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Analysis of Biblical Terms Used for Counseling

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Abstract

There is much debate and contention about secular as opposed to religious approaches to counseling – which is in effect a reflection of the secular /religious divide in contemporary culture. However, an analysis of the terms and concepts found in the Biblical texts showed evidence of a great deal of similarity and concurrence with contemporary counseling terminology. This study examines a few central terms in the light of Biblical meaning as well as the relevance of these terms in a contemporary therapeutic and counseling environment. The result of this analysis indicates the ways in which Biblical concepts enrich and expand the meaning and effectiveness of modern counseling. The analysis of the specific words tends to concur with Olsen's (1997) view that modern counseling that takes into account Biblical terms is one which, "speaks to our existential present" (p. 6). In this sense the understanding of Biblical terms and counseling terminology suggests a process which possibly transcends the dualism between secular and religious view of counseling in general.

An Analysis of Biblical Terms Used for Counseling

Introduction

The contemporary views and the common dispute about the validity and the need for counseling that takes into account biblical views and interpretations of key concepts should, in the first instance, be briefly discussed in this introduction. This refers to distinguishing between secular and Biblical or religious approaches to counseling. According to Pride (2006), Psychology approaches human behavior from a secular, humanistic perspective. Accordingly, Biblical revelation is irrelevant to understanding or changing human behavior. Psychology seeks to describe and explain human behavior *apart* from what God has clearly revealed. Its premises are derived from man-made theories, human wisdom and research conducted without a corresponding search for truth as God defines truth.

This is in direct contrast to the strictly Biblical view of counseling that Clinton and Ohlschlager (2002) discuss. They state that the emphasis in Biblical counseling is exactly opposite. Whereas secular psychology begins with a study of man's ideas, Biblical counseling begins with a study of the Word of God as it relates to human behavior and human need. It is dependent upon the revealed mind of God rather than the easily deceived mind of man. Yet it does not just *begin* with God, it follows a path that is in constant harmony with the Word of God and addresses man's problems in light of God's answers.

The above two divergent views express the extremes in the debate about secular versus religious counseling. However, both these dualistic view have been replaced in recent years by a third alternative way of viewing counseling. This is often referred to as

the secular-humanist approach, which tends to attempt to integrate religious views and perceptions within the ambit of psychological counseling. On the other hand the tension between secular and religious attitudes towards counseling is a reflection of the larger secular- religious divide that characterizes much of the discourse and debate in our world in almost every modern academic discipline.

In the light of this division it has been suggested by many pundits that there is another alternative stance or theoretical trajectory that can be adopted. This is the more open – ended and intellectually liberal approach to the praxis of counseling; where the Bible and religion are enlisted to aid and expand the concept and meaning of counseling. This view tends to envisage counseling in religious terms that are not dogmatic or necessarily bound by traditional interpretation.

Modern counseling also sees religion as an important component of the cultural aspects that are important in counseling any individual; and that these cultural aspects must be taken into consideration. This form of counseling is described as a process of listening and communication and taking into account religious criteria that influence the individual.

Counseling is the process of prayerfully and sensitively listening to another person (Proverbs 18:13, 17), helping them discern real soul needs, and providing practical, biblical advice about changing their attitudes and behaviors in relationship to God and others (Matthew 22:36-40).

This paper aims to show the usefulness and the value of the Bible as a source for counseling as well as a means of expanding the secular view of counseling concepts. The paper will, through the analysis of words and concepts in the Bible, and their

comparisons to modern counseling concepts, also attempt to show the significance as well as the problems that are involved. It has been mentioned in the literature that the use of Biblical concepts adds depth and enriches the counseling relationship. It expands the counseling relationship in various ways which are not necessarily subject to dogma or particular belief systems. This also refers to the “Relevance of Religion and Spirituality to Counseling In the area of multicultural theory...” where “...psychologists have continued to call for psychological treatments and interventions that are culturally sensitive and relevant and that integrate aspects of client culture into the counseling process...” (Walker, Gorsuch & Tan, 2004, p.64). This stance is concerned in a theoretical sense with the view of counseling which stresses that “... counseling is inescapably a religious endeavor, focused around the progressive sanctification of the soul” (Pride, 2006).

This paper will also discuss examples of Biblical terms and their relationship to modern counseling concepts and terminology. This discussion will also take into account the secular-religious debate referred to above. The central point to be explored is that Biblical counseling terms can not only provide a useful tool for counseling in a social and cultural context, but also that a study of these terms extends the understanding of counseling concepts and widens and enriches the field of counseling.

The analysis of these counseling terms will take into account the variations in meaning of Biblical terms and the way that these meaning interrelate with modern counseling terminology. For example, while the terms addiction might be a term used in the modern counseling, this term can be referred in meaning to Biblical words such as “in bondage” or “enslaved to.” Also, the term deception can be related to “self-deceived.”

Common words such as “dysfunction,” “bulimia,” “self-esteem,” and “cognitive therapy” are not used in the Bible—yet the Bible does describe them. Furthermore, while we do not read a clinical description of such things as panic attacks in the Bible, we do read about the problems that underlie and feed panic attacks and other such difficulties. Every problem that originates in the way we think and respond to life’s circumstances is addressed in the scriptures!

Analysis

Healing

The term “healing” is a broad term which can be applied in many medical and counseling contexts. It is also possibly a significant term to explore at the beginning of this discussion of the relationship between biblical and counseling terms. Therefore, the term healing and related words such as sickness and illness were investigated using Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. More than fifty references to healing were found in the Bible and these were cross referenced with Strong's Concordance.

There are different versions and interpretations to the way that healing is presented in both the Old and New Testaments. Healing appears in a number of the gospels of the New Testament. In some cases Jesus' disciples requested the healing and in other cases Jesus himself saw the need and interceded directly without another person making a request. Most of the references are in the New Testament (n = 52) probably because of Jesus' influence and emphasis on spiritual as well as physical renewal in that portion of the Bible. (Byrd and Byrd, 1993)

The process of healing can be found in Luke 13:10-17, which refers to a woman who has been crippled for eighteen years. The healing takes place by the laying of hands

on the women by Christ. In John 5:1-18 we have the story of a seriously ill man placed at pool waiting for healing. This episode stresses the importance of listening to Christ's instruction and the man is healed when Jesus tells him to take up his pallet and walk. The aspect of instruction and counsel in the process of healing will also be dealt with in more detail in the discussion section. The healing through thought is also stressed in Matthew 8:2-4, when Jesus cures a man of leprosy.

Discussion

In the sense of the Biblical definitions and descriptions of the terms noted above, the therapist opens up channels and avenues that can facilitate healing. The difference lies in the fact that the initiating of all healing is seen as God, acting through Christ in the New Testament. However, as has already been suggested in the introduction to this paper, there is a growing acceptance of the view in therapy and counseling that the counselor is a facilitator who opens up avenues for healing. These avenues are greater and more significant than the counselor or a particular theoretical stance. This means that counseling in the secular environment is becoming more cognizant of the importance of religious and spiritual aspects of healing and intervention in the process of counseling. As Garzon (2005) states, "secular therapists are challenged in their work with appropriately religious clients to develop treatment components that incorporate the Bible" (Garzon, 2005. p.113). Garzon emphasizes the perceived importance of the Bible in counseling.

Scripture remains a rich resource for clinicians in their work. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the

division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12.

Wisdom and Communication

Related to the above and to the view of counseling in general is the view of counseling as it relates to the word “wisdom”. This term occurs 234 times in 222 verses in the King James Version. In Proverbs 12:18, “reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” This suggests a relationship between wisdom, counseling and the healing process. Those that have grace and love it will delight in all the instructions that are given them by way of counsel; admonition, or reproof, by the word or providence of God; they will value a good education, and think it not a hardship, but a happiness, to be under a strict and prudent discipline. Those that love a faithful ministry, value it, and sit under it with pleasure, make it to appear that they love knowledge.

The words healing and counseling appear to be related to the value of wisdom in a number of ways. First, counseling is a form of wisdom as the counselor is looked at as an expert. This in turn relates to the term deception or the avoidance of deceiving thoughts, which is another important aspect that is found in modern counseling terminology, such as self-deception. Self-deception is referred to in the Bible in terms of the natural propensity in mankind towards self-deception in the Old Testament. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17: 9)

The American Community Corrections Institute defines self-deception as a dysfunction of the mind that allows individuals to continuously act in a negative manner.

Without intervention, the cycle of justification and deception gets worse. This results in clients staying resistant through denial and the blaming of others for their problems.

This view would tend to relate counseling terminology to a certain extent with the Biblical idea of self-deception where self-deception is seen as a deviance from the wisdom and the instruction of God

These correlations have a number of implications for contemporary counseling praxis. In the first instance, Byrd and Byrd (1993) refer to the concept of intercession that takes place as a component of Biblical healing. This in turn refers to the importance of communication in the process of healing, which also reflects on the importance of the process of communication in counseling that taken place in the Bible. This also relates to the importance of communication in the process of contemporary counseling.

These treatments appeared to be coincidental with the intercession and were intended to be ways of communication with the person receiving the healing. The gestures of touching, or application of some substance (e.g., dipping into a pool of water), or verbal instruction appeared to be concrete aspects of the healing treatment that occurred with the intercession to God. Prayers were not necessarily verbalized by the intercessor. However, in each case the reader assumes that the prayer is in fact the healing treatment. (Byrd and Bird, 1993)

The Biblical concept of healing therefore carries within it the idea that the individual has a certain amount of power to overcome ill-health or various problems. This power is however dependent on the aspect of listening, obedience and acceptance that the term “opening up” would tend to suggest. In modern counseling this relates to the view that, “... mind sets do contribute to the lowering of anxiety associated with concern over

death, or at the least loneliness” (Byrd and Byrd, 1993) Some theorists are of the opinion that these Biblical terms and the way that they interact with contemporary counseling suggests a more holistic view of the counseling and the balance between body and mind.

The holistic view is seen in Christian Biblical terms by Byrd and Byrd (1983). The holistic principles discussed by Perls place great importance on the balance of our body and mind, body and soul, thinking and feeling, thinking and action, and feeling and action. These ideas contribute to the great potential for healing offered by belief in one's self and the empowerment that comes from those beliefs, as well as the empowerment that may come from belief in the power of a supreme being who can alter disabling conditions. (Byrd and Byrd, 1993)

The implication of the above is that from a Biblical perspective the Word of God and the actions of Christ are the source of healing and counseling power; while in a secular context this would refer to the counseling expertise of the therapist or counseled. This apparent divide is an aspect that continually occurs in a comparison of these terms; yet there is also a sense in which the similarities between the Biblical and secular counseling terms are indicative of a correspondence rather than an antagonism of meaning. This aspect will be further explored in the analysis of the word 'counsel'.

Counsel

This term occurs in 30 verses of the Old Testament and in two verses in the new Testament. The concept of counsel or counseling is related to the word advice and the Word of God. In 1 Kings 22:5, “but Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the Lord." The view of counseling as advice and instruction is underlined by Isaiah 11:2 “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him; The Spirit of wisdom

and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” In Exodus 18 the Word of God is linked to the idea of counseling in this way. “Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou may bring the causes unto God (Exodus 18). Counseling in this context is appears to be about the interpretation and understanding of the message and the requirements of God.

In the ESV Old Testament, the word counsel is defined as to advise, consult, and give counsel, purpose, and devise, to consult together, exchange counsel, deliberate, counsel together. However it is also seen in a negative light as in the word Hithpael, to conspire (The ESV Old Testament). In this sense it appears to have a double meaning - to counsel and instruct but also to conspire. Psalms 64:2 states that “Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of inequity.”

The word counsel is also defined in different ways to the above in the Bible. For example, the word can be interpreted to mean to ask, inquire, borrow, beg, and to inquire, inquire carefully (The ESV Old Testament). This interestingly relates the term to the concepts of knowledge and wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 8:2

I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

Isaiah 5:19

That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

Discussion

It is significant that there is an emphasis on listening in both the Bible and in modern counseling theory. The following quotation is reiterated to emphasize this aspect. Counseling is the process of prayerfully and sensitively listening to another person (Proverbs 18:13, 17), helping them discern real soul needs, and providing practical, biblical advice about changing their attitudes and behaviors in relationship to God and others (Matthew 22:36-40).

The above states a view of modern therapy enmeshed in an understanding and application of Biblical terms. This is a pointer to the importance in counseling of creating and maintaining relationships between the counselor and the client. This aspect again emphasizes in the Biblical assessment of counseling. In Proverbs 27:6, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend. This can mean that the client needs to see the counselor as a trusted friend or advisor (Gladding, 2007). The emphasis on communication and relationships also implies the concept of involvement which is dependent on availability to counsel (Acts 20:31) and the importance of balance in the process of counseling, (Galatians 6:2 and 6:5). These examples stress the point that the models of spiritual counseling in the Bible can serve as important templates for counseling in the contemporary and secular world, thus reiterating the point that all scripture is useful for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

One study of this subject stresses this important aspect. The Biblical meaning of the word counsel is act as the foundation for a modern theory of counseling. This is related to the view that by deriving the purpose of psychotherapy from the teachings of

Jesus is also asserting the present relevance of the message. We need to believe that Jesus' message speaks to our existential present, not primarily or exclusively to a heavenly future (Olson, 1997, p. 6). The use of Biblical terms is not historically limited or even limited in a formal religious sense, but that the Biblical terms and teaching regarding counseling speaks to our existential present (Olson, 1997, p. 6).

Help

According to Crosswalk Online Study Bible, the term help appears in 167 Verses in the Old Testament and in 44 verses in the New Testament. What is interesting is the etymology of the word help. HOLPEN is the old past participle of help. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century it was also spelled "holpe" or "holp," and it was gradually displaced by "helped." (Bridges & Weigle, 1960, p. 174) The English Standard Version uses "holpen" 4 times and "helped" 6 times, as past participle. "Holpen" appears in Psalms 83.8; 86.17; Isaiah 31.3; Daniel 11.34; Luke 1.54. "Helped" appears as participle in 1 Samuel 7.12; 1 Chronicles 5.20; 2 Chronicles 26.15; Job 26.2; Psalm 28.7; Isaiah 49.8.

The meaning of the word help is to give or provide what is necessary to accomplish a task or satisfy a need; to contribute strength or means to; render assistance to; to cooperate effectively with. In the Bible the first use of the word help is in Genesis 2:18. It states, "and the LORD God said, it is not good that the man should be alone.

In many respects, the word help relates to the meaning of counsel as discussed in the previous section. Crosswalk.com refers to help in the following context (1 Corinthians 12:28) may refer to help as given to the person who more simply helps another person in need, such as caring for the poor and needy.

Conclusion

There are many other terms that could be included in an analysis of the relationship between the Bible and counseling; such as delusion, emotional awareness, stress etc. Olsen (1997) points out for example that Proverbs and Psalms, are gold mines of both wisdom and consolation relevant to counseling. Other writers have already shown this relevance in very creative and inspiring ways. For example, Donald Capps applied the structure of the Psalms of lament as a paradigm for grief counseling, Proverbs to premarital counseling, and Jesus' parables to marriage counseling.” (p. 7)

However the above overview and analysis tends to emphasize the central point of this paper. This is that the analysis of terms from the Bible that relate to counseling clearly show that they enrich and broaden the scope of modern counseling and are in many instances appropriate to the requirement of contemporary counseling. This is particularly the case when the counselor is dealing with persons who are religious and who can benefit more from the understanding of counseling references in the Biblical context.

There is also another concern that emerges from the analysis. The fact that the Biblical counseling aspect in essence is non-subjective and refers to the counsel and the instructive power of God through the Holy Spirit. However, what is also very clear is that Biblical terms relating to counseling are an invaluable asset to modern counseling praxis. This is a view that is supported by many scholars and counselors. As long as sound ethical and religio-cultural assessment guidelines are followed, scripture remains a rich resource for counselors in their work. (Garzon, 2005) In addition, psychologists have increasingly recognized that religion and spirituality are relevant aspects of client

diversity that psychologists should be able to recognize while treating religious or spiritual clients with sensitivity. (Walker, Gorsuch & Tan, 2004, p.69)

Another aspect that that comes to the fore in the above analysis is that the Bible admonishes us to “help” and counsel one another in the light of Biblical instruction. This view has been furthered in the praxis of Nouthetic Counseling.

My personal view that has been informed by the above discussion is reflected in the following perceptions from Olsen. In contrast to the goals advocated in several contemporary theories, it is my view that Jesus' teachings are most compatible with reconciliation as the primary purpose of counseling. Second, Jesus' teachings suggest an alternative theory of personality structure with an emphasis upon the whole person.

This view is opposed to the reductionism view of the human personality and is more expansive in its approach to counseling. I feel that even within a secular context, the terms found in the Bible can be as asset in modern counseling and act as very effective therapeutic tool.

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