

## The Counseling Zone: A View from the Counselor's Chair

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1) First, if you are not in a discipleship relationship or small group or an accountability partnership with a person or two, can I plead with you to change that? I start with this part of the plea because my observation is that a majority of people who are seek counseling, had they been involved in a discipleship relationship with another person, I'm convinced that they would not have gotten to the point of needing counseling. In fact, much counseling would have taken place right within the context of that friendship that had developed within the discipleship relationship.

2) Part two of my plea is that I would beg of you to not wait until things have exploded before you seek help with some issue in your life. Although we know that no situation is beyond repair and it is never too late with our Lord to fix a situation, a marriage, a relationship, etc., we also know that the longer one waits to seek help, the more work will need to be done to repair the damage. Why the wait to get help? Often-times it is pride that keeps a person or a couple from coming in for help. Certainly we all understand that internal battle that one goes through as he/she considers getting help. What will people think of me if they know I am getting help or counseling? Will this ruin my reputation? Will people talk about me? Will people think that I have massive problems? Those are some of the questions that go through a person's mind as he/she ponders seeking help. My friend, don't let pride (James 4:6-10), or the fear of man (Proverbs 29:25) keep you from asking for another believer to help you. Truth is, we all need help. We all struggle in the battle against the flesh (Romans 7). We are imperfect people (I John 1:8-10) living in an imperfect world (Romans 8:20-22) around and with imperfect people (Romans 3:10,23). We need help. I need help. Sometimes in tough situations things get really foggy. I can't see clearly enough. Sometimes I simply need to hear the voice of a person who is outside of the situation telling me that it is going to be okay, that what I'm doing is right or wrong, what God's Word says about my situation, etc. Numerous times I have gone to someone else, another pastor, or an elder and his wife, or an older man and asked for assistance. Oh sure, my pride was tugging at my mind as I pursued the counsel but the humbling of myself was so good, both for me and the person I went to for the counsel. All of that to say, "Don't wait until disaster hits before you seek help."

3) Thirdly, don't expect things to change overnight. We live in a fast-food culture where we have developed a mind-set that we should be able to get things done in a short amount of time. However, when it comes to counseling issues, if you have lived 30 years, or been married 27 years, please understand you have a lot of years of practice in thinking, communicating, responding, etc. Habits – manners of life – don't die easily and the flesh, that part of you that still opposes God, is not going to go away easily. So if you seek counseling, please understand it could take some time to see change happen. And it could take some work on your part (Philippians 2:12). So if you need help and are seeking help, please don't expect that changing life-long habits would be equal to getting treatment for an infection where you take an antibiotic for a week and all is well.

4) Fourthly, if you humble yourself and initiate getting counseling, don't exit the counseling too early. This happens all too often. Here's how it unfolds: John Doe comes in for counseling for an issue that has destroyed both his life and his marriage. He has struggled with some issue for years, perhaps decades, and he receives the counsel. His wife has told him, "Get counseling and change or we are done." So John begins counseling and he really begins to change. His wife sees him working hard and sees change taking place and both begin to be encouraged. His wife is still skeptical but John continues to work at the issue and change is taking place. He has been forgiven by his wife and all seems to be back to normal. The heat is off. No longer is he living under the pressure of, "Get counseling and change or we are done." Eventually, John

decides that he can't make it to counseling anymore. Actually, in his mind, he doesn't need to be there anymore. So he exits the counseling and settles into life as usual. Two years later, John calls for counseling. What happened? Many times it is that John left the counseling prematurely. He was on the right path but with the pressure removed he saw no need to continue to intensely work on the areas that had brought him in for counseling. The point: Don't exit the counsel prematurely.

5) Fifthly, don't forget who the Savior is. Yeah, you read that right. I know most people don't come in for counseling thinking that the counselor is a savior, of sorts, but there are times where a person may arrive at counseling thinking, "If this guy can't fix me then there is no hope." Please understand, no counselor, regardless of how good he/she is can fix you. I mean, really fix you. We are broken people, living in a broken world, and we are in desperate need of an **Unbroken** Savior who knows us intimately and is the only true physician to save us from ourselves and what ails us. God never intended for your counselor to be your savior. Let me rephrase that: Your Savior – Jesus, is actually the Wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6) and He is the One who takes your situation and redeems it. The person who counsels you is a sinner saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) and who desperately needs God's grace too. In all reality, the counselor is a beggar who has found something to eat and brings it to you, also a beggar desperately in need of food. Listen to them. Submit to them. Work hard when they have you work on things, but never start to think of them as your savior. If you do, you'll be greatly disappointed.

6) This leads to a related point. If you are a parent of a teenager, please understand that you are still the parent. The counselor is not the parent, nor is she a miracle worker who can "fix" your child. As noted above, the counselor is not the savior. He/she cannot read minds. The counselor will work hard to gather the data and will work hard to bring God's answer to the teenager's problems. But don't expect the counselor to be a savior or to do your job of parenting. Likewise, if you want your teen to get counseling, don't undermine the counsel by your own life at home. Sometimes a teenager may seek counsel but the conduct of the parents actually undermines and contradicts the counsel. If you have a teen getting counsel, we encourage you to look at your own life and humbly work on areas where you may actually be provoking your teenager to anger, or doing things that make it much easier for him/her to fall to temptation.

7) Last, if you ask for help, please understand that what you mean by help is not always the same as what the Bible and the biblical counselor would define as "help." If you ask for help and you are told what help looks like and you agree to it, then please understand that you are in the relationship with the counselor, not so that the counselor can sit and provide talk therapy for you, but rather, that he/she can hear you and then take you to the life-changing person of Christ and to the answer for your problem found in His holy Word. Help involves you, as the person being counseled, doing something beyond talking about your problems. It isn't loving nor helpful to simply allow you to sit and talk about your problems but not do anything about them. Proverbs 14:23 makes it clear that, "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." The counselors we have on our team love to help people but "help" to them is radically different from how most people define help. Change requires more than talk. It requires work, done in faith, and energized by the grace of God in you through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you. Talk therapy won't get you true change.

In review: Get involved in a discipleship relationship; Don't wait until it's too late; Don't expect things to change overnight; Don't exit the counseling too early; Remember who the Savior is; and define "help" biblically.

This is my plea. Now that wasn't so bad, was it?

# THE COG

## Community Of Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry

### Edition #32 – June 2015



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

### "Shut Up Gringo"

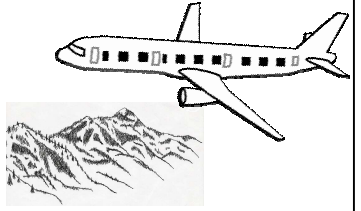
Have you ever violated your conscience? You know, you start to do something and this

thought keeps pressing in your mind, telling you to not do it. But you do it anyway. I think it is safe to say we have all done this. It could be a situation so simple such as eating another piece of pie when you know you shouldn't have. Or it could be when you clicked on that website to imbibe in another hit of pornography or turned to that TV station that you know feeds those fleshly cravings. Perhaps it was when you purchased something using your credit card, knowing full well that you didn't need what you bought nor do you have the money to pay for it. Or it may be when you clocked in early at work and then waited for ten minutes to actually begin to work. Or you took some small object from the work place and rationalized in your mind that it's insignificant and no one will even notice that is missing. Maybe as a teenager or college student you violated your conscience by cheating on an exam or having someone else write a paper for you. Or as a teen living at home, you snuck out your bedroom window during the night to disobey your parents. You get the idea. In each of these settings and thousands of others we find the conscience at work. Your automatic warning system that is built into your life was instructing you to not do something, to stop, to not go somewhere. That's the conscience. It's a gift, given by our Creator, to tell us right from wrong. Woe to the person who can carry out sin and not have the conscience raise a voice. If that is the case with you, I beg you to take note. You are not in a good position.

I was reminded of the conscience recently when I heard a news story of another airplane crash in the French Alps involving what appears to be a suicidal copilot. As details of this tragedy began to unfold it was learned that the captain/pilot of the airline had left the cockpit for a short moment, perhaps to use the restroom. Once he exited the cockpit, the copilot locked the cockpit door and began the rapid descent into the side of the mountain. The captain tried in vain to get back into the cockpit. The copilot, now turned hijacking captain, ignored all attempts by the captain to get back into the cockpit. And with resolve and a stubborn will to carry out his dastardly deed the copilot stepped into eternity, taking with him 150 people. This incident is a profound example of how the conscience works in our lives. In a sense, our flesh takes over and we begin to walk into some sin. Like the captain pounding on the door trying to get in and save the plane, our conscience works vigorously to tell us to stop, to desist, or take a different direction. Far too often, we tell our conscience to, "Shut up!"

The story above reminds me of equally staggering airplane crash decades earlier. "Shut up, Gringo!" Those were the words from an Avianca Airlines pilot as he turned off the airplane's automatic warning system, just minutes before the plane crashed into the side of a mountain. The chilling words were found recorded on the plane's little black box which was found shortly after the plane crash. With one stupid decision to ignore the warning system, the pilot, along with many others, stepped into eternity. Some, perhaps most, stepped into an eternity separated from God and into eternal torment. What a horrendous decision with staggering consequences. Can you imagine the airline pilot hearing the warning system kick on and begin to repeat – in that programmed voice, "Pull

up, pull up, pull up, pull up..." And the only response he can give it is, "Shut up, Gringo!" But that is exactly what we do when our conscience tells us, "Don't do that!" Don't go there. Don't take that. Don't look at that. Don't try that." Far too often, we tell our conscience, "Shut up." When we do this, what happens to the conscience? What is the effect it has on the conscience? What is ultimately the effect on the person's life?



To answer those questions, let's first review a basic definition of the conscience. As we saw in the last edition, Puritan author, Richard Sibbes wrote several hundred years ago in his commentary on 2 Corinthians that the conscience is the soul reflecting upon itself. The conscience is one of the distinguishing marks of humanity. Animals don't have a conscience. Humans, on the other hand, have the ability to contemplate their actions and then make a moral evaluation of that action. John MacArthur writes,

The conscience is an innate ability to sense right and wrong...The conscience entreats us to do what we believe is right and restrains us from doing what we believe is wrong. The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or the law of God. It is a human faculty that judges our actions and thoughts by the light of the highest standard we perceive. When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, consternation, anxiety, disgrace, and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being, and gladness. (*The Vanishing Conscience*, pages 36-37).

The Greek word "conscience" can be found more than 30 times in the pages of the New Testament. That word, *suneidesis* literally means "co-knowledge." MacArthur explains,

Conscience is knowledge together with oneself; that is, conscience knows our inner motives and true thoughts. Conscience is above reason and beyond intellect. We may rationalize, trying to justify ourselves in our own minds, but a violated conscience will not be easily convinced.... (*The Vanishing Conscience*, page 37).

## 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.**



## “Shut Up Gringo” [Continued from cover page]

We must understand the conscience. It is an amazing resource we have as humans. To understand the conscience and to truly understand what has happened to the conscience within our culture, we have to start out by understanding another word, a word that has been lost in our culture, a word that has fallen on hard times within the church – but a critical word nonetheless. The word I have in mind is “sin” and I hope to explain that word in articles to follow. But first, we must understand that our culture has lost the concept of “sin.”

In the 1950's and 60's, changes began to sweep through the western culture. Sure, changes had happened before, and there were many different strands of pressure at work within the culture, but in the 1950's the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Committee on Nomenclature and Statistics developed what was called the DSM-1 (The Diagnostic Statistical Manual), a resource for labeling “mental problems” that people faced. Since that time, the manual has been revised and is in its 5th edition (DSM-5). As the psychiatric community developed labels for human problems, insurance companies jumped on board, as did pharmaceutical companies. The mad search for an answer to man's problems began. The culture elevated pride as a virtue and made the pursuit of self-esteem and positive feelings the highest of pursuits. Simultaneously, the concept of moral responsibility was swept aside. Victimization became the mantra of the day. In that culture, the biblical concepts of human depravity, sin, guilt, the need for repentance and humility were left in a cloud of proverbial dust. Sadly, the church was all too eager to follow suit. The church became more enamored with self-esteem, self-love, and self-exoneration. As such, the church too, began to embrace the plethora of labels that the world counseling

system had developed to explain away the various ills of humanity. Syndromes, disorders, and terms like dysfunctional families, temperaments, the inner child, and codependency all became buzzwords used by both the world and church to give some semblance of explanation to peoples' problems. Secular psychology promoted these various mechanisms and the church followed along. Since Genesis 3, mankind has played the blame game and the last half of the 20th century has accelerated this shift of responsibility. Thus, the rise of psychiatric labeling and the shunning of the concept of sin is more prevalent than ever, even in the church. The consequences of this drift away from a biblical understanding of man's problems to a psychiatric induced labeling system, was and is, frightening. One author wrote,

Remove the reality of sin, and you take away the possibility of repentance. Abolish the doctrine of human depravity and you void the divine plan of salvation. Erase the notion of personal guilt and you eliminate the need for a Savior. Obliterate the human conscience, and you will raise an amoral and unredeemable generation (The Vanishing Conscience, page 11).

To understand the conscience, we must understand sin. To get our bearings on what is unfolding in our culture, we have to begin with an accurate understanding of what God says is the core problem with humans. We can't skirt the issue. We can't ignore what our Creator says is the central problem to our existence. Until we understand the issue of sin, we will never understand the purpose of the conscience, how the conscience is hardened, or how the conscience is trained to function the way God has designed. In the next edition of The COG, we will more fully develop a biblical understanding of sin. Until then, be careful to what or whom you say, “Shut up!”



## The Counseling Zone: A View from the Counselor's Chair By Pastor Blake Shaw “Blake Makes A Plea!”

This next month marks my fourth year anniversary serving as the Pastor of Counseling Ministries here at Grace. Time has flown by quickly, to say the least. These four years have been wrought with many ups and downs, bumps and bruises, criticisms and compliments, joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, etc. That's the nature of ministry. God has taught me much during these four years as He refines me and refines our counseling ministry here at Grace. I have to be honest that I never imagined when I took the position that I would enter into some of the hardest, heartbreaking, time-demanding situations in ministry that I had imagined.

They didn't teach us about this part of ministry in Bible College, at least at the one I attended. At times I have sat back and wondered, “How did the church get it so wrong?” I'm not speaking of our church specifically, but more so, I'm speaking of the church in general. Just recently I told a friend that when I entered into the ministry 25 years ago, I never would have thought that the rest of my life would actually be given to trying to defend the sufficiency of God's inspired Word against the attack from people who claim to know Christ. Criticism of biblical counseling is common. Some of the criticism is probably well-deserved because of the mishandling of situations by some who claim to be in the biblical counseling camp. Because we are all a work in progress, I know that when I look back on the years of ministry there are numerous counseling situations that I, as a biblical counselor, would handle differently. But not all criticism is justified, nor is it accurate. There are many misunderstandings about both biblical counseling and those who serve Christ in the Biblical Counseling Ministry. Many of those misunderstandings have arisen over

the past four years so I'd like to enter into a posture of making a plea with people who read The COG and hopefully our readers will be encouraged to share these concepts with others.



Before I make this plea, let me explain some background to this. Back some time ago I had the joy of meeting with a pastor friend of mine from a church in the area. We met to talk about our counseling conference coming up this July and about how we can work together as like-minded churches to encourage the Biblical Counseling Ministry and the training of people in each church fellowship. The pastor, in a moment of “transparency” (no, it's not a dirty word) said, “I just find that most people, most couples, don't come for counseling until it is basically too late.” We went on to discuss how true this is and yet when the couple shows up to be counseled it is almost as if they are either hoping you can pull off a miracle, or, as is often the case, they are vying for the church to take their side in the conflict. That last point itself is an article waiting to be written, huh? The pastor friend rightly observed a trend and that is that most people don't pursue help until things are so bad in the situation that it feels like it is almost beyond repair. This can be likened to a stubborn person who is perpetually sick yet refuses to go to the doctor, hoping to ride out the physiological storm. Yet, as things continue to worsen, he finally heads off for an exam only to learn that surgery is needed, or worse, that it is too late and he has a non-treatable terminal disease. Had he gone to the doctor earlier he could have avoided many of the problems he now faces. So it is with many who wait and wait to get help until it seems like it is beyond help. With that in mind, here is my plea and it comes in several parts:

Continued on back page...

## Q&A with Guest Writer: Julie Gossack

### Question:

**It seems like conservative Evangelicals have always avoided emotions and the discussion of emotions, often going so far as to make emotions seem like a bad thing. Could you address the issue of emotions and what role they play in our lives?**

### Answer:

To understand the biblical view of emotions and what role they play in our lives we need to first define them. This edition of The COG will explore the terms: feelings, emotions, and affections. Then, in next five editions we will examine these biblical principles: 1) feelings are a component of the heart from which we live, 2) feelings are not inherently wrong, 3) feelings can be sanctified, and 4) feelings must be directed by God's Word. Let's begin with the definitions.

### What are “Feelings?”

It is important to define the word “feelings” because this word can mean different things to different people. Sometimes the concept of feelings is misunderstood and misconstrued because of how different people define the word “feelings” as well as similar words like “emotions” and “affections.”

One problem with defining these terms is due to the fact that the Bible doesn't always use the same words as our popular culture. The term “feelings” is rarely used in Scripture,<sup>1</sup> and the word “emotions” is not used at all. However, the concept of feelings and emotions is all over the pages of Scripture.

Webster defines “feelings” several different ways:<sup>2</sup> 1) the perception of touch. For example, “The cloth feels rough on my skin.” 2) a physiological sensation not associated with the senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing, or smell. For example, “I feel warm, sick, tired, or hungry.” and, 3) to be emotionally affected. For example, “I feel sad or angry.” This third definition describes the type of feelings we are discussing.

### What are “Emotions?”

Emotions are commonly defined as an “affective state of consciousness in which joy, sorrow, fear, hate, or the like is experienced, as distinguished from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> That is, feelings are not the same as our thinking (cognitive), nor are they the same as our desires (volition). The term “emotions” is a synonym of that third definition of feelings. And so, the words “feelings” and “emotions” are synonyms that can be used interchangeably.

As a side note, it is important to differentiate the third type of feelings (emotion) from the second type of feelings (a physiological sensation) because speaking about *these* types of feelings interchangeably might cause confusion and even error. It is also important to know that although these two types of feelings are distinct, they are also *interconnected* as part of the human condition – Scripture acknowledges this. (Feelings as a physiological sensation and how they connect with the emotions will be discussed in Part 4 of this article.)

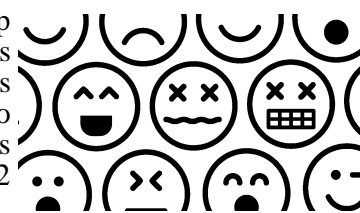
### What are “Affections?”

“Affection” is another term that is often used as a synonym for feelings or emotions. The Bible does use the word “affections”<sup>4</sup> and it seems to be the most accurate synonym for the way the words “feelings” and “emotions” are used in today's culture. Scriptural usage of the word “affections” indicates that human affections can be either sinful<sup>5</sup> or righteous.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that the word “affections,” though it can be appropriately used as a synonym for “feelings” or “emotions,” is sometimes closely linked to volition, that is, the will or desire. Puritan author Jonathan Edwards did join the affections with the will in his work entitled *Religious Affections*.

Edwards said, “The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will. . . .”<sup>7</sup> Although Edwards differentiates between the will and the emotions, he does blur the distinction by using the term “affections” in a manner that describes both the will and the emotions. Nevertheless, it is most often suitable to use the terms “affections,” “emotions,” and “feelings” as synonyms since they are so closely related.

Now that we have a better grasp of the term “feelings,” as understood to be the emotions or the affections, we need to consider the biblical principles of feelings. Stay tuned for Part 2 in the next edition of The COG.



1 A form of this word is used in these examples: Job 20:20 *feels no quietness in his heart*; Ephesians 4:19 *being past feeling*; and Hebrews 4:15 *touched with the feeling of* (KJV).

2 Webster's new Universal Unabridged Dictionary. (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996) 706.

3 Ibid. 637.

4 Our English word “affection/s” has various Greek words from which it is transliterated.

5 For example: Romans 1:31 and II Timothy 3:3, indicating hatred and lack of familial love; and Romans 1:26, Galatians 5:24, and Colossians 3:5 which refer to inordinate and vile affections.

6 For example: I Chronicles 29:3 *I have set my affections on the house of God*; Romans 12:10 *Be kindly affectionate to one another*; II Corinthians 7:15...*his affections are greater for you*; Colossians 3:2 *Set your affections on things above* (KJV); and, I Thessalonians 2:8 *So affectionately longing for you...*

7 <[http://www.jesus.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/books/others/edwards\\_religious\\_affections.pdf](http://www.jesus.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/books/others/edwards_religious_affections.pdf)> 25 Jul 2013.

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