

Class 6–Ch.8

Why is counseling needed?

Because of our human tendency to wander from scriptural truth, our souls require constant care. God has graciously granted a means of preventative care for us in the function of the church shepherds to equip us for the work of the ministry. As we are built up into the full measure of Christ, we are becoming mature and stable, ready to stand firm despite the storms of life. Teaching the truth to one another, the church "inoculates" believers so they can quickly recognize and overcome the "foreign invaders" (deceptive thoughts of earthly wisdom). By this I do not mean that believers become immune to difficulty or hardship. The Word raises our awareness of deceptive patterns of unbiblical thinking and provides eyes to see and hope to persevere so that we are not put to shame (Romans 5:5). Regularly hearing the Word and participating in fellowship with one another keeps us vigilant and keenly aware of unbiblical thinking that...blinds the mind. (147)

What is the church dynamic that fosters effective counseling?

The body of Christ must create an atmosphere where it is okay to ask for help. It is okay to admit weakness. We must be unafraid to get help ourselves from the body of Christ. We are often willing to give care to others who are in need, but can easily neglect to seek care when we ourselves are in need. Unintentionally we create a barrier between the truly needy and ourselves—the ones who seem to have it all together. The church then creates an atmosphere which communicates that some people are above needing care. The result is that believers remain at arm's length from each other, hesitant to be transparent when in need. The point is that we all need help; we all need constant care and oversight of our souls. The culture in the church must reflect the heart of our own neediness and dependence upon Christ. This is what the desperate find so attractive in a church family. We then gain a reputation that we truly love one another—and [believers] feel welcomed by that humility, confident that this is a place where they can find refuge, hope and love. (154-155)

Who should counsel?

Every believer is a counselor. By that I do not mean every believer is called or qualified to do [every type of counseling]. However, I do mean that every believer is to be engaged in the care of souls within the body of Christ, and as such they will provide counsel or wisdom for living during the course of their normal conversations. Every member of the body is called to minister the Word to one another. (144-145)

What about more nuanced or urgent situations?

Formal counseling ministry is the overflow of the church's normal responsibility to care as we are empowered by God and his provision of resources for the task. Proper soul care is not primarily [accomplished through] a lecture or formal teaching, but is embodied in human relationships centered upon the sufficient Word of God, [while being] empowered and unified by the Spirit of God. (I49)

[Formal] Counseling care is a relationship with an intensive focus on an acute problem where specific attention is given toward a restorative solution. . . More formal counseling relationships incorporate a person who has an identifiable problem, is intentionally pursuing help, and clear biblical solutions are being sought with the help of another believer. The natural overflow of 'one another' ministry is the engagement of more intensive and directive discipleship as acute problems arise within the church body. Naturally, more mature believers will be sought out for help and be watching out for other believers in need. (I43, I44)

Formal counseling ministries, if not guarded intentionally by the church, can be viewed as the only place where care is given in the church. . . Similarly, formal counseling ministry is not intended to subvert or deter normal care within the body of Christ. (I48)

Formal counseling should always have the goal of counselees moving back into the normal processes of care and growth within the church. A formal counseling ministry should always be trying to work itself out of a job. The ministry should not create people who are dependent upon the formal counseling process long-term. The goal is for intensive care to move our dependence back upon Christ through the normal means of care provided by church fellowship around the Word of God. (I49)