



## The Bible, Psychology and Christian Counselling

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When I decided to study counselling, I received a mixed reaction from various quarters, some of which gave me pause for thought as to whether I should pursue such a course. Concerns were raised as to whether it was appropriate for Christians to expose their minds to the subtle deceptions of the psychological world.

Convinced that I needed to clarify the matter for myself, my concerns were actually heightened when confronted with disturbing statements penned by Ellen White. For example, she wrote that through psychology the Enemy, “comes more directly to the people of this generation and works with that power which is to characterize his efforts near the close of probation. The minds of thousands have thus been poisoned and led into infidelity (Mind Character & Personality, vol.1 19).

As a result of this and similar statements, many have felt safe to draw the conclusion that all psychology is therefore evil and should be avoided. However, Mrs White also stated that, “The true principles of psychology are found in the Holy Scriptures.” In an 1884 Signs article, she also wrote: “The sciences which treat of the human mind are very much exalted. They are good in their place; but they are seized upon by Satan as his powerful agents to deceive and destroy souls.” Our task then, is not to ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’ by rejecting psychology out of hand, but to discern between the true and the false. Paul counsels us in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

The term “psychology” actually derives from two Greek root words, psyche (spirit) which refers to the conscious part of man - the mind, and logos (word) pertaining to study. Therefore, psychology refers to the study of the mind. The aim of psychology is to describe, understand, predict, and determine the factors that influence mental processes and behaviour. We are told that, “To deal with minds is the greatest work ever committed to men” and that, “In order to lead souls to Jesus there must be a knowledge of human nature and a study of the human mind” (Mind Character and Personality, p.4, 67).

The Apostle Paul counselled, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Conversion not only gives us a new capacity to know God, it also changes the way we think. The proper application of biblical psychology enables individuals to identify and change the faulty core beliefs about themselves, others and even God, which frequently lay at the root of destructive behaviour and dysfunctional relationships.

The choice of a counsellor requires very careful consideration. We should exercise the utmost caution and discernment for we are warned in Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.”

It is right that we take inspired counsel seriously in order to avoid counselling processes, which compound rather than provide solutions to people's problems. But we should not tar all counselling with the same brush. The study of psychology is wholly appropriate for Christians as long as our presuppositions are biblical and not humanistic.

The Bible is replete with good psychology. The fact that the core beliefs we hold about ourselves and our environment profoundly affects our behaviour is a reflection of Solomon's words, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." The fact that our mood is a significant factor in our physical health confirms the truth that, "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones." Jesus himself used good psychological principles to win the confidence of the woman at the well (John 4:7-30) and avert the execution of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11) and gently rebuke Simon the Leper (Luke 7:39-48).

Our fundamental belief teaches that, "the Bible is our only rule for faith and practice", but what does this actually mean? For example, the Bible contains excellent counsel on healthy eating, but we would hardly seek to use the Bible only, as a recipe book to cook a three course meal. The Bible promotes excellent principles for physical health but it would be ridiculous to try to use it as a text book for performing open-heart surgery. Why then do some try to apply this logic when it comes to counselling? Our fundamental belief simply means that whatever we choose to believe and do, must be founded on biblical principle.

As in all things, we must exercise good spiritual judgement and a humble heart in order to receive the help we need. Solomon states, "A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel" (Proverbs 1:5.)

### **Guidance for Choosing a Professional Christian Counsellor**

- Pray for God's wisdom to guide your choice
- If possible, get a recommendation from someone you trust
- Make sure you are comfortable with the counsellor - if not, change
- Ask how does the counsellor's Christian beliefs influence their counselling practice?
- Is the counsellor a member of a recognised counselling organisation?
- What method/s of counselling does the counsellor use? Ensure that the method is in line with your personal values
- How much experience does the counsellor have in dealing with your particular situation?
- How does the counsellor define successful therapy?
- Do you require a counsellor of a particular gender?
- How much does the counsellor charge?
- How often & how long might you be expected to meet
- Do not become overly reliant on the counsellor. Effective counselling should empower personal responsibility