

# Christ-Centered Ministry versus Problem-Centered Counseling

## Chapter One: A Radical Proposal

Many years ago we traveled through the dark terrain of psychology hoping to discover the secrets of human nature and how to help people suffering from problems of living. The more we searched through the theories and therapies of counseling psychology, the more we saw its fallacies, failures, and false ways. It was not until the bright light of the Gospel shined in our lives that we saw hope for mankind and the true answer to problems of living! Our confidence in the conversation of counseling to help people solve problems of living shifted from the psychological way to what we thought was the spiritual way. We became part of the biblical counseling movement until we realized that in many ways it simply reflected the - psychological way.

In this book we use the terms *counselor*, *counselee*, and *counseling* when we are speaking about either psychological or biblical counseling since these are the terms they use. However, when we refer to those individuals engaged in Christ-centered ministry, we will identify the one who ministers with terms such as the *helper* or *servant* rather than *counselor*, the one who is seeking help as the *seeker* or *fellow believer* rather than *counselee*, and *ministry*, *ministering*, or *mutual care* rather than *counseling*.

Counseling involves two or more people conversing about problems with one being the so-called expert (counselor) who is expected to provide answers and solutions for the one in need (counselee). The desire to help people who are suffering from problems of living quickly translates into focusing on the person and the problem. Thus much of both psychological and biblical counseling focuses attention on people and their problems. The goal easily becomes solving the problem rather than spiritual growth and the center of attention becomes the person and the problem more than “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Throughout Scripture problems of living are shown to be opportunities for spiritual growth. **Problems of living are like torn up ground in a person’s life during which the Lord can work mightily through His Word, the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ.** Will they be used as such? And how can fellow believers encourage such spiritual growth? How might we all edify one another and encourage one another to trust the Holy Spirit to empower all believers to walk according to their new life in Christ?

In addition to discarding theories and therapies of psychological counseling, **we are discouraging all problem-centered counseling**, whether psychological or biblical. - Although this may seem to be a radical move, we contend that as long as personal ministry remains problem-centered and therefore person-focused there will be less spiritual growth and more superficial fixing of the flesh.

When such counseling attempts to change behavior, it can end up being a type of - behaviorism that cleans the “cup” on the outside (Matt. 23:25) and thereby strengthens the flesh. When such counseling attempts to go deeper than the problems at hand, humans often

usurp the role of the Holy Spirit when they try to gain insight into another person or when they attempt to identify the “idols of the heart.”

### **A Radical Proposal**

**The radical proposal is to discourage problem-centered counseling and to encourage Christ-centered ministry, to overthrow intimidation from the psychological and biblical counseling movements, and thereby to free believers in local congregations to minister to fellow believers without psychological or biblical counseling manuals, workshops, seminars, degrees, or certificates.**

### **Christ-Centered Ministry**

Instead of problem-centered counseling, we propose a Christ-centered, biblical ministry that flows forth from the preaching and teaching of the Word. We will refer to this as *Christ-centered ministry* because the emphasis is on Christ and His work in the believer through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the Body of Christ to the glory of the Father. We want to intensify attention given to what already exists in the local church for every believer to be growing in Christ.

The subject of this book is the Lord’s provisions for ministering to people with the same - problems of living usually dealt with by mental health professionals and biblical counselors through conversation. **This ministry should be accomplished at the local congregational level by believers who have passed from darkness to light through the death and - resurrection of Jesus Christ and who are growing in sanctification by denying self and by recognizing that God uses suffering to purify and mature His children.** All Bible--believing churches should have the resources of teaching, preaching, evangelism, fellowship, and prayer to assist individuals who seek help when they are beset with problems of living.

Instead of communicating the message that local congregations don’t know and can’t do and that they need outside help or need to go elsewhere for ministry, our message is that local congregations do know and can do, if the Word of God is proclaimed with authority and power and there are believers who are maturing in the faith. There is no need to send people out to counseling or to bring counselors into the church, because what is truly needed should already be available regarding preaching the Gospel, teaching the Word, praying, and fellowshiping with the saints. Therefore churches need to address the following questions: Is the Gospel being preached and taught? Are biblical doctrines having to do with salvation, - sanctification, and the believers’ walk with the Lord being faithfully taught? Are members studying Scripture? Are those believers who are experiencing problems of living spending time with the Lord in His Word and in prayer, are they desiring to grow in Christ, and are they being encouraged in their faith? Are they fellowshiping with like-minded believers? The resources for loving and serving Christ through times of trial are available to every Christian in the Word of God, in the indwelling Holy Spirit, and in the local body of - believers.

Very simply, Christ-centered ministry can be summarized in the words *who, what, why, when, where, and how*. In a nutshell: The “Who” is Jesus Christ. The “What” is the life of Christ and the written Word of God as applied by the Holy Spirit. The “Why” is the Father’s mandate to all believers to minister to one another to make increase of the Body and to edify one another in love that all may be conformed to the image of Christ. The “When” and “Where” are whenever and wherever Jesus involves a member of His local church body to minister to another. The “How” is the supernatural work of the Lord through the believer to minister, by grace through faith, such expressions of love as care, comfort, compassion, mercy, encouragement, exhortation, admonition, instruction in truth, and hospitality. **The *who, what, why, when, where, and how* already exist in the Body of Christ, particularly in those churches that faithfully minister the Word and where believers are growing in their walk with the Lord.** We do not believe in cookbook counseling, but rather in life-lived ministry. We are being generally descriptive, not specifically prescriptive.

### Spiritual Growth

Christ-centered ministry relies on the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life and therefore emphasizes spiritual growth, whereby the believer walks with the Lord according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. Thus, believers are encouraged to live their new life in Christ, which is spiritually alive because the Spirit of Christ lives in them. The source of the new life is God and therefore it is both spiritual and eternal. When believers are walking in the Spirit they are living by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are putting off the old ways of what they were before receiving His life and they are following Jesus in holiness, righteousness, truth, mercy, kindness, goodness, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, patience, humility, temperance, gentleness, faith, forgiveness, and obedience to God. When they are walking in the Spirit, their desire is to know and follow Jesus, and they are growing in their love for God and one another.

Walking in the Spirit also means denying the flesh, which in this context means all the sinful ways that are characteristic of fallen mankind. The flesh is all that a person is before he is born again. The flesh is at war with the Spirit (Gal. 5:16,17). Scripture lists some of the works of the flesh as being “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings” (Gal. 5:19-21), lying, stealing, bitterness, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice (Eph. 4: 25-31). In short, the flesh is self wanting its own way at the expense of others and in opposition to God. The flesh is self on the throne instead of God. One can easily see how vital it is for believers to walk in the Spirit and to deny the fleshly self. And yet, when people experience problems of living, they often attempt to deal with them through fleshly means.

Through encouragement to grow in their walk with the Lord and to depend on Him, believers not only learn to deal with current problems; they will also become better prepared for future trials and challenges they have not yet faced. Rather than getting into the habit of looking to another person to fix their lives or solve their problems, believers will become established in their own walk with the Lord and in drawing upon the resources they already have in Christ. All biblical ministry is for the sake of building up believers in Christ so that they can walk

pleasing to the Lord, serving Him, thanking Him, and glorifying Him through good times and bad (Phil. 4:12).

### **Importance of Preaching, Teaching, and Ministering Truth**

It is disappointing to see that while churches will take responsibility for preaching the Gospel of salvation, as soon as problems occur, they send individuals elsewhere for help, not realizing that problems provide opportunities for sanctification. In fact, **counseling has all but eclipsed preaching in importance for dealing with life's infirmities**. There is a need to regain greater respect for those local church ministries and teachings that lead to salvation and spiritual growth. Paul declared:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:15-17).

Preaching and teaching in the local church are God's ministry gifts to bring people to salvation and through sanctification and also to equip the saints for ministering to one another in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12). **The emphasis is always to be on Christ and what He has done, is doing, and will do in the life of every believer through trials as well as through daily living**. He is the source and resource of both salvation and sanctification. Therefore Paul wrote:

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:6-9).

We hope to encourage believers to minister to one another with the attention on Christ, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. The goal of Christ-centered ministry is spiritual growth in walking in the Spirit rather than the flesh. We encourage confidence in the vast provisions of our Lord and discourage all reliance on counseling systems. We encourage reliance on the Holy Spirit to enable believers to minister to one another in the Body of Christ and reject all forms of intimidation from the counseling world.

The ideal seeker of Christ-centered ministry would be one who already knows that problems of living are opportunities for spiritual growth and is looking for someone to help utilize what God has already given in His Word, His indwelling Holy Spirit, and in the Body of Christ. But these people are rare, because most Christians have become culturally accustomed to expect problem-centered counseling. Not only is our proposal for Christ-

centered ministry instead of problem-centered counseling radical; even more radical will be implementing these God-given, biblically valid ways of ministry because of the current fixation on problem-centered counseling.

## Preview

Through the years we have documented the faults of psychological counseling and enumerated the errors of the biblical counseling movement in our books and articles. We are not saying that there is no good in either the psychological counseling movement or the biblical counseling movement. Some psychotherapists give good advice and some biblical counselors are truly biblical. We are saying that both movements intimidate believers, focus too much on solving problems, and have enough common and individual faults to reject them.

Many who will read this book have read one or more of our other books and articles and are familiar with our position on psychological and biblical counseling. Nevertheless, we have included some of the reasons we oppose those movements in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Two is a brief summary of research evidence that demonstrates how empty the promises of psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies really are. This type of psychology, which purports to help individuals with problems of living, is the very wisdom of men about which God warns His people (1 Cor. 2). While Christians do not need scientific research to convince them that the Lord and His Word give them all they need for life and godliness, it is important to understand that the scientific research does support the Bible but does **not** support the psychological takeover in the church.

Chapter Three reveals weaknesses of the biblical counseling movement and shows parallels between it and its precursor, the psychological counseling movement. Biblical counselors' - intent to be as biblical as possible is undermined by their problem-centered counseling, which is a reflection of the psychological counseling movement.

Chapter Four reveals the origins of problem-centered counseling, and Chapter Five explains the differences between Christ-centered ministry and problem-centered counseling. Chapter Six briefly describes the who, what, why, when, where, and how of Christ-centered ministry. Chapter Seven demonstrates advantages of Christ-centered ministry over problem-centered counseling and encourages believers in local congregations to minister to one another according to the Word of God and the indwelling Life of Christ.

## Our Purpose

Christ-centered ministry is much broader than counseling. We discuss the broadness of what is included in caring for souls in our book *Competent to Minister*. However, **the purpose of this book is to reveal the origins and faults of problem-centered counseling, to describe Christ-centered ministry and how it differs from problem-centered counseling, and to encourage local congregations to minister as God has called them to do without the influence of the psychological or biblical counseling movements.** Much of what we say

will be familiar to Christians. But, the call for those mature in the faith to be salt and light in the local church in the current era of licensed psychological counselors and degreed or certificated biblical counselors will contrast with what currently exists in the church world. While this book is aimed at encouraging believers who are maturing in the faith to minister to one another in their local congregations, it also encourages all believers to grow spiritually in faith and practice.

While we have titled this chapter “A Radical Proposal,” people in those churches that are - continuing to be biblical in their approach and continuing to rely on the Lord and His word will scratch their heads and say, “What’s so radical? That’s what we’ve been doing all along.” We thank God for those churches! Indeed our proposal would not have been radical one hundred years ago. However, **because of the way psychological and biblical counseling has swept into the church and grabbed hold of minds and hearts, this proposal is radical!** It will require a 180-degree turn around for many Christians, pastors, churches, Bible colleges, seminaries, and mission boards. In fact, if the church or fellowship you attend refers out to either psychological or biblical counselors or brings such individuals on staff, we go so far as to say that you may need to find one that has confidence in the Word of God beyond giving lip service to it. That is **confidence enough to trust mature believers in their local church fellowship to minister to those suffering from problems of living, without biblical counseling manuals, workshops, seminars, degrees, or certificates.** We hope and pray that our feeble efforts will encourage Christians to turn away from both psychology and the biblical counseling movement and to minister in the local body of believers as God has called them to do in His Word.

\* \* \*