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# FOOD FOR THOUGHT By Pastor Blake Shaw



Now you can see why I began this article with the accusation that we have all practiced witchcraft-like activity. Perhaps when we think of rebellion, what comes to our mind is a rebellious teenager or college student who has rejected his faith and has begun to live in debauchery and rebellion. Yet I wonder, perhaps if we were honest, we would all confess to a constant churning of the flesh within that rebels against our Lord. We know what God wants. We know what God says, and yet we find ourselves doing the exact opposite. It's rebellion. This is seen in our own lives when we know specifically what would please God (it's not a mystery to us) and yet in our stubbornness we stiff-arm the counsel of our loving Lord and do things our way. I've done it! You've done it.

Let's get specific: Husbands, we know God's Word says specifically that we are to love our wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. We know we are to cherish her and live with her in an understanding way and to honor her. I wonder if perhaps in our rebellion we stiff-arm the clear counsel of God. Wives, you know that God calls for you to submit to your husband and to respect him and to serve as his helpmate. I wonder if perhaps you might see rebellion in your life as you stiff-arm the clear counsel of God. Employees, you know you are to do your work as unto the Lord and to work with all your might: to be honest, work hard, submit to

authority, etc. I wonder if, perhaps, as we look at our work habits, if we can see rebellion as we stiff-arm the clear counsel of God. We know, as Christians, that God wants us to be kind to one another, forgiving one another, and to encourage one another. I wonder if we can see rebellion as we stiff-arm God's clear counsel pertaining to how we treat one another. Ponder your life and your vice and consider the heart of rebellion that is there.

As we begin a new year, let's consider the fact that we don't have to live in the way of rebellion. In fact, Matthew 1:21 tells us that Jesus came to "save His people from their sins." My friends, Jesus didn't just come to save you and me from the penalty of our sins. Sure, He did that, but oh so much more. He came to save us from the practice and presence of sin. We know, based upon Romans 6, that we have been saved from the slavery of sin. We don't have to live in rebellion. We really can say, "No!" to sin and "Yes!" to righteousness. We don't have to be a rebel. In fact, God would bid us to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ in all areas of life—in attitudes, actions, affections, words, motivations, intentions, and in cravings. As we begin a new year, perhaps now is the time to begin to learn to submit to the Perfect, Loving Master, and to leave the rebellious witchcraft-like-activity behind.

from it. If you are having marriage problems, stay away from alcohol. If you have loved ones telling you that they are concerned about your dependence upon alcohol, then listen to their advice and remove alcohol from your life. If you find yourself thinking, "I need a beer or a glass of wine every night just to take the edge off," beware. If you are one given to anxiety or anger and you see yourself turning to some form of alcohol to help you "cope," be careful. At one point last year someone asked me my thoughts related to alcohol. I told them, "I have yet to see something good come from the consumption of alcohol. Yet, I've seen a lot of heartache." Believer, you would be wise to ponder the effects of alcohol in your life or the lives of loved ones. Years ago my father read to me a short statement about alcohol by a guy named Joe E. Thompson. Here is what the statement said:

"Alcohol Removes Stains and things: I should like to expand on an article in a newspaper that stated that alcohol will remove stains from summer clothes. The statement is true and proves the amazing versatility of alcohol. It will also remove winter clothes, spring clothes and fall clothes from a man, also his wife and children, if used in sufficient quantity. Alcohol will remove the furniture from the home, rugs from the floor, food from the table, lining from the stomach, vision from the eyes and judgment from the mind. Alcohol will remove good reputations, good jobs, good friends, happiness from children's hearts, safety, freedom, man's ability to adjust and live with his fellow man and even life itself. As a remover of things, alcohol has no equal."

My friend, as I sit in the counselor's chair, I am just wondering: Perhaps we may need to give this area some attention.

## THE COUNSELING ZONE: A RADICAL VIEW FROM THE COUNSELOR'S CHAIR

by Pastor Blake Shaw

Over the past year I have been struck by a consistent problem I see arise in the counseling room. Writing about such a problem as this one is awkward, to say the least, and it runs the risk of some backlash from some of the readers. As a preface, can I ask you my friend, to simply not respond too quickly to this short article, but to instead, stop and ponder and consider what is being said?

Last year, I was struck by the number of counseling situations that we, as a counseling team, were dealing with that involved alcohol. I personally am not a consumer of alcohol, and, at the same time, have historically held to the view that a social drink (glass of wine at dinner, etc.) is not necessarily a sin issue for all believers. I've always held to the idea that the consumption of alcohol can reasonably fit into what we might call a "gray area." Having said that, I am increasingly concerned about the consumption of alcohol by believers and the role alcohol seems to play in some of the problems dealt with in the counseling room. At one point over the past two years I noticed that in every counseling situation I was personally dealing with, alcohol played an active role in the various problems.

Thus, I have been pondering this issue, wondering if something needs to be said. So here I am saying it! Believers in Christ Jesus—perhaps it is time we rethink our consumption of alcohol. If you are taking prescription drugs you need to stay away from alcohol. Even non-prescriptive drugs carry a warning about not consuming alcohol at the same time as taking the medicine, so avoid it. If you have a past history of being addicted to alcohol, then stay away

# THE COG COMMUNITY OF GRACE

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

### *The Church and Witchcraft*



Have you ever practiced witchcraft? Divination? Sorcery? "No," you say. Ah, be careful how quickly you respond. It might surprise you to know that actually every person around you, every person who sits beside you, in front of you, and behind you, as well as every leader and pastor, along with every other person who helps in various ministries of Grace Bible Church, has been involved in witchcraft-like activity. Now, before you make a quick exit out the doors of the church, scampering off to another church, let's ponder this issue a little more by looking at biblical history.

Israel was a nation that had been greatly blessed by an amazingly gracious God. God Himself led them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, providing both provision and protection as they wandered about in a desert for a long forty years. As the Israelites miraculously crossed the Jordan, God Himself provided both protection from and victory over the enemies that inhabited the land which God had promised to Israel hundreds of years prior. After Israel had settled in the land, we learn from the book of Judges that for approximately 330 years, they had struggled with submission and obedience to the very God who had chosen them and had served as their protector, their provider, and their King. In their stubbornness and rebellion, the Israelites did what natural man will always do: stiff-arm God. In fact, the very last verse of the book of Judges rightly summarizes the spiritual condition of Israel at that time when it says, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Let those words soak into your thinking for a while. No King? Every man doing what is right in his own eyes? That's a scary proposition. It seems like a recipe for anarchy and subsequent disaster, huh? Israel had rejected God as their King. The Theocracy of God as their King was over. That's always foolish. Always! As the people looked out at the neighboring nations, they noted that each nation had a king—a human king, and so they began to beat the drum of: "We want a king! We want a king! We want to be like all the nations" (See I Samuel 8:19-20). So God gave them a king according to their own desires. His name was Saul.

In Contrast to others, Saul was not an ordinary guy in the land of Israel at that time. He is described as the most handsome person among all the children of Israel. The text also tells us that he was taller than any of the other people as well. Perhaps this is where I make the necessary comment that one has to be careful about tall and handsome people but that would merely show my bias towards us vertically challenged persons. Regardless, the text of Scripture leads us to realize that Saul clearly stood out amongst the people. All the qualities that fleshly humans say are so critical are the qualities that Saul seemingly matched to perfection. Saul's tenure as king began with him hiding from the people. Perhaps overwhelmed by the position he had been given, we see that he hid among the military equipment. Was this a fear of man issue? Perhaps, because what we see later in his kingship is a battle with fearing others. We know that Saul battled other issues in his life as well. He had an anger problem. He had a jealousy problem. Sadly, he had a submission problem as well. When you study the life of Saul you find out that he is actually a lot like you and me. Really, he is. But one issue in

particular, stands out to me in the life of Saul. He was a rebel. For example, in I Samuel 14-15, we find Saul acting directly against the Word of God. It's one thing to disobey God when perhaps you didn't know what God says about some attitude or action. It's radically different to know specifically what God says and to, in essence, say, "I'm going to do it my own way instead." You don't have to spend much time in front of the spiritual mirror of your life to realize how often you, and I, in all probability, do exactly what we know God says we should not do.

But it is possible that some people don't know all that God desires in their lives. They haven't been afforded the opportunity to study God's Word and to know what He commands His people to do and not do. Lack of knowledge is certainly a possibility.

Years ago, in one of my first trips to California, I was driving with a few friends who lived in the Los Angeles area. As I was driving I saw a sign pointing out that the car-pool lane can be used for vehicles with two or more people, so naturally I jumped into the car-pool lane. I was excited to be able to sail past traffic jams and the trip was going so smoothly. I found myself at various times stuck behind a car that was moving slower than the flow of traffic so I would quickly exit the car pool lane, go around the slower car, and then jump back into the car-pool lane. After doing this several times, one of my friends said, "Hey Blake, I'm not sure if you know this or not but you can only move in and out of the car-pool lane when you have a break in the yellow lines. It's a huge fine to cross the double yellow lines." I had no idea and with my new information, I stopped changing lanes unless there was a break in the yellow lines. Once I had the information about the law I could then decide if I was going to obey it or rebel against it. This is how it is with God and His Word. I mean, it is one thing to do something that is sinful when you don't know God's Word. It is totally different to know what God specifically says to not do and to do it anyway. Yet that is exactly what Saul did. If you read I Samuel 14-15, you learn that Saul had specific directives from God, but instead, he did things his way. It's almost as if Frank Sinatra sang Saul's theme song when he sang, "I Did It My Way." Indeed, Saul did things his way. Saul did what he wanted to do, despite what God had told him. The consequences of such actions were tragic.

When Samuel the prophet arrived on the scene it was not a pretty sight to behold. Saul offered excuses for his disobedience but Samuel didn't accept the blame shifting and excuse making. Instead he went right to the core of the issue. In verses 22-23 the Scripture says, "So Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.'" Now, please note what he says next, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...." (vs.23). Don't miss what is said here. "Your rebellion, Saul, is likened to witchcraft. Your stubbornness is iniquity and idolatry."

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## Q&A with Pastor Blake Shaw

**Question:** The question for this edition of the COG is “Why is transparency lacking at Grace?” (Part 2)



### Answer:

Transparency! I'm sure you have heard this word bantered about over the past few years. Because it continues to be pushed to the forefront of our minds, it is only appropriate to take some time to understand the concept and to develop a biblical framework for which we can practice transparency in a way that is more about God's glory than it is about any of us simply feeling like we are connected to people. Last month we saw that transparency is defined as: "...free from pretense or deceit; easily detected or seen through; readily understood; characterized by visibility or accessibility of information especially concerning business practices."

We saw last month that in the pages of Scripture there does appear to be a biblical basis for some level of transparency. We considered passages such as I John 1; I Thessalonians 2:8; I Timothy 1:15; Romans 7:13-25; Acts 20; and the transparency that flowed from the writers of the Psalms. I don't think anyone would dispute the idea that within the pages of holy Scripture we find examples and principles pertaining to transparency among believers, yes, even between spiritual leaders and those entrusted to their care. You can refer back to the previous edition of the COG to see a more extensive treatment of those passages. It is in that same edition where I sought to deal with the issue of leadership and their transparency with all people.

Some insist that the teaching pastor should be more transparent when he teaches. However, last month we also considered that the pulpit isn't necessarily the place for a pastor to open up his life in specific transparency because the study of the Word is part of a worship service and really, when we leave the service, we should have a greater picture of who God/Jesus Christ is, not lingering thoughts about some struggle that the pastor has. The worship service is about God, not any of us as humans.

For this edition, I want to press a little more on this question: "What is the desired goal in being transparent?" To put it another way, "For the person who continues to call for more transparency, what is his goal? What is he wanting to accomplish?"

Back a number of years ago, I had a discussion with a friend who, at the time, was a part of our college ministry. As graduation was approaching she began to develop an exit strategy of sorts preparing to leave Grace, MSU, Bozeman, and the state of Montana. We were discussing her impending move, where she was moving to, and what church she was going to be a part of when she arrived at her new location. As she reflected on her time in Bozeman and her years at Grace she said, "Blake, I really hope to find a church like Grace but one with more transparency-with more people being more vulnerable."

Thus began a short discussion about the issue of transparency. She continued, "I think what I mean is that I wish when the pastors here at Grace are preaching that they would share more of their life, their own struggles with living life in this fallen world."

In my odd, very non-pastoral way I asked her a question and the discussion to follow went something like this, "So why is it so important that a pastor be so transparent from the pulpit?" I asked.

"Well, it helps us relate to him," came her reply.

"How would that help you grow to be more like Jesus?" I enquired.

"It just encourages me to know he's human like the rest of us."

"But how does that really help you grow to be more like Jesus?" I asked.

"Well it helps me know how to pray for him and it helps me understand how to apply to my own life what he taught."

"That's good to pray for your pastors. I know I need it," I replied. "But you don't need him or me to drag our struggles out in a worship service before you can pray for him/us. James says of the prophet Elijah that even he '...was a man with a nature like ours...' so certainly, if Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, you can know with absolute confidence that your pastors are men with a nature like every other believer. We battle sin daily. The same temptations that people in the church face are common to man temptations (I Corinthians 10:13) that we all face in one shape or another. But let me push this issue a little further. I Thessalonians 5:12 says, "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize (some translations say, "appreciate") those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." This statement about recognizing leaders is not a reference to having some facial recognition of the leaders. It has the idea of people being told to literally know their pastors/leaders well enough to have an intimate appreciation for them and to respect them because of their value. The burden to know the pastors/leaders there seems to be placed upon the people in the congregation, not the leaders. If you want transparency in the life of the pastor/leaders, perhaps it would be good to get together with a pastor and an elder and ask him about his life. All of the pastors and elders I know are very willing to talk about their life, their struggles, etc., but most won't share such things from the pulpit and there is wisdom in that" (as we saw in the last edition). I continued, "I understand the second point you raise about applying what is taught to your own life and surely you know that there is no way to draw up specific application to 1500 people every Sunday morning. The sermons are intended to give you a high and lofty view of God/Jesus Christ, a confidence in the sufficiency and authority of God's Word, and to help you develop your understanding of God's Word so that you are accurate in your understanding and able to then apply it to your life in specific ways."

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## Q&A continued...

People who listen to the sermons, at least at GBC (and I assume at most other churches too), are not stupid. And the reality is that some sermons are going to hit you where you live more than others, but most people can certainly draw out from the proclamation of God's Word specific things that relate to his/her life."

"But I just think that when a pastor is transparent in his teaching that people listen closer and can relate to him better."

"So," I responded. "Let me ask, 'If someone struggles to listen to the explanation of God's glorious Word, is that necessarily the teacher's fault? And why is it so critical to relate to the pastor who is preaching at a particular time? How does that help you become more like Christ?'" And so the conversation continued on, loaded with a lot of "I thinks" and Blake's redundancy in questions. I wasn't trying to be obstinate. And yes, she and I are still friends today. I was trying to get her to think through her motivations and goals for transparency because she was going to choose a church based upon a pastor's transparency from the pulpit.

Don't get me wrong at this juncture. I am not opposed to a pastor sharing his life from the pulpit. I would agree that when a pastor shares a part of his life while speaking that it can resonate with the hearers. But all too often people remember the personal information and miss the point of the sermon. This very thing happened to me back a number of years ago when I was assigned the duty to fill the pulpit one particular time when Pastor Bryan was out of town. In the sermon I shared about a battle with a particular sin issue in my own life, thinking that the transparency would help others understand how to apply the sermon to their own lives. As it turned out, the sermon and the transparency was an encouragement to some folks (I received several encouraging letters and cards the following week to verify that). One woman in particular thanked me for my transparency about the battle with sin and noted how encouraged she was by the transparency and how it helped her think about an application to her own life. What struck me though was that the next week I was approached by several individuals who asked me how my battle with the particular sin went over the past week. One even jokingly commented about it. So I casually asked each of them if they remembered what the sermon was about and what passage the sermon covered. To which they all said, "No, they would have to think about it for a bit." Understand, I'm not opposed to fellow believers asking me personal questions. I'm not opposed to

the accountability that seemed to be found in that little interaction with those individuals. But what it demonstrated to me is that not everyone who hears a sermon and hears the thoughts of transparency shared in the sermon actually has the intention to apply the truth of the sermon to his/her own life. And sadly, what oftentimes happens is that people remember the personal story shared but forget what really matters and that is what God has said in His Word.

But why belabor the point about transparency? Why not just accept the college graduate's evaluation concerning transparency? Those are fair questions. If you reread the discussion with my friend I hope you can see that one point I keep pushing on is related to goals. In any discussion about transparency (or any discussion about church life) I believe we need to ask the question, "What is our goal in being transparent?" My friend gave me insight into her goals for "transparency". She indicated that she wanted to be able to relate to the pastor, to know he is human like all of us, to know how to pray for him, and to understand how God's truth applies to life.

On the surface, I have no problem with some of those goals. But is that really why we come to church? Is that really what we want a Bible teacher to do when he is unfolding for us God's Eternal, Holy Word? Sometimes I wonder if perhaps for some folks (not all), they are living life in the mud of sin, and perhaps it helps them feel some level of relief when they know that the man in the pulpit has struggles as well.

As I said in the last edition, please understand, I like transparency. I think most, if not all, people who have been in a discipleship relationship with me or who have come to me for counseling would say that I utilize a level of transparency in my discipleship and my counseling, so as to relate to and connect with the person being discipled and counseled. I know there are strengths to transparency. I'm still not convinced that the pulpit or large group setting is always the place to have the level of transparency that people want from their pastors/leaders, or anyone for that matter, nor am I convinced that all transparency, regardless of the setting, is always the best and most helpful way to live life. I am convinced that on a person-to-person level, the leaders we have around us will gladly share their lives with you, but they will always do so with wisdom.

### TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

**Third Annual Biblical Counseling Conference  
July 16-18, Grace Bible Church.**

**Registration forms available throughout  
the church and at the church office.**

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:** The Community of Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry and the editor of the monthly newsletter welcome letters from the readers. Letters may be edited if the editorial team deems it necessary to do so to fit the space allowed or due to unbiblical communication practices. We encourage the reader to write with edification in mind. Letters must be signed. Names can be withheld upon request. If you have a question about counseling that you would like to ask for future publications feel free to submit those questions to Pastor Blake Shaw.

