

# WHAT IS CHRISTIAN COUNSELING?

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In order to answer this question, it is necessary to begin by describing what Christian counseling is not. Contrary to what some may think, Christian counseling is not a deceptive or manipulative scheme to entrap people into discussing God or the Bible. Nor is it about badgering people into accepting doctrines that contradict their cherished beliefs or values. Finally, Christian counseling is not Bible study per se although on occasion scripture might be quoted and discussed in depth.

Christian counseling is authentic and those who practice it need to be characterized by openness, integrity, and respect for the free will of those seeking help. It is also focused upon meeting the needs of counselees, and its methods are used with sensitivity and care.

Christian counseling may be defined as a learning experience involving two or more people in which a counselor or counselors help one or more counselees solve personal problems or achieve goals. The distinctions of Christian counseling are its reliance upon the Bible as a source of authority and its recognition that transformation through relationship with Jesus Christ is the core dynamic affecting personal change. This principle is a fulfillment of II Corinthians 5:17 which states, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Christian counseling acknowledges that the central problem people face is alienation. It may be said that alienation originated when "sin entered into the world" (Romans 5:12) and altered human history forever. Alienation has many facets, separating people from vital relationships with God, other people and even with themselves. Therapy that is Christian will assist counselees in the healing process of reconciliation, a process that will affect each area damaged by alienation.

Christian counseling can only be done by Christians, that is, people who know God personally and have experienced the reconciliation offered to others. However, not all counseling done by Christian people is necessarily Christian.

As mentioned previously, this form of counseling draws upon the word of God, the Bible, as its source of authority. Its methods and the goals that are pursued are viewed through the grid of scripture with counselors only practicing those that pass the test of congruence.

Therefore, almost any method in psychology can be incorporated into Christian counseling, but only when done with discernment. For example, cognitive therapy that helps people to think according to scriptural principles, "the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16), and behavioral therapy that empowers counselees to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers" (James 1:22) can be very useful.

Similarly, twelve-step facilitation can be presented as spiritually congruent. The original principles of the recovery movement were actually inspired by the Bible. In addition, marital theories whose primary purposes include helping spouses communicate meaningfully, achieve reconciliation and otherwise love one another (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4) can be viewed as supporting consistent Christian living.

The practice of prayer can add to the meaning, depth and power of the experience although the frequency of prayer's use in counseling sessions varies a great deal among both counselors and counsees. Like every aspect of Christian counseling, prayer is incorporated to the extent that it matches the needs and goals of the counselee.

Therefore, rather than being a specific method, Christian counseling is essentially an orientation and a general approach to helping people. Its distinctions are that it emphasizes spiritual motivation and transformation, utilizing the Bible, prayer and the refined practice of psychological methods. Characterized by hope, it addresses the core conflicts caused by alienation, looking to the example and teachings of the One who achieved reconciliation, making it available to all people for all time.