

Introduction to Pastoral Counseling: An Exchanged Life Perspective

by John Woodward

Christ's Great Commission is for His people to make disciples of all nations and this mandate includes evangelism and teaching (Matt 28:19,20). One aspect of carrying out this task in the context of the church is counseling. Counseling can be described as remedial discipleship which helps a troubled believer overcome their problems biblically.

With the growing complexities of our culture, the moral decline in North America, and society's drift away from a Christian worldview, the pastoral ministry seems to be as challenging as ever. The minister is expected to preach effectively, administrate the church programs, visit newcomers and the membership, perform weddings and funerals, evangelize, and demonstrate social concern. It is not surprising that some pastors regard counseling as a responsibility they would rather avoid. It would be simple to refer parishioners who are disturbed by "psychological problems" to a psychologist or psychiatrist. Although there may be occasions where referral is necessary (such as for organic issues), pastoral ministry is usually recognized as including some pastoral counseling.

A typical approach to help pastors counsel is to somehow integrate secular psychology and the Christian faith. The tendency in the Clinical Pastoral Education field is to put more of an emphasis on psychological research than biblical theology. An example of a book aimed at introducing pastors to counseling is the volume in Baker's Source Books for Ministers series. The author's intention is valid. "The goal of spiritual counseling is to bring men and women into right relationship with God and lead them to the abundant life." This purpose statement quoted from James Bonnell is fine. Yet in the chapter on techniques of counseling, the author just surveys secular counseling models with some evaluative comments. [1] This leads to the dilemma of how to integrate unbiblical, secular psychology with biblical counseling.

Larry Crabb has attempted to show how to integrate these two without compromising the Bible's message. He proposed four options of integrating psychology and biblical teaching:

1. the "Separate but Equal" approach, which rejects the relevance of the Scriptures in addressing psychological problems.

2. the "Tossed Salad" approach, which mixes psychology and Christian beliefs
3. the "Nothing Buttery" approach, which disregards psychology altogether
4. the "Spoiling the Egyptians" approach [2]

Crabb advocates the fourth option, the title of which alludes to Exodus 11:2,3; 12:35,36. He advocates accepting and using psychological insights which are deemed compatible with biblical teaching and presuppositions. He illustrated this kind of approach by observing that,

"Man is responsible (Glasser) to believe truth which will result in responsible behavior (Ellis) that will provide him with meaning, hope (Frankl), and love (Fromm), and will serve as a guide (Adler) to effective living with others as a self-and other-accepting person (Harris), who understands himself (Freud), who appropriately expresses himself (Perls), and who knows how to control himself (Skinner)." [3]

The difficulty of various attempts at integration is that the counselor does not approach the task of counseling with a thoroughly biblical theology and counseling model.

There is also the tendency to water down the provision God has made for people's spiritual, mental, emotional, volitional, and physical needs. In his book, *The Sufficiency of Christ*, John MacArthur laments the shift in Christian counseling toward psychology and away from the Bible's answers.

"I have no quarrel with those who use either common sense or social sciences as a helpful observer's platform to look on human conduct and develop tools to assist people in getting some external controls in their behavior. That may be useful as a first step for getting to the real spiritual cure. But a wise counselor realizes that all behavioral therapy stops on the surface--far short of actual solutions to the real needs of the soul, which are only resolved in Christ." [4]

There is a need for a Christian counseling model which goes beyond an eclectic approach, merely supplemented with the Bible.

In a standard secular text on counseling, Gerald Corey surveyed the major counseling models. He noted the need for clarifying one's philosophy and assumptions regarding counseling.

"It is my conviction that our views of human nature and the basic assumptions that undergird our views of the therapeutic process have significant implications for the way we develop our therapeutic practices. I am also persuaded that, because they do not pay sufficient attention to their philosophical assumptions, many practitioners operate as though they had no set of assumptions regarding their clients. In my opinion, a central task is to make our assumptions explicit and conscious, so that we can establish some consistency between our beliefs about human nature and the way we implement our procedures in counseling or therapy." [5]

Without God's revelation to clarify the spiritual needs of man and give moral values and ethical absolutes, choosing a counseling model becomes very subjective. This being the case it should not surprise the evangelical pastor that his counseling model should differ essentially from secular approaches.

Jay Adams, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, wrote Competent to Counsel to make a case for the primacy of the Bible in equipping the pastoral counselor. He denounced the trend in Christian counseling of compromise with secular psychology. Adams contrasted the eclectic approach with the adequacy of the Bible in The Christian Counselor's Manual. He stated:

"The eclectic pragmatically attempts to take the best of everything and glue it together in a patchwork. That we may not do as Christians, because instead of saying that nobody has anything (ultimate truth), we must say God has given us everything. This is the distinctive fact about the divine knowledge approach. The Scriptures plainly declare: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and Godliness." (2 Pet 1:3). . ." [6]

Through such books, evangelical pastors were encouraged to counsel people using a consistently biblical model. Whether it was due to Adam's counseling orientation under O. Hobart Mowrer (whose emphasis on personal responsibility was popularized in Reality Therapy by William Glasser), or due to the emphasis on law in reformed theology, this nouthetic counseling model emphasized admonition. Whereas this is valid and beneficial for much remedial discipleship, many find themselves in the kind of despair mentioned in Romans 7:22-24:

"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 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. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" [7]

A growing number of counselors are finding great benefit in the insights and methods of Exchanged Life Counseling. This approach focuses on God's resources for living as Paul went on to declare in the same context of Romans:

"I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . For the law 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 . . . 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."(Rom 7:25;8:2-4)

The term "exchanged life" is a scriptural term, alluding to Isaiah 40:31. "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." The word "renew" is a translation of the Hebrew "chalaph", meaning to change or exchange. The phrase was also used in the devotional biography of J. Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission. [8] It testifies of how Taylor came to personally appropriate the truths of Galatians 2:20, where the apostle Paul wrote,

"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 I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

One's biblical understanding of the means of abundant living in Christ should be foundational to the counseling approach. The "exchanged life" is one of the names of the deeper life model of sanctification. This emphasis on the truth of the believer's union with Christ has been taught in this century by groups such as the Keswick movement (e.g. Evan Hopkins, F.B. Meyer, Andrew Murray) and the Capernwray Bible Schools (founded by Major Ian Thomas). Recent examples of exchanged life teaching include books by Stephen Olford and Neil Anderson. Olford's book, Not I But Christ, has an introduction by Billy Graham and endorsements by other prominent pastors and teachers (which indicate that these truths are appreciated by many evangelicals). Anderson's Freedom in Christ Ministries has been popularized through his books such as Victory Over the Darkness.

This perspective of Christ as life should be shared by all believers, since it is clearly described by our Lord in His metaphor of the vine and branches in John 15:1-8. It was central to Paul's testimony and teaching as well (Gal 2:20; Col 3:1-3). For instance, Romans 5:10 declares, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."(emphasis added).

F.J. Huegel, in Bone of His Bone, describes the truths of the exchanged life in profound terms. In the book's final chapter, Huegel insisted that if this view of sanctification were biblical, it should radically affect Christian ministry. [9] While he itemized the implications of the deeper life on the church, prayer, and missions, it obvious that it should also directly impact pastoral counseling.

One person these truths greatly affected was Charles Solomon. As an engineer by employment and a depressed Christian by experience, he came to the end of his personal resources. While reading Christian literature with an exchanged life message, the Lord illumined him, helping him appropriate his identity in Christ. Solomon later completed the Doctor of Education degree in Spirituotherapy at University of Northern Colorado through which he clarified a model for counseling people from an "exchanged life" perspective. Although many counselees and ministries have been enriched and instructed by this counseling paradigm, there has also been resistance to it in the Christian counseling institutions which either promote Christian psychology, or a strictly nouthetic approach.

Perhaps one reason for the reluctance of some pastors and counselors to adopt this counseling model is that they have not personally had the kind of sanctification experience of going to the Cross for full surrender and subjective identification with Christ. Another factor is that Exchanged Life counselors have found that the tripartite nature of man (as spirit, soul, and body) is crucial to clearly communicate the precise truths of the believer's union with Christ. Charles Solomon observed, "Because most Christians see no practical relevance in holding to strong conclusions about their immaterial makeup, the discussion of dichotomy and trichotomy is viewed as theological hairsplitting. But if Christians can be shown that a clear understanding of the soul's relationship to the spirit of man can clarify and solve practical problems that face him everyday, the distinction may be worth understanding . . . Because we have seen the strong interdependency of identity and acceptance in man, we need to examine both models of man to see which better accommodates an explanation of the cause and solution to these needs and which of the two is more consistent with biblical language. Finding a spiritual model of man will aid the believer in understanding his interpersonal functioning and his standing before God." [10]

Not only is trichotomy important in the philosophical and theological basis for Exchanged Life counseling, it is an important facet of communicating biblical truths to the client.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it."(1 Thess 5:23,24-emphasis added).

Finding a scriptural model of man will aid the believer in understanding his intrapersonal functioning and his standing before God. Also, the articulation of this liberating truth through teaching or counseling is greatly enhanced. A Christ-centered counseling theory or approach must be anchored and be congruent with a model of man which leads to a scriptural definition of the spiritual life as summarized in 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 I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Endnotes

1 James D. Hamilton, *The Ministry of Pastoral Counseling*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 15.

2 Lawrence J. Crabb Jr., *Effective Biblical Counseling*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 33-50.

3 Ibid., 56.

4 John MacArthur, *The Sufficiency of Christ*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 69,70.

5 Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1977), 185.

6 Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 93.

7 The New King James Version is cited unless indicated otherwise. Published by Thomas Nelson, 1982.

8 Howard and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1932), 157.

9 F. J. Huegel, *Bone of His Bone*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 93-101.

10 Charles R. Solomon, *Handbook to Acceptance*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982), 99-100.

11 Ibid., 100,01.

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