

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

The Spirit in Counseling

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:14; John 6:45; John 14:1–2; John 14:16–17; John 16:13–14; John 17:17; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 2:10–14; Ephesians 2:1

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Many Christian counselors are guilty of ignoring the divine Counselor. It's time to rediscover His role.

I think it's no exaggeration to say that the Christian counseling scene today is in total shambles. I'm not talking about *true* Christian counseling—that which trusts the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit to conform a person to Christ—that kind of counseling has been successfully changing sinners since the apostolic age. I'm talking about pseudo-counseling—the attempt to fix people with a blend of secular psychological theory and the Bible. But have integrationist counselors affected any real change among evangelical Christians? Are people really fixed?

It has been sad to see so many Christians seek counsel from Christian psychotherapists who fumble around with theories developed by Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers and B. F. Skinner. Psychology and talk therapy are so bankrupt that many are abandoning them to embrace biological psychiatry. Psychotropic medicine is the new savior. Problems that were once blamed on dysfunctional families and Id/Superego conflict are now charged to chemical imbalances and disorders.

Yesterday's psychology and today's psychiatry share the same fatal errors—they reject the total depravity of man due to sin; they treat the symptoms instead of the heart; and they aim for change that is not true sanctification.

In spite of obvious failure, the notion prevails within the church that psychotherapy and psychiatry are more effective agents of change—particularly in dealing with the most difficult cases—than the Holy Spirit who sanctifies. But can psychotherapy or psychiatry possibly accomplish something the Holy Spirit cannot? Can an earthly therapist achieve more than a heavenly Comforter? Is behavior modification more helpful than sanctification? Of course not.

Let's take a few moments to get reacquainted with the Holy Spirit—a Person who is a stranger to psychotherapy. To do so, we need to go back to the time our Lord first introduced Him; it was on the night He was betrayed.

Jesus' crucifixion was drawing near, and His disciples were fearful and confused. When He spoke to them about going away, their hearts were troubled (John 14:1-2) and they feared being left alone. But Jesus assured them that He would not leave them to fend for themselves. He comforted them with the promise of the coming Holy Spirit.

The Divine Helper: *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper— John 14:16*

“Helper” is the Greek word *parakletos* that we transliterate as a word you may be familiar with—paraclete. It describes a spiritual attendant whose role is to offer assistance, support, relief,

advocacy, and guidance. Isn't it interesting that the divine Counselor's ministry to believers is to provide the very things so many people vainly seek in therapy?

Jesus called Him "*another* Helper." There are two Greek words that can be translated "another." One is *heteros*, which means "a different one, a different kind" as in, "If that style is not what you want, try another." The other word is *allos*. It is translated "another" in English, but it means "another of the same kind," as in, "That cookie was delicious; may I have another?"

Jesus used *allos* to describe the Holy Spirit—He is "another [*allos*] Helper [of the same kind]." The same kind as what? Jesus was promising to send His disciples a Helper exactly like Himself—a compassionate, loving, and totally sufficient Paraclete, just like Himself. In fact, Jesus is called our Paraclete in 1 John 2:1: "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate [Paraclete] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

You wouldn't question Jesus' capabilities in the counseling office, would you? His ability to get to the heart of counseling issues is unparalleled — as God, He knows all men (John 2:25). And look at the fruit of His counsel—it radically transformed the apostles to the point that they turned the world upside down. The Father has sent another Helper, co-equal with Jesus Christ, to be your Counselor. Don't doubt His ability.

The Permanent Dweller: *That He may be with you forever... He dwells with you and will be in you—John 14:16, 17*

The Lord also promised that the Helper from the Father would take up permanent, uninterrupted residence within His disciples. That was a New Covenant promise foretold in Ezekiel 37:14: "And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life." The Holy Spirit wouldn't merely be present *with* them; the greater truth was that He would be *resident within* them permanently.

According to Romans 8:9, the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the mark of all who are truly born again: "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Thus as a believer you enjoy the permanent, continuing presence of the Holy Spirit living within. His help—all the resources of God Himself—is always available.

The Truth Teacher: *The Spirit of truth —John 14:17*

It is noteworthy that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of truth." As God, He is the essence of truth; as a Paraclete, He is the One who guides us into truth. That's why apart from Him, it is impossible for sinful human beings to know or understand *any* spiritual truth. Paul wrote,

To us God revealed [His wisdom] through the Spirit . . . that we might know the things freely given to us by God... [things which] a natural man does not accept . . . for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:10, 12, 14)

The unregenerate have no facility for spiritual perception. They cannot comprehend spiritual truth because they are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), unable to respond to anything except their own sinful passions. Believers, on the other hand, are actually taught spiritual truth by God Himself (John

6:45). In fact, much of the Holy Spirit's ministry to you as a believer involves teaching you (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 John 2:20, 27); guiding you into the truth of Christ (John 16:13-14); and illuminating the truth for you (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Let me add a footnote here. This promise of a supernatural Teacher had special application for the eleven disciples that it doesn't have to you. The Holy Spirit not only helped them understand many things that perplexed them before the resurrection (cf. John 2:22; 12:16), but He also gave them perfect recall of every word Jesus had spoken. His ministry to the apostles assured the infallibility of the New Testament record and guaranteed the purity of the apostolic testimony (cf. John 14:25-26).

If you are a believer, you also benefit from the Holy Spirit's ministry. He guides you to the truth of Scripture, teaches you, affirms the truth in your heart, and convicts you of sin. He even enables you to walk in obedience to the revealed Word of God (cf. Romans 8:11; Philippians 2:12-13).

As a divinely indwelling Helper, the Spirit of Truth performs a function no human counselor can ever approach. He is constantly there, pointing the way to the truth, applying the truth directly to your heart, prompting you to conform to the truth—in short, He sanctifies you in the truth (John 17:17). Don't sin against the Holy Spirit by looking to sinful humans to accomplish spiritual transformation. Instead, "if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

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