

Maranatha Bible Church 2020

Equipping Hour: Advanced Biblical Counseling

Week 3: Conviction in Counseling

Introduction

Last week we discussed the importance and role of teaching the Scriptures in Biblical counseling. We talked about the purpose, plan and place of teaching. I know there was a lot of information which was given, but take heart, a lot of this will really come to fruition when you disciple one another. Most of the discipleship which is taking place in the church is happening around these principles already.

This morning we are going to look at conviction in counseling. This is what happens when we know about God's standards and realize we are not following them. Teaching and conviction will, at times, happen almost simultaneously. As you are teaching the Word to the person, the Holy Spirit will begin to convict them. It is also very important to understand that it may not happen right away. You may have to explain something to someone multiple times so that they are able to comprehend. Furthermore, you may need to use different methods; such as diagrams, metaphors, story's, etc. You must pay attention to the response of the counselee, making sure they understand what you are teaching them.

Keep in mind a couple of things:

- 1) In this 6 week class, we are taking a deep dive into **2 Timothy 3:16-17** "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for **teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
- 2) Start with teaching...know your Scriptures and how they apply to certain situations.
 - A) Make sure you know the context of the verses that you are using. Do not just parachute into a text and use it for someone. Always remember to ask yourself, *what was the author's intent as they were writing this letter?*
 - B) While in discipling one another you will use a variety of texts, do not promise something that the Bible does not promise. Keep in mind that *Proverbs are not necessarily promises*. Promises to Israel in the Old Testament are not transferable to the New Testament church...so on and so forth.
 - C) All of these things come as you read and study the Bible. We cannot rush in our efforts to know the Bible, but we must always be moving forward.

Lack of conviction in modern day mainstream counseling:

I was reading this past week in *Psychology Today* that in 1999 there were 15,000 members in the American Association of Christian Counselors; today there are over 50,000. These are not Biblical counselors, but those who would consider themselves *faith based*. It is important to understand that while most use the terms, Christian Counseling, Pastoral Counseling and Biblical Counseling interchangeably, we as Biblical counselors should proceed with caution.

Considering the terms, *Psychology Today* says “Generally, those who call themselves “Christian counselors” or “Bible counselors” tend to be more evangelical and fundamentalist than those who call themselves pastoral counselors. Their therapy typically includes prayer and proselytizing and relies heavily on Scripture. [University of] Virginia's John Portmann is wary of what sometimes passes as therapy among Christian counselors. “Many people doing Christian counseling are not equipped to deal with major issues like depression,” he says. “There's this faith that the Scriptures can provide all the answers you need.”

He is not pointing this out as a positive, to believe that Scriptures are all that you need. He is saying that if that is all we have, then we are falling short.

At the Spiritual Care Department at UCLA Medical Center, anyone who proselytizes on the job is dismissed, says director Sandee Yarlott. “We're trying to develop standards that run across all faiths,” she says.

At the Chicago Christian Counseling Center in Orland Park, Illinois, all counselors are state-licensed mental health professionals; few have theological training. “We believe that every life is sacred and meant to bring God glory,” says executive director Bruce Frens.¹

Why do I bring this up? As we are diving into the place and purpose of conviction, it is good to get a feel for what is taking place around you. You will encounter friends, family and fellow church members who have been to various other places for counseling and when you bring up the Bible, there may be some backlash. This will happen especially when conviction comes around.

The unfortunate ideology which has grown out of the church today is that the Bible is good guide, people are inherently good and people’s faiths and beliefs should be incorporated into their counseling process. This stands completely counter to what the Bible teaches. As Adams points out “It isn’t easy to find a chapter on conviction in a counseling textbook.”²

Why is Biblical Christianity so important and the use of the Scriptures key? Jesus, speaking of the Holy Spirit in **John 16:8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”** Conviction is not only a good thing, but in the life of the regenerate person, it is essential so that we may walk worthy of the gospel (Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10, 2:6; 1 Thess. 2:12; Gal. 5:25).

The Place of Conviction

1) ***Conviction is the fruit of teaching God’s standards to God’s people.*** This is why we first need to handle the Word correctly and teach the word to people so that they can know the standards which God has set and know they have not met them.

A) While the majority of counseling which takes place today has very little focus on conviction, it is of the utmost importance to the Biblical counselor.

2) Often times the phrase *you are not the Holy Spirit* is used when dealing with people’s sins. While this certainly is a fact, we need not shy away from using Scripture to convict people of their sin.

A) There are some pitfalls that we must look out for:

¹ This sounds honorable but in reality he means that each person’s individual faith or beliefs can be used to glorify God.

² Jay Adams *How to Help People Change*, p. 107

- a) **Putting our own standards on someone.** The standards which are set forth for the believer are found all throughout the Bible. We cannot put our own personal preferences above the commands of Scripture. This is simply giving someone advice and attempting to modify behaviors.
- b) **Not allowing the Holy Spirit to fully convict the person.** When we teach God’s standards and the person knows they have sinned, they will feel remorse or guilty.
 - (1) We must not minimize this phase by telling them that they are okay or anything else which takes away from the work of the Spirit.
 - (2) This is them, hopefully, on their way to repentance (this is covered more in the next section).
- c) **Thinking that education will stop people from continually committing sin.**
 - (1) While education certainly has its place, *we must never think that an intellectual understanding of something will result in a righteous change.*
 - (2) For example, we know certain diseases are transmitted by drug use and illicit lifestyles.
 - (a) Some diseases are almost exclusively because of these choices.
 - (3) Our schools and governments have spent billions of dollars educating the public about what happens to them when they partake in these alternative lifestyles.
 - (4) Unfortunately, the numbers are staggering when it comes to drug and alcohol abuse.³**
 - (a) Drug abuse and addiction cost American society more than \$740 billion annually in lost workplace productivity, healthcare expenses, and crime-related costs.
 - (b) About 38% of adults in 2017 battled an illicit drug use disorder.
 - (c) That same year, 1 out of every 8 adults struggled with both alcohol and drug use disorders simultaneously.
 - (i) I want to make a note here, notice how they are calling this a *disorder*. You are probably really familiar with this term, but I would guess that you are not able to define it.
 - a) Do not worry, neither can the “professionals.” Here is what *Psychology Today* says “...the concept of mental disorder (like many other concepts in medicine and science) lacks a consistent operational definition that covers all situations.”⁴
 - b) At the end of the day, the general consensus is that anything that is not “culturally expected” could be classified as a disorder.

³ <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/addiction-statistics>

⁴ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mysteries-love/201503/what-is-psychological-disorder>

- (5) **Why talk about this?** Per the American Addiction Center, there are three main causes of addictions:⁵
- (a) **Genetics**, including the impact of one's environment on gene expression, account for about 40% to 60% of a person's risk of addiction.
 - (b) **Environmental** factors that may increase a person's risk of addiction include a chaotic home environment and abuse, parent's drug use and attitude toward drugs, peer influences, community attitudes toward drugs, and poor academic achievement.
 - (c) Teenagers and people with **mental health disorders** are more at risk for drug use and addiction than other populations.
 - (d) We need to be careful to even use the term *addiction* or *addict*. It is officially defined as a "compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance. It is accepted as a mental illness in the diagnostic nomenclature and results in substantial health, social and economic problems."⁶
 - (i) When we say someone is addicted, it is understood that it is not their choice to continue using the thing they are addicted to.
 - (ii) On the contrary, every time someone uses something they are addicted to, it is their choice.
- (6) If education worked, people would see what doing drugs and abusing alcohol will do to them and then they would either never start or stop right away.
- (a) But obviously, education in this area is not working.
- (7) **Notice what all those stats had in common, they all place the blame somewhere else.**
- (a) It can be your genetics. Sorry about that, you are destined to be a drunkard and there is nothing you can do about it.
 - (b) It can be your environment, so if you change everything in your life (except you), there is a better chance that you will not abuse alcohol and do drugs.
 - (c) You have a mental disorder, which is hard to define. In fact, so is normal. As one doctor says "The last criteria is particularly hard to discern, since what is "normal" is hard to define."⁷
 - (i) If normal is hard to define, then how do you know when someone is acting contrary to a normal culture?
- B) I bring all this up to show you that even with an abundance of education and knowledge, man has not even come to definitive conclusions regarding what the Bible calls sin.

⁵ <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/addiction-statistics>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3190444/>

⁷ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mysteries-love/201503/what-is-psychological-disorder>

C) ***Conviction of the sinner must take place in order that they may not just cognitively change, but righteously as well.***

a) This is why the place of conviction is so important in counseling. Without it, we are left to blame a myriad of other things, always keeping the focus off of the individual.

b) When we do that, there can never be any real and lasting heart change.

D) Where is the place of conviction in Biblical counseling? After we teach them what the Word of God says and bring it to bear on their hearts.

a) We must not let other excuses get in the way as we are teaching them the Scriptures.

3) Even as Adams says, not every single person coming to you for counseling will need to be convicted. To be sure, the vast majority will, but there will be some that just need clarification on Scripture or perhaps some better understanding.

A) They are already convicted, but perhaps they just do not know what the right course of action is.

The Plan of Conviction

1) There are two things you must know when enacting a plan of conviction.⁸

A) ***You must know the person that you are counseling and you must know Scripture.***

B) Knowing the person means that you have asked enough questions to get a good understanding of why they think they are with you and then why they are *really* with you.

a) If you do not know the person well enough, you will start to make assumptions.

C) To know Scripture means that you know what Scriptures to give someone for the circumstance they are presently in and for where they need to be.

2) For example, a very common theme in marriages is a lack of love between the couple. God fearing men and women, who do not understand the Scriptures, can struggle in their marriages.

A) She says he is not loving, he says that he would love her if she treating him with respect.

a) This is a very common theme that I have encountered in various church settings. The main issue is that they might have a little Bible knowledge, but not the ***right*** knowledge.

b) Most cite **Ephesians 5:25a “Husbands, love your wives...”** and **verse 33b “...the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”**

(1) This is what is known as a never-ending cycle. He would love her if she respected him but she cannot respect him because he does not love her.

⁸ A plan of conviction is what Scriptures you are going to use in order to bring about conviction in the life of the counselee. This is not conviction which is generated on the counselor's part, but knowing what Scripture to use in certain circumstances.

- c) Looking at this as just a brief example and assuming that you know them well enough, you would want to take them to that passage and read it out loud with them. This is where you would begin to teach them what it is saying.
- (1) I do this by observation with them.
 - (a) I ask them what is there and what is not there. 9 times out of 10 they both are very satisfied because they find what they are looking for in the Bible...he must love and she must respect.
 - (2) Then I ask them what is not there. Specifically, what is this love and respect predicated upon? I want them to see what is lacking in their understanding regarding the Scripture.
 - (a) To be honest, most do not see what I hope them to see so I must point them to the fact that these are commands which have no qualifier except that they are for husbands and wives.
- d) After teaching (usually fairly brief), I move onto a plan of conviction. My plan is that they would see that each of them have a responsibility within their role that has nothing to do with their spouse.
- (1) What I mean is that a husband is commanded to love his wife...not when she is lovable but as Christ loved the church.
 - (a) That kind of love usually needs some explanation with it. Thankfully Paul did not leave us hanging...but he defines this love by saying that Christ “gave Himself up for her [the church].”
 - (b) What Paul did not say is that Christ loved the church after the church started to love Him.
 - (c) You can get a sense here of how teaching and conviction work at the same time.
 - (2) I would say the same thing to the wife. Reading all of **verse 33** “Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”
 - (a) I would first start by adding to the definition of a husband's love to his wife by stating that we love our wife as Christ loved the church ***and*** also as you love yourself. You can also reference back to **verse 28**.
 - (i) The hope with this is that it would bring the concept of love down closer to reality for him. That he would be **convicted** that he loves himself (both in action and thought) more than his wife.
 - (b) Looking to the wife, I would point out the *and* in **verse 33**. It does not say *so that* or any other conjunction. There are two separate commands for one marriage.
 - (i) She is to respect him, her husband...not when he is ready in her eyes to be respected, but because it is a command from the Lord.
 - (3) There is most likely nothing more than a husband wanting his wife to admire him. On the flip side, there is most likely nothing more than a wife wanting her husband's love and attention.

- (4) The two must love, cherish and respect one another, not for what they can get out of it but so they can esteem each other higher than themselves and glorify the Lord.
- e) There is a lot more to say regarding those verses, but the main point is that you must bring a plan with you when you are counseling. This means that you must have a good knowledge of the Scriptures. You certainly do not have to know them all (nobody does), but be able to go to some different places for various people.
- B) Regarding plans of conviction, you will find that most people fall into just a few different categories. This is why you must get to know the person so you do not just lump them in with so many others but you personalize something for them, so to speak.
- a) Remember, the Scriptures have one interpretation but many applications. You interpret the text for the people in the same way but you apply it in accordance with their situation.

The Profit of Conviction

- 1) After having the right place and putting together a plan of conviction, it is time to see the profit. What should we see produced in the individual?
- A) This step of conviction is most likely the hardest for the counselor to not only start but also to work through. Many people will say things like *don't judge me* or *you think your better than me*; or a number of other deflections that take the responsibility off of them.
- a) **These things are both okay and should be expected.**
- (1) Why are they okay...because it means they are convicted. Imagine if they sat there stone cold and agreed with you and did not care at all.
- (a) Also, we should expect that as we use Scripture, people are going to be cut to the heart.
- (i) In **Acts 2**, Peter preaches a sermon on the day of Pentecost. Take note that he uses Scripture to explain what happened, then again to show them how they were guilty of the committing this sin.
- (ii) What was their response? In **2:37** *“Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”*
- a) This is obviously a good outcome to using Scripture to convict, but the point is that they were convicted (or pierced) to the heart.
- (iii) We see the opposite in **Acts 19** in the city of Ephesus. Paul had gone there and because of the message he preached, we are told in **verse 26** *“You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of the Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.”*

- a) Paul was teaching the people the Word and telling them their gods were nothing (this is Biblical counseling). They were convicted and turning to the true and living God.
 - b) What was the fruit? If you read on in the chapter, you will see that there was a great riot. Even though Paul wanted to go and address the people, he was persuaded not to.
- B) This is the step in which much time may be needed. There is a good chance that much of what you just said is fairly new to them and they may need to really meditate and think about your counsel. That is okay. You do not want a superficial or knee-jerk response.

a) **Some things that you should hope to see in the regenerate person:**

(1) Repentance for their sin.

- (a) Once again, this may not happen at that time, but hopefully sooner rather than later.
- (b) The Christian should be he quick to repent from their conviction as they submit to the Holy Spirit's work in their life.
- (c) Sometimes repentance is slow because the person thinks they *needed to sin*. They do not see their sin as something that broke God's law but something they were forced into without any other options.
- (d) It is our responsibility to be able to rightly teach the word so that the counselee understands God would never do that to them.
 - (i) We are told in **James 1:13-16** "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."

(2) Fellowship with the Lord to be restored.

- (a) As you are talking with the counselee, you must be able to explain to them that their fellowship with God has been broken.
- (b) We are told in **1 John 1:5-10** "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.*"

- (c) This fellowship with God is at the heart of Christianity. At the very core of Christianity is not following rules and rituals, but it is a personal faith in the Lord Jesus and fellowship with the true and living God.
- (d) “To have genuine fellowship with the holy God, we must walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light. It’s easy to claim to have fellowship with Him, but to be mistaken or deceived. The false teachers were claiming to have fellowship with God, but their claims were patently false. There was in John’s day, as there is today, the peril of profession, the danger of claiming to know God, but of being deceived.”⁹

(3) A desire to live a holy life.

- (a) For any believer to experience true joy, a focus on God’s holiness is their only hope. It is easy for someone to think they are okay or to even feel okay.
 - (i) This happens when we bring God down to our standards instead of looking for His.
 - (ii) Only repentance from our sin can bring true and lasting peace and joy.

2) A few things to keep in mind regarding conviction:

- A) This can be the longest step out of the four. If someone does not want to see their sin for what it is, there is no going past this part. You cannot correct someone who does not think they have done anything wrong.
- B) You may need to go back to step one, teaching, and attempt to explain the Scriptures to them again.
 - a) This is okay in the counseling process.
 - b) I have found that when this step of conviction is done properly and the person is allowed some time to think about what is going on, they are eager to find out what the next steps are.
- C) I like what Adams says about conviction “The idea is not to make the counselee sweat it out.”¹⁰
 - a) This is not an interrogation room from your favorite police show where you need someone to confess to the murder. These are brothers and sister in Christ whom you desire to see live a life which honors and glorifies God.
 - b) Conviction can be the hardest and most confrontational step in the process, but it also offers the greatest profit for the work.

⁹ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-4-how-have-fellowship-god-1-john-15-10>

¹⁰ Jay Adams, *How to Help People Change*. p. 133