

DECEPTIONS IN COUNSELING

Man's Way Versus God's Way (Part 8)

We have just concluded a set of seven feature articles on the subject of counseling entitled, "Man's Way Versus God's Way." The danger of seeking and offering the world's counsel is graphically illustrated in *Isaiah 30:1-15*. The Israelites were seeking counsel from Egypt (its libraries were thought to be the repositories of the world's wisdom) instead of seeking God's wisdom. In this passage, God warns the Israelites that the consequences of rejecting His counsel would be disastrous. In the same way, many believers today seek secular counseling to solve their problems.

In our previous feature articles, we called attention to the striking contrast between biblical and secular counseling. While each article highlights at least one of man's errors, the enormity of the overall deception is not apparent unless all the articles are viewed together in summary. This article provides an overview of these errors — serious traps which entice believers away from complete trust and devotion to the Lord.

Deception #1: Failure to use the Bible as the sole authoritative source for counseling

Sadly, many of God's children have believed the false teaching that the innermost functioning of the mind can be understood through scientific research. They may agree that the Bible is without error, but they claim that additional sources are needed in order to deal with the truly serious problems of the mind. Furthermore, they criticize those who counsel from the Scriptures alone. They ridicule the "Scriptures alone" approach as narrow and shallow.

Man's conclusions about how the mind functions can only be theoretical. Effects on the brain can be studied scientifically because the brain is a physical entity; however, the mind is not a physical entity and, therefore, cannot be put into a test tube for study.

While a scientist cannot see into the mind, God's Word is able to discern man's innermost thoughts and intentions (*Hebrews 4:12*); and the Holy Spirit provides all the guidance needed through the Bible to overcome even the most serious difficulties of life (*II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:3-4*). It is the Bible that is deep and profound, not secular counseling.

Delusion #2: Preoccupation with self

Nowhere in the Scriptures are we told to focus on loving ourselves. Instead, we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Christ (*Luke 9:23-24*). God intends for us to be conformed to the image of His Son. The only way we can love in a meaningful, fruitful way is to love the way God loves. That is why Jesus tells us that the whole Law and the Prophets, i.e., all of the Scriptures can be summed up merely by God's commandment to love Him and others (*Matthew 22:37-40*). Man is most miserable and least fruitful when he is preoccupied with self.

Delusion #3: Fixing feelings as a primary emphasis in dealing with problems

Today, the most popular method for dealing with "abnormal" behavior focuses on helping a person to feel better or to follow his feelings — neglecting the underlying cause. Drugs may be prescribed and exercises recommended to eliminate or "vent" bad feelings. These "cures" deal with the problem only superficially and actually encourage the counselee to avoid looking for the real cause.

Feelings are God-given, so feelings in and of themselves are not sinful. However, we are not to live according to our feelings. God's commands very often require His children to act against their feelings. For example, it does not feel good to be patient; yet, God commands us to be patient. This is a major contrast to the world's teaching.

God knows our heart (*Jeremiah 17:10*) and how we feel (e.g. *Genesis 4:6*), but He deals with us according to our deeds (*Genesis 4:7; Jeremiah 17:10*). We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (*Philippians 4:13*). Therefore, believers can live obediently whether or not they feel like it.

Deception #4: Reliance on drugs to modify behavior

Television is awash with advertisements for medicines that allegedly treat all sorts of so-called “emotional problems.” Many psychiatrists dispense pills as their primary treatment. Because pills can help change behavior temporarily, these psychiatrists often assume that the lack of the prescribed drug is the cause of the behavior. This assumption cannot be proven because the unacceptable behavior could just as easily have been the cause for the physical (emotional) symptoms.

Even chemical imbalance is no excuse for ungodly behavior. Everyone chooses whether or not he will behave in a godly way and is, therefore, responsible before God (*Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:6*).

Deception #5: Concentration on healing the past

Many well-meaning counselors assume that “abnormal” behavior is the result of previous abuse by some other person or group. According to *Ezekiel 18:2-18*, no one can cause a person to behave in a particular way; nothing and no one can cause a person to sin. We are not victims of our past circumstances, our parents, our spouses, curses, demons, Satan, etc. Believers can choose to go God’s way in the power of the Holy Spirit (*Romans 6:1-7; Philippians 4:13*).

Certainly, we are to take care of unresolved sin. Past sin that has not been dealt with is still a current problem. Our primary focus, however, should be to remain faithful in the present (*I Corinthians 4:2*).

Deception #6: Concentration on unverifiable mystical experiences

There is a great tendency to fear what cannot be seen. Many are attracted to teachings on spiritual warfare which often focus on fighting Satan and his demons through prayer and certain mysterious procedures. This is a misrepresentation of spiritual warfare as presented in the Bible.

In *Ephesians 6:10-14*, God tells us three times that spiritual warfare is waged by standing firm. We are to put on the full armor of God (*Ephesians 6:14-17*) which equips us to live godly lives and stand firm. God says that if we submit to Him and resist the devil, he will flee from us (*James 4:7*) and we will be strengthened and established (*I Peter 5:8-10*).

Our attention as believers should be on the empowering, enabling, and leading of the Holy Spirit, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (*Galatians 5:16; Hebrews 12:1-2*).

Challenge for today’s church

Believers must reassume their God-given responsibility to restore those who have fallen and help them to minister as maturing and working parts of the body of Christ (*based on Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:12-16*). Man’s attempts at formulating counseling theories and psychotherapies do not begin to compare with the authority, the wisdom, and the power of God’s counsel, and further, are doomed to disorder and confusion (*based on Romans 1:21-25; I Corinthians 1:20-21; II Timothy 3:1-9*).

NOTE: Much of the information in this article is taken from the *Self-Confrontation* manual and the seven previously published feature articles.