wonderful Counselor.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly [counseling theory came from the ungodly], nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; [What is he doing?] But his delight is in the law of the LORD [the Word of God], and in His law he meditates day and night [that’s where he gets his thoughts]. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

When we become that kind of person more and more and counsel that way and avoid the counsel of the ungodly, our lives will be fruitful and those we counsel will bear this kind of fruit as well.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 22
Turning to Worldly Counsel

By
Bob Hoekstra

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Worldly Threats to Counseling God’s Way. We’ve looked at the primary, basic threat and that is forsaking the Lord as our Wonderful Counselor. If we were not doing that, if we were not turning away from Him, if we were not indicating that we don’t think He’s enough, that He’s not wonderful enough, we wouldn’t have to worry about this second major threat, because the second major threat is turning to worldly counsel. If we felt the Lord was the Wonderful Counselor we would not be interested in the counsel of the world. But we have been turning, just like Israel turned from their fountain of living waters, we’ve been turning from our Wonderful Counselor, forsaking Him, drifting from Him, neglecting Him and His Word, underestimating Him and His Word. And of course that leads people to the second thing: turning to worldly counsel, allowing the infiltration of worldly wisdom of psychological theory and even the things that spawn like the twelve-step self-help movement and self-help literature and all of that, just to come rolling into the church.

It is related to our first heading: Turning to Broken Cisterns. See when Israel forsook the fountain of living waters, they went to dig up some place to gather water, something to live by, religiously speaking. They hewed for themselves cisterns. That is, man-made water systems. Broken cisterns though, that can hold no water. They are flawed systems or defective systems, there at the end of Jeremiah 2:13. There are holes in the systems of thought.

If you have never read Richard Ganz (G-A-N-Z), He wrote a book called *Psychobabble*. We’ve used it at times for one of our texts at different campuses. He gives some of his testimony and I have heard some of it in person. We won’t get into it here, but it’s beautiful and rather extended. But he was a godless theoretician in a psychiatric wing of a big hospital in New York, an agnostic Jew, who was wise in the wisdom of man. And he said he was sitting one day with all the big moguls, the brain trust, talking about patients and who is going to try what theory with which one. And he said right in the middle it this thought came across his mind: “This stuff is all a bunch of baloney.” He was an absolute chief baloney slicer. And he saw what he was dealing with. It wasn’t long—he was off on vacation. It was one of the little *L’abri* outposts in Europe that Dr. Schaffer had started and he found out that Yeshua was Messiah and gave his life to Christ and came back. And then his story of entering that hospital again and starting to witness and see patients saved and lives made whole. You know what happened? He got fired. They told him, “We’re just here to theorize on these people. You’re making whole new creatures, this will never work, you know.” They gave him a choice. Shut up or leave. Either keep your religion out of the workplace or go. And he said, “Well, that’s an easy decision. I’m out of here.” Of course they had to give him thirty days’ notice, so he had a beautiful closing evangelism program. There are holes in the systems of thought and broken cisterns that can hold no water.

There is a major tragic deception taking place in the church world today, even in the body of Christ. Not just bizarre charismania, but the wisdom of man. In fact, when I was pastoring in Irvine, one of our men in the church was getting very troubled emotionally. His doctor sent him to a psychiatric hospital. And I went to visit him there. And they gave me the card and do you know who operated it? TBN. This was in 1983. It’s only gotten worse since then.

It’s amazing you think that people that talk about the Holy Spirit all the time would be totally apprehensive to human wisdom. But no! Which is kind of a tip-off that a lot of that Holy Spirit talk is carnal involvement, carnal hype. Because the carnal message of psychology doesn’t seem to conflict with it at all, see. When a person really filled with the Spirit wants to walk by the Spirit, they’re going to be increasingly sensitive to psychological theory as being not according to the mind of Christ.
There is a major tragic deception taking place in the church world. And by that I mean all of Christendom. All of the organizations and religious operations and church buildings, denominations, that identify themselves with Christ. Somewhere in that is the church, the body of Christ. In some churches it’s almost all the body of Christ and little, very little religious Christendom. Some churches it is almost all religious Christendom, hardly a believer in the place. And in some places it is nothing but the world using the name of Jesus for religious ends.

One of the reasons I left pastoring a local church—I pastored a total of twenty-five years in two different churches. And really thought I’d do that until the Lord came, even if I lived to be as old as my dad, 84. But the Lord burdened me so heavy with this issue and I began to teach and warn our own flock and equip them. And word began to get out what was going on there and pastors everywhere wanted to hear on this subject. And the more I began to travel a little and teach I realized that there is a desperate need out there. Desperate need! Even good men that aren’t trying to compromise the message need to hear a word. Because they’ve never had an opportunity it seems, because the whole church world is so sold out to the wrong direction. It is almost like wherever they got trained they didn’t get warned on this or shown the true and living way of the Wonderful Counselor.

There is a major, tragic deception going on in the church world. Yes, it is subtle often in its issues. But it is a deadly delusion. It involves shifting our attention, our hope, our focus from the Lord Jesus Christ our Wonderful Counselor. Shifting our love, our allegiance, our confidence, our expectations from God to man. It is shifting them from Christ to self; shifting them from the Holy Spirit to the resources of the flesh; shifting our love, allegiance, attention, confidence, expectation from heaven to earth. It is shifting such important issues from God’s wisdom to man’s wisdom. And maybe at the bottom of all of it is this shifting of allegiance, confidence, hope and faith from the revealed truth of the Word of God to the speculative theories and myths of man.

I don’t even know how to state it in terms that begin to do justice accurate to the breadth and depth and degree of this major deception.

Could this be part of the last apostasy prophesied in the Word of God? Oh, absolutely it could be. I’m not saying it absolutely is, but it absolutely could be. I mean, it just fits. All the way from the doctrines of demons to the day coming when people would not have any time for truth. They just want what works, what makes you feel good, what will get a crowd, what will get money, what will get you a big name in the religious world.

Personally it pounds on my heart like a sledge hammer every week, sometimes days upon days. And I believe it is an ache on the heart of God. We are His people. He doesn’t want us off into contaminated thinking and behaving and theorizing. He wants us just gulping streams of living water. That is all He wants. And He is that fountain. And here we are turning to broken cisterns, out digging up someplace to collect something that looks like water that we might live on. And the cisterns are broken. They can’t hold anything anyway.

In 1Timothy 1:3-4 is a warning to stay away from myths and fables.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification, which is in [or by] faith.
We are not to teach strange doctrines, other doctrines, things foreign to the Word of God. We are to stay away from them, not integrate them, but expose and avoid them. We are not to pay attention to myths or get all excited about invented theories and imagined systems. It causes disputes. Or it could be translated, “speculation,” which of course leads to disputes. It sure fits this matter of unverified theories instead of absolute truth.

See the administration of God or godly edification is in faith. It is by faith. The way God redeems lives, reclaims lives, builds lives, sets lives free, makes lives whole, is all by faith. Trusting in God and trusting in His revealed truth. Not in ideas and theories and applications and programs and support groups and on and on, with strange doctrines, myths, speculations. They are things from Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and others. We are to stay away from these things. Things like psychoanalysis. The theory that the way you help people is you analyze their psyche. You dig into them and you get them thinking and opening up. It is a deadly theory. It is a myth that that’s the way you help people. That is the way you bury people. That is the way you get them totally self-absorbed. That is not a great hope, it’s a great curse.

And the counselor asks the one who comes for help, “What’s going on in your life? What are you struggling with?” And they share it. And the counselor says, “What do you think about that? What do you feel about that?” Well, this and that. “Well, tell me what is really going on down inside.” Just driving in, you know. “Let’s get inside you.” And everybody is trying to get in touch with something in there, the little child within or the sleeping giant within. How about the carnal, fleshy sin within? What are we going to find in there if we aren’t looking for Christ?

He is our hope of glory. Not self-analysis. And boy when people start opening up on what is going on inside, what is the trend? You go, “Wow, we better find out what caused that.” Well, the way you find out what caused that is you go to the Word of God. “Oh, no, no. We go back into your history. What have you gone through? Tell me about your traumas, your fears, your dreams. Tell me about your mom. Tell me about your dad. Tell me about your grandparents, your playmates. Let’s find out who messed you up like this. We all know it wasn’t you. Who did this to you? What forces shaped you like this?” And it is in and back, which are the two opposite directions of the kingdom of God. The Scriptures make it obviously clear, the directions of the kingdom are forward, looking upward. This kind of counsel is inward, looking backward. They minister questions. They serve up questions. They produce questions, not answers. It really is the wrong direction.

Philippians 3 and Colossians 3 give the two directions of the kingdom of God.

Philippians 3:14, “Forgetting the things that are behind, I press ahead for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” verses 12 through 14 point forward and upward.

Colossians 3:2-3, “Seek the things above, not the things that are on this earth.” This is a heavenly mindset, not an earthly one.

It is so sad to take people in and back. In me dwells no good thing. Take me to Christ, please! Take me back, I can’t live there. Today is the day of salvation. Not only initially, but everyday thereafter. Where God works is today. People think that you are nothing but a product of everything you have experienced on earth up until now. You might build a theory that is convincing in the world. That doesn’t apply at all to those of us who are in Christ Jesus. We are not a product of everything we’ve experienced up to now. We are new creatures made new in Christ. Colossians 3:3, you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Don’t take me inside.
Don’t take me back in my human life. Take me to Christ for that heavenly life. Show me that real life that I can draw on today.

Sure things back there might be on the mind today. And if they are then they’re not back there, they are today. Just don’t go digging back there. If you remember something back there, God wants to deal today with it. Maybe someone you wronged that you are to go and say “I’m sorry.” Or someone wronged you and you need to offer forgiveness. If the Spirit convicts you that’s something God is doing today. Not back there, today! But to go digging for things—“We will never get this ironed out until we can explain every facet of what brought this to pass.” What a trap! You talk about jumping into an ocean of spaghetti knotted together where you can’t find the beginning or the end—and it’s all the flesh. And you think you’re going to find a life in that?

It’s like handing people a shovel and saying, “Hey, let’s go dig in the graveyard and find a life for you.” You have been buried with Christ. Let’s be looking upward. God’s work is this very next step, as I look upward. That’s the kingdom developing. That’s the work of God. It’s the very next thing I say now with the Lord. It’s the next thing I do. It’s the next person I relate to. Today is the day of salvation. God help us from this psychoanalytical theory that has swallowed up Christians.

One man at Irvine went off for counsel, his marriage was troubled a bit. They gave him a woman counselor, an absolute no-no. She counseled he leave his wife temporarily to get in charge of his life, find himself and develop a life and then build that marriage back together. That was absolutely foolish counsel. Nowhere in the Word of God would that be validated. He did it and of course before you know it he’s filed for divorce and he’s running around with another woman. And now eleven years later, the only real difference is, instead of going to the therapist once a week, he goes three times a week. In and back, it’s endless. It’s endless. It’s like a bottomless pit. What a trap!

Is the enemy clever? Let’s see—life in Christ and hope is forward and upward. “Okay let’s see, let’s find a reasonable overwhelming way to take people inward and backward and we’ll rob, kill and destroy as we do it.” It is astounding.

The amazing thing is, if you offered a study like this throughout the general church world in America, the remnant of a few who would be excited and interested would break your heart. No, no we’re totally scheduled up with our therapist, we don’t have time for something like this. Plus, it is going to contradict everything we are trying to build.

I don’t despair in it. My heart is broken and heavy every time I think on it. I don’t despair in it. God rescued me from the pits. I was sure going the wrong way. And everywhere God sends me, I see God rescue others. So in that sense I am encouraged. And who knows how many more He will rescue in the days ahead. And who knows how many more He will send out. Who knows how many more pastors will share the truth with their own congregations. I love to share this with pastors, because pastors who are sensitive to the Word of God, not trying to protect a vested interest or keep the party line for their seminary or their denomination, they receive this word gladly. We get calls from pastors all the time who are teaching these things diligently to their congregations. So I’m encouraged. But I tell you, it absolutely is a David and Goliath issue.

There is a dear attorney friend who sends wonderful books out to pastors all the time. I was his pastor for three years. I can see him praying right now. “Oh, God use Davids, those burdened on these issues that so many care not about. Use Your Davids to slay this mighty giant, this Goliath of psychology in the American church.” That’s a great prayer. Look how God answered that prayer once long ago.
There is no human way in the odds you could ever figure to have a major impact. But whether you have little or large, you have what God allows you to have and what others will open up to. But I do not believe that it has to stay in those proportions and that Goliath can fall. Oh there will always be some. Even if he falls, they will just lie down with him and they won’t leave him, you know. “We were raised on this, we will die on it.” Well you’ve been dying on it all your life.

Like there was at the Reformation. Did that set aside Roman Catholicism? No, not at all. In fact, Rome is coming back. They’re back. They’re coming to the church. They’re signing together. And you look at who’s signing and you go, he signed? He knows the Word of God, why did he sign with an apostate church? “Oh we are going to get back to mother church. We are all going to be one.”

There’ll always be those who will not let go of the lie and always compromise the truth. But there could be multitudes that want to come out of that stuff before Christ comes back. But personally I don’t care if it’s ten or ten million. I don’t want it to change the course that God has put my heart on. We are not doing it for proportions and numbers. We are doing it for the sake of the Lord and for the love of the truth. And for the love of souls that are just getting ripped off every way you look. Psychoanalysis—what a myth! What a strange doctrine to bring into the church.

The subconscious mind, that’s another one. People are controlled by the subconscious mind. You know, things they aren’t thinking that are in there that control their lives. Again, you might build a case like that for a dead world that has no life. And you know, the enemy is just using what has happened to pull them around by the chain. Okay, maybe so. But it has nothing to do with new life in Christ. The whole thing in Christ is learning to think and walk with the mind of Christ, not unlocking the subconscious. “You know, if we could just get into what you’re thinking when you aren’t thinking, we could set you free, make you whole.” It’s a myth! It’s a trap! It’s a distraction. It’s a substitution. If I need help, and you are going to counsel me, I will tell you this, “Please share with me the mind of Christ.” Show me how I should be thinking. Share that new mind with me—that is what I want to hear! Don’t try to delve into me to find things I don’t think about that dominate my life because I don’t flush them out in the open. That is so humanistic. It is making my un-thought realm of my mind more powerful than the mind of Christ. It is not right.

In 1 Corinthians 2:16 it says, “But we have the mind of Christ.” And we can learn to think that way as we are in the Word of God and the Spirit of God is teaching us how the Lord thinks on things. Everything now is mental illness. It is never called ungodly thinking anymore. Everything is sick behavior, it’s not called sinful behavior.

Dr. William Playfair wrote the book, The Useful Lie, a profound book. The useful lie is this that people’s problems aren’t sins, they are disorders and pathological problems or physiological disorders. And everything is redefined from sin to sickness. The Useful Lie. Oh, it is being bought hook, line and sinker, through the world and even in the church.

Now this doesn’t mean that those who want to counsel God’s way deny the physiological side. It’s not that we say nobody can ever have a chemical imbalance. We are just saying that everyone doesn’t have one, you know. Sure, we’re body, soul and spirit and the body can affect how you think. You know, if you get physically sick you don’t think clear or feel good. That’s fine. God made us that way. There is nothing wrong with that. We can acknowledge that. And counseling God’s way doesn’t even rule out medication, but it sure says that medication is not man’s hope. And it has almost become man’s hope. Everyone has an imbalance and everyone gets a
prescription. That is how you counsel today. Prozac is the great deliverer really. Not the Holy Spirit. Not the fruit of the Spirit, but the moderating impact of this mind-altering drug. It is scary!

We can acknowledge the medical side. True medicine, again would just reveal how God made creation, chemicals, and man, and all of that. Nothing wrong with that, though I tell you, it baffles the mind of man even when he tries to get into it. But we don’t deny that aspect.

This is not Christian Science brought into the counseling arena. It’s not that at all. It’s just the sorting out of the difference between sin and true sickness, between philosophy and science and especially between the truth of God and the guesses of man. That’s what it’s all about.

And sure those who have some understanding of physiological things—If you’re counseling someone who’s in bizarre behavior, there’s nothing anti-biblical to say, “The sick need a physician. I think you should get a physical exam.” There’s nothing wrong with that. That’s not anti-biblical.

But the problem they face is going to be one of two things, physiological or spiritual, Biblically speaking. It is physiological or spiritual or a combination of the two. You know what it is not going to be?—psychological and that imaginary third area has usurped the whole treatment of man these days. How? It is by sending people to psychiatrists—who are philosophers—but who also have an MD degree. Which means what? They can prescribe medication. They are the new high priests. It is witchcraft, it really is. Drugs, sorcery, it is witchcraft. And these great high priests of psychotherapy, they’re the philosophers who can give drugs.

And again, it’s not saying that medication is evil. The aspirin falls on the just and the unjust alike; it can work just as well with one as the other. It’s the common grace of God. That is fine, but our hope isn’t there. The answer to everything isn’t there. It takes the wisdom of God if you are going to even touch in those areas. And godly people who know the physiological side can work together with spiritual counselors if there might be a physiological problem. But it is even harder to track those things down. Even there the Lord often throws you on Himself.

My wife’s had migraine headaches from the time I started to travel and speak. What a coincidence! She never had them in almost fifty years of life before that and she’s had them continually since then. Now we have prayed for her, laid hands, and anointed with oil. We sought the Lord. She has gone to doctors and even the doctors are totally baffled. There may be a physiological cause. They can’t find it. Where are we you left to? The Lord. “Lord, You would have to heal her directly, or if You are going to use an instrument, we haven’t found any wise enough.” But I tell you, we don’t believe our hope is the prescription. It is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And maybe someday there will be someone God will use to show a physiological cause. We may find out when we get to heaven, it was nothing but spiritual warfare all the way along. Who knows? Only the Lord does.

But it is not, “Oh no, medication!” It is just that’s not our hope. And the world and the church are turning like that to it now. In fact, there are no tests anymore. It’s usually a prescription by trial and error, when a troubled person comes in.

I’ll tell you a story. Man in our church in Irvine, when I was pastoring there with the saints, had a troubled marriage. His wife wasn’t a believer. She wanted him to go to her therapist. Well, he was so clear on these issues. “Are you kidding? There’s no hope there. Let the dead bury the dead. Let the blind lead the blind.” But she persisted and he said to me one day, “You know, I was thinking of going to my wife’s therapist.” He says, “You know me, Bob. I don’t think there’s
an ounce of hope there. I just want to show my wife. I’m willing to do whatever, you know. I
don’t have all the answers. I want to see this marriage…. ” I said, “I don’t have any trouble with
that at all. That person may need you to visit them, you know.”

So he made an appointment. He goes to this therapist, a lady. And she says, “Tell me a little about
yourself and the marriage.” And he talked a few minutes. And it’s less than fifteen minutes and
she goes, “Thank you. That’s enough. I can see what the problem is.” He goes, “Oh, what is the
problem?” She says, “You are clinically depressed.” He scoots up on the front of his seat and
says, “I beg your pardon. The joy of the Lord is my strength.” And he was a man of joy too, in
spite of his difficulties at home. She said, “No, no, no. I know these things.” And she starts
writing. And he goes, “What are you writing there?” She says, “Well, I’m writing you a
prescription.” He leaped to his feet. He said, “I’ve been here fifteen minutes. You’ve never met
me before. You know nothing of my medical history. You haven’t taken one test. And you’re
prescribing medication for me?” It scared her to death. Nobody had ever been such a heretic in
front of her. Now, she knows he’s deluded as well. She was not a high priestess to him.

And I’m not saying everyone out there in the counseling field, in the world or the church, is doing
that. But that it is the tendency, prescription by trial and error. “How you feeling? Try this.” You
come back next week. “How’re you doing?” “Oh, not much better?” “Well then, let’s try this.”
The hope is in man’s theories and man’s medical products. Again, we are not closing our eyes to
the reality of the physiological, but any way you look at it you need God at work in it.

Strange doctrines in the church. Here’s another myth. Here’s a major one. Here’s a biggie. This is
one of the strangest doctrines that ever hit the church. We can call it the myth of self-love.
Matthew 22 shows us how it gets into the church, by twisting and perverting the Scriptures. By
the way, men who have written in the church on this self-love issue that we’ve got to learn to love
ourselves, usually bring it into the church by taking a verse, a passage like this in Matthew 22 and
then distorting it.

Matthew 22:36-40,

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, ‘You
shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all
your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all
the Law and the Prophets.’

A term for God’s reveled word in those days—“all the Law and the Prophets.”

Now, so often, to bring this self-love myth into the church, this passage is read and then here’s
what follows: “Now we all know we don’t love ourselves the way we should. So how can we
love others the way we love ourselves? We don’t even love ourselves right. So we’ve got to get
out there and start learning how to love ourselves. So we can then love others the way we have
now learned to love ourselves and then we can get around to loving God, the tougher project.”

That is the thinking. That is the popular exposition of this passage in the church world today. I
first heard it in 1967 when I was a youth pastor at the Evangelical Free Church in Orange,
California. Took the high school group to a Christian retreat center and a part-time professor at
Fuller Seminary, where I was attending at that time before I went out to Dallas. We had this
passage or a parallel one and that was the bridge in, “You’ve got to learn—you know that we
don’t love ourselves the way we should.” You can tell that to almost any group of people in the
American church world—they are probably discouraged, frustrated, lack of fulfillment, and immediately they go—“he’s right!” You know, they interpret all of that frustration as a lack of self-love.

Now, obviously from many things we have looked at in the Scriptures, this is a perversion of the Word of the God. But if we just limited our evaluation of that myth to just this passage, look how impossible it is to come to that conclusion. Two major problems with that teaching right in its own context. Number one, how many commandments did Jesus say are here in this teaching? Two. This self-love myth says there are three here. The third one is you’ve got to learn to love yourself. No, no. Jesus said there are two here. In fact, He said on it hang all the revealed word of God. There is nothing left to hand on an imaginary unspoken third commandment. So right there this whole myth is gone, if we just pay attention to the Word.

You know, there’s a worse perversion of this context that not only adds a third commandment that isn’t there, but it totally reverses the priority. If you read this passage, what do you think is the primary thing Jesus is sending out people to concentrate on? Love God! This new teaching sends people out what? It is learning to love themselves! It is astounding how popular this message is in the church. Well because there’s so much carnality, so much self in the church. So we love it. “Oh yeah, oh man. I don’t have to deny myself? I don’t have to take up my cross? There is no cross of discipleship for self. You mean I can go on a self-love trip? Oh man, let’s do it together. Let’s become strong Christians together learning how to love ourselves.” It’s a tragic myth.

Remember 2 Timothy 3:1-2 said in the last days difficult times would come because men would be lovers of themselves. The list of characteristics of humanity in the last days starts out, with number one characteristic that men will be lovers of themselves. Self-love has always been man’s problem. That’s why Jesus says “If you want to follow Me it’s no to self; death to self. Then come follow Me and develop a love relationship with Me.”

This new teaching that you’ve got to get into yourself and love self, self-love has always been a problem! In the last days it is going to characterize, openly, all of humanity. People used to hide self-love. Why? They would be embarrassed. People would think they were narcissistic, egocentric self-worshippers. So people were pretending like they were other-centered and humanitarian and all that. But that’s gone now. I mean, you can flaunt your self-love as an athlete, as a singer, as a politician and people will applaud you for it, because they want to learn how to do it too. That is why they idolize you. You love yourself so wonderfully, you know. That’s what has happened in our culture.

I see on the news some of these self-worshipping, self-absorbed, self-possessed icons of our culture. It’s repugnant to the extreme to me. I grew up in sports a lot all my life and I played all kinds of them in school and out. And I mean, to me, athletics publicly in this country is like a pathetic shame. Not that it ever was great, but it used to be more neutral. You could be involved. The Cowboys—fourteen years in Dallas that’s where I got a real view of this. Oh does that city worship those people! I think I’m making a point. In the last days men will be lovers of themselves.

There are so many myths and strange doctrines in the church. We need God-centered counseling. Husband, tell me, is your wife meeting your needs? What a dumb question. What a fleshy, self-serving question. Husband, are you walking in the need to know and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ? Husband, are you serving your wife, loving her as Christ loved the church? Those are the questions. Not, is your mate meeting your needs? This needs God-centered counseling. The wife
goes in, you know, “Tell me is your husband meeting your needs?” God is the one who pledges to meet our needs. And we don’t go to Him to get them met. We go to Him to love Him, serve Him and know Him and we just end up with them met. There are sad things in the church.

Rights-centered counseling. You have a “right” for this. You mean, me who is saying no to self and death to self, now to be a good Christian I’ve got to exert my rights? Wow. Or counseling that’s left brain, right brain. The problem with you is you are only using half your brain. And you’ve got use this side and you’ve got to get that side. What a humanistic, horizontal self-hope! How about, listen, one ounce of the mind of Christ would be better than the whole half of either one sides of our brain, you know. It’s a myth.

Temperament analysis counseling. Christian books on it. “Are you sanguine or phlegmatic?” No, I’m Adamic. I’m sinful apart from Christ. You know, don’t classify what kind of flesh I have. Tell me how to get it on the cross! On the cross it doesn’t matter what [personality] type. Just nail it. “Well, what personality are you going to be?” I would like to be like Christ, you know.

There is so much myth in the church. Lord help us!

But in a brief way, the problem with so much of this is that it is man’s wisdom, not God’s wisdom. Let’s just read that Scripture, 1 Corinthians 1:18-21. Man’s wisdom is what it’s all about in all these things, instead of God’s wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21,

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Oh, doesn’t this show man’s wisdom is just so vain.

In 1 Corinthians 3:19-20.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written: ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness,’ and again, ‘The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, they are futile.’

People look at these guys we have mentioned, so many of these theoreticians and they go, “Oh how wise.” Well, measured to our thinking capacity, yeah, maybe they’re more brilliant creative thinkers. But God looks at their wisdom and goes, it’s foolish. That’s not wisdom, that’s foolishness.

Here is another one in verse 20, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise.” He knows all these theories. He knew every one of these before they were ever created. And look at His estimation. These thoughts of the wise, they’re futile, which means useless. Why would the church want to integrate with the Word of God things that God calls useless? And you talk like that to many pastors and Christian counselors they go, “Oh man, you are so narrow minded. Come on. This stuff deepens and broadens our message and gives us a stronger insight.” Wait a minute. God
looks at all that. He knows all about it. And He says it is futile. It adds nothing to what the Lord wants to share with us.

Here is another problem. All of this worldly counsel, it’s a matter of flesh, not the Spirit. We won’t read Isaiah 31:1 which says, “Woe to Israel who goes down to Egypt for help.” They don’t seek the Lord, because the Egyptians are men and not God. They are flesh and not Spirit. The church is going to the world’s help just like Israel used to go to Egypt. What’s the problem with that? It’s flesh, not Spirit. It’s man, not God.

Jeremiah 17:5-8, speaking of all this says, “Cursed is the one who makes flesh his strength, and blessed is the one whose trust is the LORD.”

It’s a curse to put our hope in these things. It is not that they are just kind of, well interesting, but they don’t work. They are a curse. That curse of hoping in man, makes lives like a shrub in the desert that doesn’t bear fruit. Those who hope in the Lord, Jeremiah said, their lives become like a tree. The leaves don’t wither and it doesn’t cease yielding fruit even in tough drought times. That is a great passage there.

In John 6:53 and 63, Jesus said that you have no life in yourselves. The flesh has no life. John 6:53 says, “It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing....”

Then Galatians 3:3 says, “Are we so foolish, having begun by the Spirit are we going to be perfected by the flesh?”

How did we start out with God? By the Spirit. Now how are we going to grow and mature, have our lives made whole, and be perfected? By the flesh? Are we that foolish? We would have to say, as the church world and Christendom today, “Yes, we are that foolish.” Even those who started by the Spirit, born again by the Spirit, they are going to perfect their lives by the flesh?

Whatever you say about psychological theory, you have to realize together, agree together, it comes from the flesh of man. Man’s human ability to think and theorize. Is that going to perfect us now that we are born again? Are we that foolish? It seems like the major thrust of the American church on that issue is, “Yes, we have become just that foolish. We are born again, but seeking perfecting help in Christ from godless, humanistic theoreticians.”

We saved this study toward the end of the course. Maybe you can see why. It is best that we didn’t get into it too early. I would probably never get off of it. And there is much to say in addition to this, but oh, there’s much to say on this.

What are the worldly threats to counseling God’s way? Number one is forsaking our Wonderful Counselor. And it will always lead to the second problem and threat is turning to worldly counsel.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You so much for being our Wonderful Counselor. We thank You for life in the Spirit and the truth of the Word of God. Lord, forgive us for our compromises and our loss of focus and putting hope in man and the wrong directions. And we pray for the church of Jesus Christ. Lord, we love Your church. We love Your people. We lift up all in Your Church who are into the integrating of myth and fable from the theories of man, that they would be drawn away from those, see the bankruptcy of it, Lord. And see that it compromises
what You have called us to. That we might all come back to the fountain of living waters. And Lord Jesus, let You be the Wonderful Counselor that You are. Forgive us for thinking any other thing. And Lord, we cry out that You would stir, in many hearts, a real reviving and reforming and reshaping on this issue. And Lord, guard us and guide us and let us be a part of that new fresh work You do to bring us back to You, to Your Word and counseling God’s way. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 23
Counseling Session Guidelines

By
Bob Hoekstra

Brought to you by

Blue Letter Bible
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All right, let’s pray.

_Lord, we look back over these many visits together with much thanksgiving. As we approach our last time of gathering we just ask You in these visits to bless us, to speak to us, to counsel us, and build us up. We thank You for Your faithfulness when we call upon Your name and seek after You, Lord, You speak to us and reveal Yourself to us. We come with thanksgiving and humbling ourselves before You, Lord, admitting again tonight how much we need You. We ask You to undertake on behalf of each one of us. Give us ears to hear and eyes to see and just speak to us, Lord, and reveal Yourself. We look to You as our Wonderful Counselor and ask You to counsel us on this great subject of Biblical counseling. And we ask You to do glorious things in our lives, our thinking, our perspective, our equipping, even now. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen._

**Conclusion**

The Counseling Situation. We’ll look primarily at counseling session guidelines. And what we are thinking about in this time of study are those moments, whether formal or informal, scheduled or spontaneous, whether it is just a part of our general ministry to the body of Christ, or it is our major calling and gifting, that time when one person sits down with another. It’s certainly can fit the situation with two or three or four gathered together in a counseling situation. But so often it is one sitting down with one, face to face, all the way from a counseling appointment to a cup of coffee in a neighborhood home, to lunch, to after a church service. I mean, it’s totally flexible, adaptable. The counseling situation, when God brings two or more together to counsel through one to the other and usually to one another.

Counseling Session Guidelines: The first issue is “A Proper Personal Walk.”

_Ephesians 4:1,

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you are called._

Let’s keep adding verses and then reflect on them.

_Ephesians 5:1-2,

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children, And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma._

_Ephesians 5:8,

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

A little side note there, there is another verse that speaks of who we are in Christ. “You are light in the Lord.” All hinges on that last phrase. Take that last phrase out and the first part is not true.
You are light—not quite! But you are light in the Lord. He is the light of the world. He makes us the light of the world. And any light shines forth it must be Him. So many verses in the New Testament speak of who we are in Christ, because of who He is. But the point here is that we are to walk as children of light.

Ephesians 5:15,

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.

A proper personal walk is really a primary issue if we want to be used of the Lord in any counseling situation, used of God to counsel God’s way. We cannot walk any way we want to, any way the flesh would or the natural mind, then all of a sudden remember, oh that’s right! Brother so-and-so, sister so-and-so, they were going to get together with me in about a half an hour here. And all of a sudden expect to be a vessel fit to be used.

Healthy, valid, effective living, spirit ministry flows out of a proper personal walk. It is not something we turn on and off because now we are going to be with someone. Now we’re going to have to function in ministry. We are always with the Lord. He is always with us. We may not always be aware of that. And the more we walk as these verses tell us—walk worthy of the calling, walk in love, walk as children of light, walk wisely. As we’re walking with God in the way that He has ordained, the way that pleases Him, the way that He’s called us, that’s when we are usable in the hands of the Lord.

A walk is kind of a clear picture, one step after another, after another, after another. It is issue after issue, day after day, opportunity after opportunity, challenge after challenge, and impossibility after impossibility. Just step by step by step by step, things keep coming our way. But in it all we are to be relating to the Lord in a spiritually appropriate way, light, love, wisdom. And as we are walking rightly with the Lord, we are having the basic issue of preparation being taken care of day by day.

Sort of like 2 Timothy 4:2, “Be instant in season and out of season.” This is a call to those who are to preach the Word. There is wisdom there for all of us in every aspect of ministry and certainly in the counseling ministry, which can arise like that with a phone call or a couple of sobs. What’s going on? They tell you and boom, you are the counselor.

I found the wisdom of seeking God to be instant in season and out of season as a preacher and teacher. Way back it took my every thinking, waking moment to think I was half prepared to teach at the end of a week, once a week. And I didn’t realize that sometimes you’d have three minutes notice. Two minutes notice. Five seconds. “Hey, Brother Bob, what’s on your heart today? Why don’t you come and share.” So, even the teaching ministry can sometimes just almost explode before you spontaneously.

But hardly any ministry, like the counseling ministry, has its spontaneity and unpredictability. We want to be walking rightly with the Lord. And then out of that godly walk, we are available to be used any step along the way. So you don’t want to think about principles, procedures, ideas and a certain place, time and appointment. Yes, that all may fit in somehow in it. But it may be much more spontaneous than that and much more unpredictable. And whether it is predictable or not it’s not, “Well, you know, I just walk according to the flesh a good part of the week, but four or five hours before ministry I kind of start shaping up.” I mean, that is no good. That is not a proper personal walk.
The walk God has called us to is a step-by-step, day-by-day, one step after another all the way, until we are face to face with Him. That is a proper personal walk with love and light and wisdom. And certainly in all of that we want to be people who are in the Word and walking by the Spirit and praying much and in body life, which we saw as the very setting and means by which God counsels.

Not only a proper personal walk, but it takes a Biblical perspective on counseling. That’s a big issue because there are all kinds of cultural, religious, folkloric, humanistic perspectives on counseling floating everywhere and they are rampant in the church world. We want a Biblical perspective on counseling. We want to think about the counseling ministry from God’s point of view.

Psalm 119:41 isn’t directly about counseling ministry, but it has some great implications for counseling ministry, and this the very point.

“Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—Your salvation according to Your Word.”

So much of the counseling ministry is sharing the mercies of God with people, ministering the great salvation of the Lord to people. Remember salvation is much bigger than new birth and forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 2:3, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.” Our salvation is so great. We too often think of it in terms only of being saved from things, from sin, from the world, and from hell. And praise the Lord those are important aspects of salvation. They are kind of the initial introduction. But salvation, the delivering work of God, the rescuing work of God, is salvation from and through and unto. All along the way He wants to save us from hell for heaven, from sin to righteousness, from self to Christ, from the enemy to the Father. It’s always from and to. And then all along the way it is salvation through, the saving work of God delivering us day by day, sustaining, guarding and guiding.

“So, let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord, Your salvation.” If we’re crying out for the mercies of God and His salvation to come to us, that’s what we want to pass on to other people in counseling ministry, the mercies and saving work of God. But it is “according to Your Word,” not according to tradition. Not according to the ecclesiastical party line. Not with what is politically correct or religiously correct, but “according to Your Word.”

This phrase appears often in Psalm 119. I’ve studied it a few times. It’s quite an insightful adventure to just trace that phrase through Psalm 119 and be reminded of all the things that God wants to take place in our lives according to His Word. That is being in-line with the insight, precepts and patterns, but also by means of the resources there. “According to Your Word,” in line with the patterns but also by means of the resources, the enablement that is there in His Word.

According to Your Word, Lord, that’s how we want to minister in counseling. Counseling is the Lord as Counselor. Counseling along the path of discipleship and hastening and developing the process of sanctification. That is counseling according to God’s Word.

So as we think about sitting down and ministering face to face with folks in a counseling situation, these guidelines that we have gone over quickly here, because we’re going to spend most of our time on the next arena, but these two we have gone over quickly are really the most critical. Because as we get into these aspects of sort of a flow of a session, I believe these are Biblical valid and sound. But if we are not walking rightly with the Lord and if our general
perspective on counseling is not God’s, it is not Biblical, then it doesn’t matter how well we think we have learned from the Word to minister one on one. The heart is already taken out of it. We are just off into another technique and we don’t want to do that. We want our counseling ministry to be a living reality flowing from a living relationship with God, giving us a perspective of life on the whole situation and then let it come out in the parts and pieces that God has revealed in His Word are so appropriate. So, though we haven’t spent a lot of time on proper personal walk and having a Biblical perspective on counseling, these are just fundamental to what we are looking at in this unit of study. The proper personal walk, that’s all about the whole Christian life and living in Christ. Then the Biblical perspective on counseling, that’s what this whole course has been about. So we are just touching lightly on two things that are enormous. And really we want them to be the fundamental ground we stand on and then I think it is increasingly beneficial to consider this next arena where we’ll spend most of our time.

That is, the flow of a session. I put in parenthesis, unfolding aspects. It is the flow of a session or the unfolding aspects of a counseling session. I really, prayerfully sought the Lord on the terminology there. I was asking God to guard my communication and thinking and the thinking of those I was studying with from any kind of formulative approach to counseling. We have listed there, eight aspects of a counseling situation that we could think of in that way. But I would not want to entice anyone to counsel by the numbers. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—that’s how we do it! And then you are sitting there with someone that the thing is a living and spontaneous spiritual happening. And this person is pouring out their heart and you’re, “No hold it, hold it. You’re on five, I’m on three.” Sure, we wouldn’t say that but sometimes we can behave that way.

In fact this is one the concerns that I have with some very good Biblical literature on counseling that is out. Now, when I say good material, I mean major, minor portion of the literature in the so-called Christian or religious counseling field. I believe it takes enormous discernment from God not to get swept up in the abundant waterfall, overflow of production of books on the counseling scene, often sold under the heading of self-help literature. This ought to send the church running and screaming, you know. “Protect me from that, Lord.” Instead they hit the top on the best seller list of the Christian community. Self-help. It is condemned by its very title. How can our number one problem become our number one help? Self-help? We learned that straight from the world. You know, that is a big thing in the world. Do it yourself, it is cheaper. Counsel yourself, it’s cheaper. Help yourself. Maybe self won’t have to die, you know.

It takes a lot of discernment out there because there are all kinds of books and some over the names or with forwards by well-known names, or endorsements on the back of the jacket by names that you obviously know love the Lord. And if you don’t know the author you can tell who is recommending it. “Hey, these people love the Lord, this must be okay.” There is more to it than, “Hey, we just all love the Lord.

Oh praise God, we should love the Lord and want to grow in love with the Lord. But there is also truth and righteousness and right and wrong. And there is man-centered teaching and there is Christ-centered teaching. And there is literature that feeds the flesh and there is literature that crucifies the flesh that the life of Christ might come forth. And it is hard to find in most Christian or religious bookstores. Some are Christian. Some are more kind of religious because they just sell whatever will be bought. Whatever sells they stock in many places. And that is one thing we can ask God to give us is increasing discernment, because hurting people go looking for books like this.
I taught this class at one of the Bible College campuses and one young brother, after a few weeks into the course, started bringing me books. “What do you think of this book?” Yeah, that is one of the ones we were warning about without giving titles or authors. “Yes, that’s one.” He said, “I was thinking so.” He said, “Two years ago this was my great hope.” And it started going on. Every week thereafter he brought me some books. By the time the course was over I had a huge box from just that one student. And I think the last class he brought like twelve books. They all work together in integrative psychological Christian Biblical counseling, which is hard even to say that all together. It is such an oxymoron. You know, those terms do not go together.

It takes great discernment and we should ask the Lord to give us great discernment. And friends that we are ministering to—for many discernment has kind of slipped off the back burner even in much of the church world. And I spend a lot of time with pastors and in pastors’ homes and leaders’ homes in churches around the country and I am amazed at the books I come across. Out there on the coffee table or in the den, you know. These books proliferate and too few leaders are stopping to evaluate their message by the Word of God. So we want discernment on it.

But out there is some wonderful Biblical writing in the arena of counseling. It is just not that easy to find. It is not that popular. It doesn’t sell that much so it isn’t stocked everywhere. But there are some good things out there and good Biblical input from CCEF, the Christian Counseling Education Foundation, down in San Diego. BCF, the Biblical Counseling Foundation, The Self Confrontation Manual out in Rancho Mirage, the Palm Desert area. And you know books by Dr. Jay Adams and NANC, the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, NANC. They are around, they are just not that easy to find because they aren’t popular and they aren’t big money makers.

But some of those I have a concern that they too easily can be taken and used in a formulistic manner. And the more data and the more detailed and the more procedural and the more A, B, C, D, the more easy it is to get kind of laid under the letter of the law and be counseling by the letter instead of by the Spirit. You can be able to point right to chapter and verse and say, this is valid. Yes, that’s fine. By the Spirit of God you are using it. So I’ve prayed for the Lord to give me some terms that at least to some extent guard against formulistic letter of the law, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H approach to counseling. And then you have to grind everyone through that procedure and that is the only way it works. You can get very boxed-in and really quench the Spirit of God. And some of those wonderful resource books, which have tremendous Biblical data on counseling issues, sometimes underestimate greatly the work of the Holy Spirit in the counseling ministry, which we have spent some time about along the way. But it is easy to understate the importance.

See, Jesus was the Wonderful Counselor. He is that now, but He is not visible among us. But the Holy Spirit is another Counselor. In John 14:16, “I’ll give you another Counselor, just like Me.” And the Holy Spirit now carries on that counseling ministry of Jesus the Wonderful Counselor.

So, there is the flow of a session, the unfolding aspects, all of these may not appear in this order. They don’t have to be in any or every counseling situation. But I have noticed through the years, so often, these issues unfold in importance or in progress of communicating with someone very much like this. So though it is not a pattern to follow, it’s a pattern you often find yourself in, you know. So that is why they are listed and that is why they are in this order. This is not an exhaustive list, but I think it is significant. What we have tried to do in this course is take significant things that we can cover in a reasonable amount of time, that can have major impact on our personal discipling and counseling ministry. And I believe that these eight issues are another segment like that. This doesn’t cover everything that needs to be known or will ever
happen in a counseling situation. But these eight issues are very basic, they are critical, and you find them happening or need to happen time and time again.

So, The Flow of a Session; Unfolding Aspects. The first is prayer—

Philippians 4:6,

> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

This is a general word for just the Christian life and walk. As one paraphrase puts it: “Don’t worry about anything; pray about everything.” That catches the heart of it, doesn’t it? That is for the entire Christian life for every believer. But oh!—the implications for the counseling ministry. The more one counsels and the more God uses someone, you realize you are going to be ministering one to one with someone, they are often coming to you for help with anxiety. And I’ve noticed that in anticipating, wanting or wondering if God might use me to help them, it is easy to get anxious. You know, what is this all about? What am I going to say? Am I going to be able to help them? Do I even know what this is going to be about? Do I even know anything from God on this subject? You know, all those kinds of anxieties. And sometimes if you know a little bit about what the whole issue is ahead of time, then you are really set up for an anxiety session, you know because they catch you at church, “Oh, can we go to lunch Tuesday?” Yeah, I’d love to get away. “Good, because…” and they tell you the “because” and you’ve got forty-eight hours of anguish you know, waiting. They are going to look for my help.

Be anxious for nothing. Then, what is the option? In everything, pray. And I would say, pray as you are approaching the session with someone before. When you sit down together, pray together about the time together. Prayer.

This is another issue that is too easy to underestimate in the counseling ministry. It is too easy to think: problem—resolution, pain—providing comfort, Perplexity? “Ah, I’ll bring this great insight.” Well, that is all a spiritual potentiality in the counseling situation. But, even if that comes to bear, it is generally related to prayer and seeking God. And even if there is an insight given it is not just, “okay, now go do it.” You still need to be prayerfully going out with that truth or insight. It is too easy to underestimate the place of prayer in the personal counseling ministry. Plus, prayer is appealing to the Wonderful Counselor Himself, you know. It just goes perfectly with Counseling God’s Way.

Second is to listen. One of the Proverbs says, “What a foolish thing it is to give an answer before you listen, before you have heard the issues” (Proverbs 15:28 paraphrased). Listen. There we can just put the entire chapter of John 4. You recall that? The woman at the well? Jesus who is the Wonderful Counselor was ministering to the woman at the well.

Listening is an important, valid, Biblical Christ-like aspect of counseling God’s way. Counseling God’s way is not ramming the Word of God down people’s throats. Now, we have spent a lot of time pouring out a lot of Scripture in this course. And I believe that is the issue for equipping us and for helping others. But we don’t want to get a misconception that we are just, waiting for that person to get there and just ram that Word down their throat.

We do want to be ready to share what God has given us, but also we want to listen. For a few reasons and one is, look at John chapter 4. Here is the Wonderful Counselor, the Creator of all, the One who made this woman, and He is listening. And He didn’t even need to, in order to find
anything out. If He who knew all things did some listening, how important is it for you and me? Is it going to be appropriate for us to listen when we do not know all things and do not know every heart? Plus listening is just one way to show Christ-like caring. The Lord was so gentle and so concerned for this woman. Oh, He brought right up front the issues that needed to be raised. But it is a fascinating chapter to read when you pray and think about Biblical counseling. Here is the Wonderful Counselor, one on one. It is just a wonderful chapter to pray in and think in and ask the Lord to enlighten us in.

And certainly one thing you see here, the caring, loving, attentive listening that the Son of God, come in the flesh, gave to this woman. How much more us? Listening is so right. And for us especially, we not only want to show the loving care of paying attention. It is one of the great ways to show people the love of God. Just listen.

Think of all the listening God does. Oh my goodness! There are so many things that, if we were God, we wouldn’t even want to hear. God is a great listener. And we want to counsel God’s way—listening is an important ministry to people. It just shows love. It just shows you care. Listening like the Lord Jesus does here, like God has shown to do throughout His Word, as people are crying out in prayer around the world, throughout the ages. God is a great listener.

But in listening, not only listening to the obvious issue or problem or concern, but listening more profoundly. And I don’t mean that in any kind of humanistic psychological way. Well, I hear them saying this, but I know what they are getting at. It is not that kind of listening. I am talking about listening for deeper spiritual priorities than maybe they are raising. But you are sensing maybe, by what is said or isn’t said, or even more important to address than even why they came to see you.

And that’s the next issue, number three, that relates to that kind of listening. And I’ve called it “Saved?” The Scripture there is Matthew 28:19. Saved?

Through the years as the Lord has had me sit with thousands of folks, a couple of things the Lord has taught me to do is pray before, pray with if you can at the beginning to just focus both hearts on the Lord. And then while you are listening, keep praying. In fact I have found in most counseling situations, if you really listen you end up praying. It is just like, Whoa, Lord! And you can do a lot of heavy duty praying in a few minutes of listening. Three minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes of listening, and you can learn a lot too and hear a lot. But you can do a lot of praying. And often, when ministering one to another, there’s a lot of reason to pray in fifteen minutes of counseling conversation that was stirred by someone burdened or hurting or needy. And I like to be listening and praying. I am praying that I will hear, praying that I will understand, praying that I will be available and sensitive, praying the Lord will show me this—Lord, is this person saved?

And I’m particularly talking about counseling with someone that you don’t absolutely know. And of course only God absolutely knows this issue. But you might not have any testimony or confirmation or insight there, whether they are a professing Christian or not. Or what their relationship is with the Lord, depending on how deep the relationship prior. And say, “Lord, is this person saved?”

Remember Matthew 28:19 is our Scripture. “Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.” That is the one great command to all of the church throughout all of the church age. That is what we are to be about the business of doing all the time. Becoming more of a follower of the Lord, which is what a disciple is—and helping others to do the same.
Discipleship is what it is all about. Discipleship isn’t a study program. It is a life pursuing a person and the Person is Christ and we are the pursuers. That is discipleship. And that is what the whole life here on earth is about. It is not about all other kinds of things. Those other kinds of things are either appropriate aspects of discipleship, or things a disciple should be free from. You know, that’s where all the rest of the stuff fits in.

Jesus came to make disciples, to call out followers of Himself. And then He left and said, “In My name go do the same thing. Keep following Me and help others. Follow Me and call others to do the same.”

And our counseling ministry, we saw early on, must be seen in that context. Discipleship isn’t one thing and counseling another. Discipleship is the life of the whole church all the time. Counseling is one way to disciple. I like to think of counseling as discipling someone around some felt need or stirring or yearning or desire or emptiness or thirst. Something that would just cause a person to reach out for help. What do they need? It is a word of counsel from God through us that will disciple their lives.

Saved? That’s what I like to ask when I’m counseling someone. “Lord, is this person saved? Do they know You? No matter why they came, Lord, if they aren’t saved I know what the number one priority for that session is.” It is their salvation, not their discomfort, their heartache or their perplexity. Not that those are unimportant at all. God cares about those matters and we should too. But that is not number one priority. What if you give twelve-eight answers for twelve perplexing issues and the person came and went unsaved? Oh, great help! For what, just to kind of muddle through another day with a false hope of having it more together? In a sense they are worse off than when they came.

Saved? With a question mark, “Lord, is this person saved?” Have they begun to be a disciple? Have they even started on the discipleship path?

Folks have said, “Bob, how do you counsel an unsaved person?” Basically, it is one word: evangelism. That is what they need, which is the first aspect of discipleship. Hearing the Good News of the Savior, and then that they might know Him as Lord and Savior and then begin to follow Him. And that following is the other aspect of discipleship. Is this person saved?

I don’t know, the Lord may have let me be an instrument of sharing the Gospel and leading more people to the Lord in counseling ministry than maybe any other single means through all the years I have walked with the Lord and ministered and served. And I believe the Lord wants that right up front in our minds. It is because if this person doesn’t know the Lord, that is exactly where the Lord wants to start.

Let me tell you a story. When I was still pastoring a lady came to me one day and said, “Pastor, can I meet with you?” My daughter…” (She pointed her out and I knew her because she’d been in the church a while, a spiritually vivacious, hungry young gal around twenty or so.) “My daughter is engaged to that young man.” And I said, “Yes, yes, I know that. I’ve sat down and talked with them.” She said, “I’m really concerned about that and I’d like to talk to you.” I said okay and we arranged a time. We met together later in that week and she brought her boyfriend. Her husband left her many, many years before. And my, at that time assistant pastor John, sat down with us. He and I often sat together. I invited him very regularly to sit with me in counseling sessions. Which, by the way, I think is a great way to counsel and it is a great way to learn counseling ministry too. And so the four of us sat down.
And I asked if I could pray for us all and we had a good time of prayer. Then I asked this dear lady to share her heart some. And I began to listen to her and pray for her. And as she was sharing, I was hearing some important things. She was saying, you know, “My daughter is flighty and impulsive. This young man is irresponsible and in debt.” And I forget a few other things she thought she had discerned. And I acknowledged them. I said, “You know, if those situations describe those two, I can see why you’re concerned. You have valid concerns.” And I acknowledged that, but I kept praying and listening. I was not only listening to why she came, what was on her mind, I was listening to hear an answer from the Lord to my prayer, which I began to pray for this gal. “Lord, show me if she knows You.” I had just seen her a few times at church. She was very new to the church. I had hardly anything but maybe just met her briefly. So I didn’t know where she stood. I knew where her daughter stood. She was definitely born again and full of the Spirit of the Lord. Yeah, a lot of, you know immaturity, but she had a lot of life and a lot of hunger and zeal and a lot of growth going on.

So I’m saying, “Lord, does she know You?” Well, as she’s describing the problem, I’m noticing a real absence of the Lord, being referred to or mentioned. And though it seemed she was a concerned mother, it seemed like it was a very earthbound, human, horizontal kind of concern. And I said to her, “Could I share some things with you that might help you?” And she said, “What are they?” And I said, “Well, let me ask, do you have the Lord in your life to help you through this?” And it was just like that [snap] her face and her response. I forget her words. I can remember her face. It was like the Lord was saying to me through her, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” And so it was like, “Thank You, Lord. I know right where You have us now, what the priorities are.” And I said, “Could I share some things with you so that you can see how to have the Lord in your life, not only to deal with issues like this but all of life for time and eternity.” She goes, “Oh, okay, yeah. Tell me.”

And I had my Bible there, which I always do. And I just opened it and I started reading. I didn’t comment on any verses. I just started reading. I just ask the Lord to guide me through a lot of salvation verses. I read in John and Romans and 1 John. I read some of the classics, John 3:16 and John 14:6 and 1 John 5:11-13 and Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23. And I just kept reading all these salvation verses. And as I’m finishing one I am just depending on the Lord to bring to mind other ones. I don’t know how many minutes I was doing that, but I read quite a few and I hadn’t commented on one of them. I am still just turning pages and reading. We were sitting at this big round conference table in this room. And I heard, “Thud! Boo-hoo, boo-hoo!” It was just the reading of the Word of God about sin and the need of forgiveness and salvation and Christ, the way, the truth and the life. She just collapsed on her forearms and was weeping.

I said to her, “Wow, it sounds to me like you sense a real need for what God is offering here in Christ.”

“Oh yes, yes, yes.”

And I said, “Well, why don’t we tell the Lord about that? Talk to Him in prayer.”

She said, “I don’t know how to pray.”

So I offered to help her. I said, “I love to pray. And I’ll be glad to lead you and we’ll talk about these things that have touched your heart. I’ll just pray to the Lord as though it’s you and what I think the Lord is wanting to hear in light of His Word. And if it expresses your heart, you just go ahead and say it to the Lord. And if it doesn’t express your heart you just be silent and then I’ll ask the Lord to lead us on to other issues.”

And everything I prayed, she just said right to the Lord. Well, I realized that somewhere during that time of praying that this woman had been born again! Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.
And it was obvious that she was trusting her soul and salvation and was repenting of her sins and looking to Christ for life. And I realized all of a sudden that I was praying here with a new sister in the faith! So I turned the prayer to thanksgiving and all of that. And then, at the end of the prayer, she was sitting across the table from me and we had our heads bowed. And we looked up and I looked straight at her and her face was beaming. She came in like a facial thunder storm, ready to rain and really concerned. Now she was just beaming with joy and peace.

She spoke first and said, “So this is what those two kids are so excited about! Isn’t that great?” I said, “Yes, yes.” Her boyfriend was there and I turned to him and I said, “Where do you stand in all of this?” He said, “You know two weeks ago I gave my heart to the Lord like that, but I didn’t know how to explain it to her.” Oh man, there was big hugging and tears and another time of rejoicing!

A little side note. I am very—I don’t know the right word—grieved, irritated, perplexed, or perturbed, at this professionalized fifty minute counseling session approach that has come to the church world with church staff and Christian psychological counselors and all. I mean, God can certainly work in five minutes, but I don’t see any rushed relationship there in John 4 with the woman at the well. The Lord even extended the session for her to go get some folks and bring them back for some of their own.

So we were together a couple of hours, and do you know we never again returned to the subject that she came in to talk about. After we had celebrated her boyfriend’s new salvation, she pops up to him, “Oh momma doesn’t understand this. We’ve got to tell her. Oh, aunt so and so doesn’t understand.…” She is just going right down the clan. It was an evangelist in the making right there. And as the weeks begin to roll by, we get reports of mother and daughter out evangelizing the clan. That is what we are talking about here. Listening and determining whether they are saved? Because if they aren’t that’s God’s number one priority for that person.

The interesting thing is, she came in wanting me to kind of step in and be sure this engagement was broken off. I did not do that, though I did agree to pray for her, them and talk to them more. And it ended up that they did—I don’t know the right word here either—terminate, postpone, bring an interlude to their engagement. Then one of them went off to Bible College up at Twin Peaks. And then six months later the other one went there. And then they eventually got engaged and married. And it definitely was at least a matter of timing that this gal was sensitive to.

That’s what we’re talking about. Saved? Because the Lord wants that person to be a follower. No matter why they came, He is using whatever motivated them, so that He can either get them on the path of discipleship or as we’ll see in just a moment, if they are believers He wants to move them on down the path of discipleship.

Let’s take a break right here, shall we? And then we’ll pick up with the rest of this after a break.
Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 24
Questions and Final Exhortation

By
Bob Hoekstra

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All right, let’s continue to look at Counseling Session Guidelines. We have looked at three so far. We have looked at prayer, listening, number two and then number three, asking the question and praying, “Is this person saved?” I think that is an important question. It keeps the priorities sorted out in the counseling ministry. And the Lord can use us so much in that kind of a situation to let the challenges or opportunities of life be the avenues to lead to the presentation of the Gospel and offering of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Very closely related to that is another question that I believe is Biblically correct to be asking and I have personally developed more and more of a habit in this arena, as the Lord has worked in my life. And that is, even if in sharing with that person we have strong indication they are a disciple of the Lord, there is another question to be asking. Let me put it another way. Maybe you know that person and you are quite certain from long standing relationship that they know the Lord, that they are a disciple of Jesus Christ. Well, here is another question that is very appropriate and fits in the same realm of thinking. As we are listening and praying, praying and listening, and say we are quite certain of their saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ—another question I like to ask while I’m praying and I have put it in these words—Saved, but? Yes, they are saved, however—yes, they are a disciple of the Lord, but are they living as a disciple? Are they following the Lord? Are they pressing on after the Lord? Or are they just coasting or drifting or getting into self? And in this day and age a lot of Christians that are seeking a word of counsel on the formal or informal level are (on their own flesh’s inclination as well as the encouragement of many other Christians often) they are very much into their own flesh.

Which reminds me of a comment. Why is it that there are so many of these self-help books, self-help groups and all of that in churches? How is it that in the Christian publishing community there can be tons of books that are self-centered instead of Christ-centered? Well, one reason is there is so much fleshy carnality in the American church and there is an automatic market for it. All this stuff feeds the flesh, appeals to the flesh, entrenches people in the flesh. And often Christians, real disciples in the sense that they do know the Lord and have followed Him some, when their crisis comes, when their problem comes, they are sort of into self. Hey, help me. Protect me. Fulfill me. Actualize me. I will assert me and all of that….

So here is another great question to be asking: “Saved, but? But how are they walking?” Are they pressing on to know the Lord? Are they following hard after the Lord? If they are not, there is the next priority.

The Lord doesn’t just want to speak into their perplexity. He doesn’t want to just restore a comfort zone. He wants to use whatever they’re wrestling with to get them moving on down that path of discipleship. It is just like He wants to use the issues of life to get us on the path of discipleship by coming face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel. So those who have met the Lord, who are drifting or into self or sliding back, He wants to use whatever they are struggling with to let them encounter the Lord again in a fresh new call to move them on down that path of discipleship.

And the Scriptures on that from Luke 9:23, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Verses like that are very appropriate. I’ve turned often through the years to a verse like that when discipling someone in counseling that I was quite sure was already a believer.

Two other great verses are, Romans 12:1- 2.
...By the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice…which is your only reasonable service. And not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what that is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Those are great verses to share with a believer who knows the saving, forgiving grace of God, but is not living by the sustaining, liberating, maturing, freeing, transforming grace of God.

How can you tell in listening to a person that you know, most likely, most certainly is a Christian, how can you tell if they are pressing on as a disciple or if they are into self? Well, as I have put it before, if you hear them talking all the time about the unholy trio, the unholy trinity, “me, myself and I,” that is the tip-off number one. “Well, I don’t like this. Well, they’re not treating me right. Well I, I, me, me and mine.” Just on and on and on it is “me, myself and I.” It’s like trumpeting out, “I’m into self.” I am sitting before you, walking according to the flesh. Now counsel me, you know. That’s kind of what is happening.

And often that is the situation. We are all vulnerable to that, being susceptible and temptable. But especially in our day and age and our church culture and just people who live as citizens of our country, there is so much self-ism and me-ism and self-exaltation and self-serving. And it is all sort of given a validation by the ascendancy of the psychological counseling profession. The experts in me-ology, and self-ology. They are experts at it and all the theories are built around self basically and they are very self-serving.

And so, people get a lot of encouragement not only from within but from without. Their own flesh is crying out, take care of me! “Bless me. Protect me. Give me.” And many, sometimes well intended Christians are “amening” them. Yeah, you need to do this for yourself. You have been giving too much attention to your kids and your husband. You need to do this for yourself. And just start gearing you away from the Lord and others into self. Then they come for help and they want you to help them help themselves!

I like to be praying, “Lord, use me to get away from this issue with them that they are harping on, that they want to comfort, protect their own flesh from or in, and help us get right down to discipleship.” Again it is because I found so often that if we even can go beyond the limited issue to the bigger foundational issues, we are helping people not only get through the struggle they are in, but they learn how to walk through and face all kinds of challenges and struggles. And discipleship is what it is all about.

Another unfolding aspect in counseling session is: Early, Appropriate Use of the Word from John 14:16.

Before we read that verse, let me tell you another brief story. One day my buddy Pastor John and I were coming out of a counseling session that I had again invited him to sit in on. And after the folks left the first thing John said to me was, “Bob, you sure get people into the Word of God in a counseling setting a lot faster than I do.” I thought on that just a minute and I said, “John, you know, I get people into the Word a lot quicker than I used to.” And I have seen through the years that there has been a kind of a tightening of the gap from the starting to share together to the time we are in the Word together.

And I’ll tell you, that is what my heart is beating for, praying for, and crying out to God for the most. That is a chance to open the Word of God and directly let the Wonderful Counselor start counseling. I really see that as our primary role in Biblical counseling. It is to be an instrument
through which the Lord can work in such a way that His Word can actually be opened and let Him speak directly right into the situation. That is what I’m always aching for and looking for.

I may have shared before, but years ago when I’m praying and listening, I used to write down a lot of details about it, and not that that is invalid or forbidden, but through the years I have gotten away from that. I noticed people getting kind of edgy, you know. As they are pouring out their heart, you’re writing. It is like, “What are you going to do with that? Where’s that headed? Into the Sunday bulletin? And as more time went on I just stopped writing. But I did and still do like to have a Bible, a pen and at least a little piece of paper in my Bible or in my pocket. But the only thing I generally write on it anymore is Scripture verses because when I’m listening and praying I’m saying, Lord, what do You want to say to this person? And when the Lord brings to my mind a Scripture passage, I count that a direct answer to prayer. It’s like the Lord saying, “Here is what I want to tell them.” And I just write it down. And then when that moment comes, as it so often does, sometimes sooner or sometimes later, when the person says, “What do you think, or what should I do, or does God have a word for me?” Whatever they say, I want to just grab the Bible. Well, let me tell you what I think. Whatever they say when they are looking for help, just turn it right to the Scriptures.

That is the most significant moment, I believe, in the counseling situation. I mean, that is where things, in an amazing way, really start popping and happening. It is because the Word is living and sharp and quick and powerful and used by the Spirit it’s as though the Wonderful Counselor Himself is right there just ministering to that person.

The reason I like to use John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit….” By the way, that word “Helper” could also be translated Counselor or Comforter. It is one of those two Greek words that can be translated counselor or comforter.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

If we are going to use the Word of God in counseling—which we must if we are going to do it God’s way—we’ve got to be letting the Word be planted in our hearts. I believe it is right to desire an early, appropriate use of the Word of God. I think both of those words are significant, early and appropriate. As early as we can by looking for the opportunity, but also appropriate; not sitting there with our Bible in hand as they come in and we’re ready to just jump all over them. Now I am not saying that God would never do that. That may be just what that situation needs. And sometimes in the most unusual ways, a way you would never apply maybe in a thousand other settings, but it can be just what God wants to do there. Early, but appropriate. Early, you are looking for that chance. But being appropriate in that you are not ramming it down their throat. And you have time to show you care. You listen. You want to learn. And you want to pray. But I believe an early, appropriate use of the Word of God is pleasing in the sight of the Lord, to be pressing toward in prayer, in our heart, in our thinking, in our desire.

Now this is an overstatement, but so often I feel like up until that moment, a lot of it is almost like it would be waste. That overstates it. I know God is working between hearts and on hearts and of all that. And I don’t want to be misunderstood, but this moment from the Word is so significant, that the other is kind of like, that was just so this can begin to happen. That’s how important I think it is.
And again, we want to speak the truth in love. We are not ramming the Word down people’s throats. We are not laying the law on people, unless of course if they are very rebellious we better be ready to lay the law on them. Because the law is for the rebellious and the insubordinate according, to 1Timothy 1:7-9.

Early, appropriate use of the Word. But if we are going to be used that way, what needs to be happening? We need to be taking the Word into our lives. We need to be letting the Holy Spirit, teach us all these things of the words of the Lord—“He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is teaching us the Word and then bringing it to our remembrance when it is needed.

Some believers, unnecessarily, sadly, needlessly disqualify themselves from counseling ministry too often, too quick, too soon, because they think they don’t have the memory for it. “I can’t remember all those verses and apply them to all the categories. And you know, that’s too much to remember.” I really don’t believe that the counseling ministry is all about memory. Now if you have been given by God a great memory, praise God, He can use it. But I don’t think in any place in the Word of God are we told that you have to have a great memory to be used in personal ministry.

What we need to do is have a growing relationship with the great God and get into this great Word of His and let it get into us, and then be available. If we are not taking it in, letting Him teach it to us, it’s not there for Him to bring to our remembrance. But He is willing to take the role of teaching and bringing to our remembrance. If we let Him teach the Word to us, really make it important in our lives, then in certain situations the Spirit of the Lord will just bring it to mind. I mean, it’s amazing the way that works. Again, it’s such a living, spiritual dynamic. You don’t want to bring it down to some rote procedure. It’s just God at work. But we want to be putting God’s Word in our heart.

James 1:21, “…meekly receiving the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.”

And Psalm 119:11, “Your word have a hid in my heart.”

We want to be bringing it in and then the Spirit of God will bring it up at the right moments. It is part of His great ministry to us. We can depend on that, count on that, and rely upon that.

The next issue is Needed Response or Action.

The next unfolding aspect of a counseling situation is watching for needed responses or actions. Some are real obvious like Matthew 5:23-24

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

If we are counseling someone and they are into this great service of God, but they are kind of impeded or bothered or hassled in it by this nagging reminder that they have a brother who rightly has something against them, and they come for our counsel. “Well this is going to be a tough one, you know. We might need a year or so of therapy before we ever get down to the bottom of this.” No, you just tell them, “Hey, shift your attention from that project that service that you’re engaged in, not that it’s wrong. Not that you have to leave it forever. Just focus your attention on
straightening that thing out with your brother. And often in counseling situations the Word has spoken so much into that that we can just be watching for those.

Perhaps in some ways if we are watching, we will maybe helping people in one or two times of counseling them whereby the trend in our culture and in our church today is to stretch everything out and on and on. It’s like every issue comes with a guaranteed six month, twelve month, eighteen month, twenty-four months of—well, they don’t call it counseling, often it’s therapy. But a lot of us can shorten a lot of it probably, just by watching for those things the Lord has spoken right into. And when they share and the Lord has spoken, you can just share with them. Hey, there’s no mystery here. You don’t need to get into your past. Or you know, maybe something you did to your dog caused this. Or that thing you didn’t get when you were five years old for your birthday. Look, you want to serve God but there is this problem. A person has something against you. You can’t change it, but you be sure you are not the ongoing cause of whatever remains. They might not receive it. They might not respond. That is fine, then you are free to just press on right back with your service and all.

You know, a man comes in and sits down with you and tells you that he’s, his life’s just in great turmoil because he’s been cheating on his wife for twelve months. And he asks you what he should do. You don’t have to say, “Give me two weeks to pray on it and come back. Boy, you have been doing that, how long? You need at least three years of therapy before we can even get into any action steps.” It’s not that mysterious. You’ve been doing what, you scoundrel? God have mercy on you. I think right now would be a time to fall on your face before God. Right now. Right now. The only thing better would have been to do it six months ago. And when you are done you probably ought to go home and do the same before your wife. “What?! She might not respond the way I want her to.” Yeah, but she might respond the way God wants her to. And we’ll see how God wants to respond. You know, a kick in the pants or astounding measures of mercy and forgiveness. Yeah, but she might not let me back in the house. She might not want me in her life. Well, you know, she actually has that option before God and she can seek God on that. You can’t make it happen one way or the other. Either way, that is where you ought to be. And who knows, she might have mercy on you. She might have mercy on you.

I think God wants us to be watching in counseling situations for things God has spoken right into in His Word. It seems like the whole thing in the counseling field now is to make everything a great mystery. It is like you’re hunting for hidden clues. So many issues, God has just spoken on them. People are unaccustomed to speaking straight forward to each other. You know it is hiding and restating and redefining and making less of sin and less of righteousness and more of self. And often in counseling, I believe, the Lord wants us to be alert for needed response and action.

I’ve been with folks in counseling situations that are amazingly gifted at that. And the Lord has made me much more forthright in counseling ministry on things like that than I was when I started out. I was probably Dr. Mealy-mouth when I started out. Hey, we can work something out on everything. But I have been with some who are just astoundingly gifted at it. Or have learned and matured. And they have been listening to God and they see and they just speak. And in the name of the Lord and by the Spirit of God things begin to change rapidly or at least you know exactly where the issues are. And God can use us that way.

So needed response or action, good to be watching for them. Someone might need to immediately confess or repent or seek forgiveness or offer forgiveness.

Next is Homework. Both, 1 Peter 2:2 and Hebrews 5:13-14, I think make it clear. We are not talking about busy work. Not just something to look like we are attacking this thing or getting at
it. But this is something to take home in the Word to work on before God in prayer and seeking. Particularly if I’ve been with someone and they have been sharing and pouring out their heart. I’ve been listening and praying and I have written down five or six passages maybe. And they ask what I think and I begin to share these. And you know, time goes on, you realize or they say they need to go or it just seems like you both wore each other out. You know, there might be two or three or four passages left. If they say, “Can we get together again on this?” I like to say, “Yeah, and why don’t you take these and be praying in them. I mean, really consistently seeking God. I think God wants to speak through these passages.” That’s what I’m talking about by homework. It is something to take home to help get in the Word to hear from the Lord. Then you get together again and that is what you talk about. “What did the Lord show you in those verses? Hey, let’s go over them together.”

1 Peter 2:2, “…As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

The Word of God is pure spiritual milk and often people need to grow up in and grow out of their situations. And the Word of God is there to assist them.

Hebrews 5:13-14,

> For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food, meat belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern both good and evil.

It is not only the milk of the Word, but the meat of the Word. The meat here especially is shown to be the things about Christ, as our great High Priest. That is real growing up, maturing, let us go on to perfection, Hebrews 6:1 kind of food. Reading the Word to find out who Christ is, what He has done and what He is doing now on our behalf. Letting people drink and chew on the Word of God between times with them.

And then last is Prayer. And that is purposefully a repeat from the first one. That was prayer, Philippians 4:6. The last prayer is from 1Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” It certainly fits the counseling ministry to be those who want to pray without ceasing.

Pray before we meet with folks. Pray with them when we are together. Exhort and encourage them to pray. Pray as we depart. And pray for one another while we are apart. I mean, that just fits the Biblical counseling ministry. It keeps our hope resting on the One who is the Counselor.

Now this is not exhaustive, but I really believe that it is, though somewhat brief, it has a significant measure of fullness to it. If we just walk in these things in our counseling ministry the Lord will be adding other unfolding aspects that will become increasingly important in our ministry personally as the years go by. But these are a great place to pray and ask the Lord to build.

Let me share a concluding word or a final exhortation based on some Scriptures that we have looked at. Isaiah 9:6, that wonderful, wonderful passage. “And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor.”

What we have been looking at, throughout this course, is this glorious truth that in the kingdom of God man is not the counselor. God the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit, is our Wonderful Counselor. May that shape our counseling ministries. May it shape our perspective on Biblical
counseling that the Lord is the Counselor. And in light of that, may we be those who respond in a Hebrews 12:2 kind of a way, “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfector of our faith.” When we need counsel we want to characteristically, habitually be looking to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word to counsel us. When others come to us for counsel, we want to increasingly, habitually be pointing them to the Lord. Urging them to look to the Lord and get in the Word. I’ll get in the Word with you. Let’s search out the Lord, the mind of the Lord, the Word of the Lord. Let’s be looking to the Lord.

Oh, how desperately we need that in these days. People in the culture and people in the churches are looking to human experts instead of to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is understandable in the world, but tragic when it comes into the church. This is the Lord God Almighty, Creator of us all and Redeemer of His people. Shouldn’t we look to Him for all of the issues of our lives? I mean, it just makes perfect Biblical sense. There is a lot of nonsense of the flesh in the church world and we don’t want to contribute to it. We even want to be salt and light to see the church move out of it and see people looking unto Jesus. Run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Boy that creates a lot of counseling ministry right there. The fact that the Christian life is a race that needs to be run with endurance. A lot of us feel worn out a lot of times on the track. And we are turning to one another for help and encouragement. How’re we going to help each other press on down the track? If we don’t encourage and help one another to look unto Jesus, we will stagger on our face and make no progress down the track. Or we will even be tempted to drift off the track. We need to be looking to Jesus who authored faith in us, by presenting Himself to us in the Gospel. Now He wants to perfect our faith, mold it, shape it, build it, deepen it, and strengthen it. How? It is by looking unto Him, getting to know Him, and learning to trust Him. It is letting Him work in our lives as faithful and true and trustworthy, so we will trust Him more. That should be the very shape of our counseling ministry.

Then John 8:31-32,

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’

There is so much out there in the religious church counseling arena with so-called Christian psychological counseling and counseling clinics and trained psychological church staff members. They are referring to the Christian psychiatrist and there is so much that is going on in the church world that is not built on, permeated with, and in-line with the truth. God’s people need to know the truth because only the truth sets people free. What truth? It is the truth of the Word of God. “If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth…”

People who live in the Word of God they are really walking a path of discipleship and they get to know the truth of the Word and the truth of the Word liberates their lives from crazy thinking, bondage of bad thinking, bondage of bad talking, bondage of bad behaving, bondage of bad relating, bondage of bad priorities. The truth just sets us free more and more from that stuff.

And there is so much that’s going on in the church world that is not the truth. It’s just full of subtle human compromises, even lies and myths. And may the Lord stir our hearts to have a passion for the truth. We want to be counseled by it and want to counsel with nothing other than the truth of the Word of God.
Now to be doing that we will certainly want to be Bereans like Acts 17:11. Way back down the road I would hear a counseling theory and I’d think, “Oh, sounds pretty good to me. I’ll try it or I’ll recommend it to someone.” Boy, more and more I hear it, I just want to sift it through the tightest sieve of the Word of God. I think that is what Acts 17 is all about. “These [at Berea] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica…” Boy, you read First and Second Thessalonians, spiritually speaking those were noble-minded people. They received the Word of God for what it is, the Word of God and not the word of man. It began to change their lives. I mean, we are not comparing good and bad here. We are comparing great with greater. Those in Thessalonica they were spiritually noble. But these in Berea were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, “in that they received the word with all readiness…” That is also what they did in Thessalonica. “…and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things are so.”

These things called Christian counseling literature, theory, approach, let’s see if these things are so! Let’s have that kind of a mind. Let’s just see if they are so. No one is harmed in that if we do it with the right attitude, only can be help for us all. “Oh, let me tell you this great new idea, this great new theory. Oh, it’s just touching lives everywhere.” Well, now wait a minute. Is it just getting crowds and filling appointment books, or is it really doing what God wants to do? “Oh, yeah, it’s just the greatest.” Well, let’s hear about it. “Well, it’s about getting the other half of your brain to work.” Oh wow! The prophets wrote about that numerous times. It’s all they could talk about.” Let’s just see if these things are so.

And as far as the theories and ideas of man, I have become a radical skeptic. You know, prove it to me by the Word of God! Not in a nasty, mean way but very stubborn. Show me in the Word! If it is in there, praise God! If it is not, “get thee behind, Satan.” You know, I don’t want anything to do with it. In fact, I want to warn against it. I want to be a spiritually noble-minded Berean.

Testimony
I spent too many years as a young believer without this noble mind being even a fleeting thought in my Christian life. I spent too many years, I would say five of the twenty-five that I pastored, I with never an interest in being this noble-minded counselor. In fact, I was very careful to avoid such things. Never inferring that something might be wrong or that someone might wrong or that I could say this is right and that is wrong. “Hey, don’t judge. Hey, don’t be negative.” That’s a smokescreen. We don’t want to be judgmental. We don’t want to let negativism to be our way of life, but we do want to be noble Bereans. As we take in everything that is out there in the church world, and boy there is a lot out there and some of it even the world snickers at and is embarrassed. And the church is just plowing on like, “Well, we’ve got the answers from Freud and Jung and Maslow and the rest.

Let’s search the Scriptures daily. Let’s really be in the Word measuring all these counseling ideas to find out whether these things are accurate. And listen, if they were doing that with the apostle Paul and that was noble-minded as he preached the Word, don’t you think we ought to be doing it heavy-duty with theoreticians and clinicians and interns and psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and all the other “gists”? Let’s just see if this is so.

We need noble-minded Bereans this day. May the Lord make each of us into that kind of counselor. Not just grabbing the kind of, “Hey what’s hot, what’s popular, and what seems to work or what people are interested in?” Personally, I have no interest in that. I mean, zero anymore. I want to know: does what you are suggesting fit the Word of God? In fact, let’s start another way. Let’s just find in the Word what people need and then let the theories of man buck up against that.
“And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,” that’s kind of the heart of the whole thing. If our heart is set on Him and He is counseling us and we pass it on to others, ultimately we will be counseling God’s way and not man’s way. And I have shared my heart pretty openly. I think we desperately need something more than a counseling revival. We need a spiritual reformation like 400 years ago, to come heavy into the church. God is able, and may we be willing to be used.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You for giving us these weeks, these hours of study in this course. We thank You for the Word of God and what a perfect text and more than a text. It is a love letter from heaven to our hearts. Lord Jesus, we acknowledge You as our Wonderful Counselor. And we want to be those who are looking to Jesus, pointing people to Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor. Men and women who live by, stand on, and counsel from the truth of the Word of God and are noble Bereans measuring everything out there in the counseling ministry by what the Word of God says. Lord, raise up an army like that throughout the church world. Forgive us for our attraction to the ways of man, our fleshy, self-serving delight to take man’s way and not God’s way. Forgive us for any contribution in that, Lord, and use us now to call the church in Your direction. And just do a wonderful work in these days when so many, many hearts are troubled, burdened and seeking help. May we give them what You have for them and not man. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Counseling God’s Way

Appendix A
Course Outline and Scripture References

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COUNSELING GOD’S WAY

Appendix

Course Outline and Scripture References

I. What Counseling Is

Lesson 1 - Introduction; The LORD as Counselor

- Matthew 5:3
- Matthew 16:16
- Psalm 32:8
- Psalm 73:24
- Psalm 33:18-22
- Psalm 25:12-15
- Psalm 23:1-6
- Psalm 34:18
- Psalm 46:1-3
- Psalm 55:22
- Psalm 62:5-8

Lesson 2 - The LORD as Counselor, Part 2

- Isaiah 9:6
- Colossians 2:3
- Isaiah 61:1-3
- Isaiah 42:3
- Matthew 11:28-30
- Matthew 5:45
- John 4:13-14
- John 7:37-38
- John 8:12
- John 10:10

Lesson 3 - Counseling and Discipleship

- Isaiah 9:6
- Matthew 28:19
- Matthew 4:19
- Proverbs 16:25
II. God’s Way in Counseling

Lesson 4 - Counseling and Sanctification

- 2 Corinthians 1:3
- 1 Corinthians 1:2
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5
- 2 Timothy 2:21
- Titus 2:11-12
- 1 Timothy 4:7-8
- 1 Peter 1:14-16
- Hebrews 12:9-11
- Romans 7:18
- Psalm 32:8
- Philippians 3:8-14
- Isaiah 53:3
- Colossians 3:1-3
- 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 1 John 3:2-3
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Lesson 5 - God’s Word in Counseling

- Jude 1:3
- Psalm 119:24
- Psalm 119:105
- Psalm 119:130
- Psalm 107:17-20
- John 8:31-32
- John 17:17
- 2 Timothy 3:14-15
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Jeremiah 10:23
- Hebrews 4:12
- Hebrews 12:1-2
Lesson 6 - The Holy Spirit in Counseling

- 2 Timothy 3:17
- John 5:39-40
- Isaiah 55:10-11
- Isaiah 9:6
- Isaiah 11:2
- John 14:16-17
- John 16:13-14
- John 8
- John 17:17
- Isaiah 61:1
- Ephesians 5:18
- John 16:7-8
- 1 Timothy 1:8-9
- Galatians 5:16-23
- 1 Corinthians 2:12-13
- 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Lesson 7 - Prayer in Counseling

- Psalm 119:17-19
- Psalm 119:25-28
- Job 23:12
- Ephesians 6:18
- Ephesians 3:16
- Luke 18:1
- Philippians 4:6-7
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- Colossians 1:9
- Psalm 6:1-3
- Psalm 25:16-20

III. Counselors and Their Equipping

Lesson 8 – Church Life in Counseling

- Ephesians 1:22-23
- Colossians 3:11
- Colossians 3:12-17
Lesson 9 - Who Is to Do Counseling

- Romans 15:14
- Mark 10:18
- Colossians 1:27
- Isaiah 9:6
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- Romans 12:6
- Romans 12:8
- 1 Corinthians 12:4
- 1 Corinthians 12:7
- 1 Corinthians 12:8-9
- John 15:4-5
- Galatians 5:22-23
- Galatians 5:25
- John 15:7
- Philippians 2:13
- Proverbs 11:13
- 1 John 3:16

Lesson 10 - Equipping for Counseling Ministry

- Ephesians 4:11-12
- Romans 14:19
- Romans 15:2
- Colossians 3:16
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- 2 Timothy 2:15
- Hebrews 5:13-14
- 1 Peter 2:4-5
- Hebrews 13:20-21

Lesson 11 - Vital Issues for Counseling
IV. Foundational Truths for Counseling

Lesson 12 - Vital Issues

- 1 Peter 4:12
- 1 Peter 4:15-16
- 1 Peter 1:6-7
- James 1:2-4
- 2 Corinthians 1:8-9
- Romans 1:17
- 2 Corinthians 1:10
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-9
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 1 Peter 5:10
- Isaiah 41:10
- Romans 15:13

Lesson 13 - In Adam or in Christ

- Romans 5, 6, 7 & 8
- John 8:31-32; 36
- John 14:6
- Colossians 2:9-10
- Romans 5:12
- Ezekiel 18:4
- Romans 5:17
- Ephesians 2:3
- 2 Corinthians 4:3-4
- John 8:29
- Ephesians 1:3
- Matthew 3:2
- Colossians 1:27
Lesson 14 - United with Christ

- Romans 6:1
- Romans 6:2-4
- 1 Corinthians 10:2
- Romans 6:4-6
- 1 John 2:16
- Romans 8:23
- Romans 6:8-11
- Romans 5:10
- Hebrews 11:1
- Romans 6:12-19
- Philippians 2:13
- Galatians 2:20

Lesson 15 - Walking According to the Flesh

- Romans 8:4
- Romans 7:14-16
- Romans 6:14
- Romans 7:12
- Romans 8:23
- Romans 7:17-20
- Romans 7:21-23
- 1 Corinthians 2:16
- Proverbs 16:18
- Romans 7:24
- 1 Corinthians 15:57
- Matthew 26:41
- Philippians 2:12-13

Lesson 16 - Walking According to the Spirit

- 1 Corinthians 15:57
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- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 1:13
- Colossians 3:3
- Philippians 1:1
- Philippians 3:9
- Colossians 1:27
- John 15:1
- John 15:5
- 2 Corinthians 5:20
- Colossians 2:9-10
- 1 Corinthians 1:30-31
- 1 Peter 4:11
- 2 Peter 3:18

Lesson 18 - Renewing of the Mind

- Romans 12:2
- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- Ephesians 2:1-3
- Ephesians 4:17-18
- Ephesians 4:23
- Mark 12:30
- Romans 12:1-2
- Isaiah 1:18
- Titus 3:5-6
- 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 1 Corinthians 2:16
- Jude 1:3
- Colossians 3:2
- Romans 8:6
- Psalm 63:6
Lesson 19 - Spiritual Warfare

- 2 Corinthians 10:3-4
- Ephesians 6:11-12
- Ezekiel 28:12-17
- Isaiah 14:12-14
- 1 John 5:19
- Romans 8:28
- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- 1 John 2:15-17
- 2 Corinthians 11:13-14
- Matthew 4:3
- John 8:44
- Revelation 12:9-10
- 1 Peter 5:8
- 1 John 3:8
- 1 John 4:4

V. Major Threats to Counseling God’s Way

Lesson 20 - Victory in Spiritual Warfare

- Romans 8:35-37
- Hebrews 2:14-15
- Colossians 2:13-15
- John 16:33
- Revelation 20:1-3
- Ephesians 6:10-18
- Isaiah 40:31
- John 10:10
- Romans 7:18
- Colossians 1:27
- Matthew 4:4, 7, & 10
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- Isaiah 14
- Ezekiel 28
- 1 Peter 5:5-10
- James 4:6-10

Lesson 21 - Forsaking Our Wonderful Counselor
Lesson 22 - Turning to Worldly Counsel

- Jeremiah 2:13
- 1 Timothy 1:3-4
- Philippians 3:13-14
- Colossians 3:2-3
- 1 Corinthians 2:16
- Matthew 22:36-40
- 2 Timothy 3:1-2
- 1 Corinthians 1:18-21
- 1 Corinthians 3:19-20
- Isaiah 31:1
- Jeremiah 17:5-8
- John 6:53 & 63
- Galatians 3:3

VI. Counseling Session Guidelines

Lesson 23 - Counseling Session Guidelines

- Ephesians 4:1
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Ephesians 5:8
- Ephesians 5:15
- 2 Timothy 4:2
- Psalm 119:41
- John 14:16
- Philippians 4:6
- Matthew 28:19
- John 3:16
- John 14:6
- 1 John 5:11-13
Lesson 24 - Questions and Final Exhortation

- Romans 12:1-2
- John 14:26
- 1 Timothy 1:7-9
- James 1:21
- Psalm 119:11
- Matthew 5:23-24
- 1 Peter 2:2
- Hebrews 5:13-14
- Philippians 4:6
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- Isaiah 9:6
- Hebrews 12:1-2
- John 8:31-32
- Acts 17:11