

Beating a Dead Horse

There are times when I feel like I beat a “drum” too much. You know, I pick a topic or an issue and I milk that issue for all its worth. Perhaps some might be tempted to think that very thing when it comes to the topic of forgiveness — that drum I’ve been beating over the past several editions of the COG. Some may be inclined to think that it is time to move to some other issue. Certainly there are hundreds of other issues that could and should be written about when it comes to counseling issues. Would you not agree? It is true that there are many other issues that need to be addressed, but the issue of forgiveness is such a critical topic that I dare not treat it with casualness or fail to make an attempt at exhausting the issue. Every week in the counseling zone/room, the issue of forgiveness comes up. Every week. No exceptions. Why? We sinners sin. We sin against one another. When we sin against others there is conflict that follows. When there is conflict, restoration needs to happen. Restoration will always require the seeking of and granting of forgiveness. Thus, I continue to beat the drum of the issue of forgiveness. Let me urge you, don’t ignore this issue. For you personally, you must have a good theology of forgiveness. If you don’t, you won’t be able to help others to be reconciled. In fact, if you don’t have a clearly thought out theology of forgiveness, you’ll most likely find yourself in the pit of bitterness struggling to figure out how to get along with someone or how to be reconciled to her. You’ll find yourself stumped, wondering what to do when you seek forgiveness but forgiveness isn’t granted. Your theology of forgiveness must start with your view of God and His character. Once you lock in a clear theology of God and an understanding of His holiness and the wonderful attributes of mercy, grace, and love, you begin to get a sense of what is involved in forgiveness and why you truly must and can forgive.

Welcome to the Counseling Room

Welcome to the counseling room. You’ve been here before but I welcome you back. If you recall from our last couple of editions of the COG newsletter, we are sitting in the “Chair of Observation” watching a counselor work with a couple of men who have had a conflict. It wasn’t just your ordinary conflict. The conflict involved two men, Shaun and Cal, both of whom were, at the time, involved in their local church but who also worked together for the same company. Cal was the supervisor and Shaun worked in a crew under Cal’s directives. If you recall, Shaun and Cal had a massive conflict at work which ended in Shaun exploding in anger and walking out the door of his workplace. Persuaded by their wives, Cal and Shaun arranged to meet with the counselor to try to work through their conflict. In the first session, Cal was told of his transgressions and he humbled himself and sought forgiveness from Shaun. Shaun didn’t grant forgiveness, nor did he ask Cal for forgiveness for his wrongdoing in the situation. This (Shaun’s response) was saddening to both Cal and the counselor. In a meeting three days later the counselor confronted Shaun, seeking to compel him to forgive Cal and Shaun had responded to the counselor, “Why should I forgive him? I don’t trust Cal. I’m not sure I believe he is truly sorrowful so why should I forgive him?”

Now Shaun and the counselor are meeting to answer the question, “Why should I forgive him?” We saw that the first reason why Shaun ought to forgive Cal is because forgiveness is the most Christlike act a person can do. The

counselor has explained to Shaun that we are never more like Christ than when we are extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us. What endears us to God is the fact that He has forgiven us. At that point, the counselor asked Shaun to read two very familiar passages: Ephesians 4:31-5:1 and Colossians 3:12-13. The counselor pointed out to Shaun that God actually talks about him (Shaun) in the verses read, pointing out that Ephesians 4:31 speaks of the explosive anger, of the slow burn anger, of the bitterness, of evil speaking, and of the clamor which all characterized Shaun in this conflict. The counselor helped Shaun see the issue of forgiveness as laid out in Ephesians 4:32, “...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you.” The counselor belabored the point of verse 32: “God in Christ forgave you,” having Shaun read it several times. “Let it soak in for a while. God forgave you,” he explained to Shaun. “When you forgive you are being an imitator of God, as the next verse in Ephesians says that we are supposed to be” (Ephesians 5:1).

The counselor continues to lay out for Shaun, reasons why he is supposed to forgive. Next he explains that another reason why Shaun ought to forgive Cal is because it isn’t murder only that is commanded against in the 6th commandment. The counselor has Shaun read, Matthew 5:21-22, which says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Murder

It is true that murder is wrong. But Jesus goes to the heart of the matter. When He refers to “Raca” the literal meaning of the word is, “Empty-headed.” Jesus points to the mouth that exclaims, “You fool,” to drive home His point. Jesus is moving the listeners towards the heart and pointing out that the verbal abuse actually flows from sinful motives of anger and hatred which are at the root of murder. Jesus said elsewhere that what comes out of the mouth is actually a revelation of what is in the heart (Luke 6:45). The law was concerned about the heart attitude so when Jesus addresses this issue, He is making it clear that Shaun’s heart attitude is such that it makes him guilty of murder. Recall that Shaun disagreed with Cal’s decision making. He thought Cal to be foolish, stupid if you will, in the decision making process. And Shaun told him such. The counselor in this session simply wants Shaun to realize that he has actually murdered in his heart. Thus, he has broken God’s law. The counselor wants Shaun to understand that it is possible to be perfectly innocent of taking away a person’s life and yet be totally guilty of breaking the sixth commandment. That is why Shaun needs to forgive. Actually, that is why Shaun also needs to seek forgiveness from Cal.

The counselor stops to let Shaun ponder the fact that he is actually guilty of murder in the eyes of God. Is his offense really any worse than that which Cal did? No. The difference is that Cal has please the Lord and dealt with his sin. Shaun hasn’t. Shaun has much to consider. But there is more. And that is for next time.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT BY CHRIS SEDGWICK

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). I have never really studied out what the peacemaker is. I have taken a class in Bible College called “Peacemakers” and learned much about conflict resolution between two people, but I never fully understood what Jesus was telling us in this passage. My goal for writing this article was to gain a proper perspective of peacemaking so that I may apply it to my life. I also want to touch on how it is good for me, being a “child of God,” a husband, and a counselor, and hopefully in the future a father. However, in studying this I hope that with whoever reads this will be encouraged from what I have learned. I pray that you take this and learn more, and apply it to your life as well.

A Dazzling Vision

To give quick context on this verse Jesus is opening His Sermon on the Mount with “a sober, yet dazzling vision, of the operation of the kingdom of heaven among God’s people.”¹ These beatitudes should impact us and our lives if we respond to it. The character of this Kingdom life contravenes the values that most people hold dear, because God’s blessing rests on the unlikely ones – the poor in spirit, mourners, the meek, the persecuted. “Thus beatitudes line an upside-down reality, or – more precisely – they define reality in such a way that the usual order of things is seen to be upside down in the eyes of God.”² There have been few New Testament sections that have been misunderstood and abused as much as this one. Most people who don’t understand this section don’t want the theology side of it, but only the practice of what these beatitudes say. “Not theology, they said; that has been the curse of the Church. What is needed is this beautiful ethical teaching, this marvelous, moral uplift which is to be found here in the Sermon on the Mount.”³

A Lack of Peace

Most people, even some believers, don’t want to think about the theology side of this passage, let alone verse nine. They only want the moral side of this verse. What I’m going to discuss is the whole gambit of this verse: the theology, the context, and application. Having all three will help us gain a better understanding and result in each of us being a peacemaker, given that those who wait and do the works of God “will be called sons of God,” as the verse says. This should be for us as believers, our ultimate reward, that is, “fulfilling the role that Israel has assumed but taken for granted” (Deut. 14:1; Hos. 1:10).⁴ In order to understand more about what a peacemaker is, we must know who God is. He is known throughout Scripture as the “God of peace.”⁵ God of peace is one of the dominating ideas of God’s word. It starts with “peace in the Garden of Eden, and closes with peace in eternity.”⁶ If you look back at the history of humanity there is a spiritual theme of peace as well. Because man sinned in the garden, Jesus Christ on the cross made peace a reality again, and “He becomes the peace of all who place their faith in him.”⁷

I have learned that there are two reasons why there is no peace today. I find it ironic that I am writing this while there so many events that are taking place in this week of April of 2015 that exemplify the reasons for a lack of peace.⁸

A Peace in Our Soul

The first reason why there is no peace today is the opposition of Satan. The second is the disobedience of man. “The fall of angels and the fall of man established a world without peace. Satan and man are engaged with the God of peace in a battle for sovereignty.”⁹

It’s easy to see that the world does not honor peace by the standards and action that it supposedly has, but rather, actions for peace are just words that are discussed. There has been no end of riots, marches, sit-ins, rallies, demonstrations, protests, and wars.¹⁰ These happen because we put self first. This is the “enemy of righteousness, and consequently, of peace. War, resentment, division, hatred, and strife are the results of when we focus on self.”¹¹ It’s been said, If I were speaking on the international situation, my one main comment at the present time would be this. “I believe there is far too much talking going on in the international realm. I cannot see that it does any good to be constantly black-guarding another nation, (or even our own). It is never a good thing to say these unkind, unpleasant things. You can organize for war. You can organize for peace. But stop talking. One of the first things for making peace is to know when not to speak.”¹²

The Peace of GOD

The peace of God, however, has nothing to do with politics, or the military of nations, nor the council of churches. Nor does it have, [anything] to do with statesmanship, no matter how great, or with arbitration, compromise, negotiated truces, or treaties. God’s peace, the peace of which the Bible speaks, never evades issues; it knows nothing of peace at any price. It does not gloss or hide, rationalize or excuse. It confronts problems and seeks to solve them. It often brings its own struggle, pain, hardship, and anguish, because such are often the price of healing. It is not a peace that will be brought by kings, presidents, prime ministers, diplomats, or international humanitarians. It is the inner personal peace that only He can give to the soul of man and that His children can exemplify. That is the peace that Christ speaks of, a peace in our soul.



**Blessed
are the
peacemakers,
for they
will be called
sons
of God.**
Matthew 5:9

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Food for Thought [Continued from cover page]

With, and Without Jesus

We also have a waiting list, of usually one or two people, who want to receive counseling. Our supreme peacemaker is Jesus Himself, making peace between God and man. Making peace between man and man. It is important to understand that the peace, of which Jesus speaks, is having a presence of righteousness rather than having an absence of conflict. "Men can stop fighting without righteousness, but they cannot live peaceably without righteousness. Righteousness not only puts an end to harm, but it administers the healing of lives." Without Jesus, the most men can offer is a truce which is only a temporary resolving. Man can only write up documents looking at an international level, which will bring this "truce." All that does is bring up nothing more than a cold war and they put hatred and disagreements aside and do not resolve them. In the end without God it will always come back.



James 3:17-18 says, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Peace, God's way, is only found through purity, and cannot be gained through the expense of righteousness. God tells us that the only way to resolve the wrong attitudes and actions of two people in conflict is to be at peace with all men, and to do that, we must obtain holiness (Hebrews 12:14). You cannot separate peace from Holiness; Psalm 86:10 tells us that "righteousness and peace have kissed." We will continue to examine the reality of peacemaking in the next COG.

¹ Wilkins, Michael J. "The NIV Application Commentary On Matthew: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life", (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004) P.204;
² Ibid;

³ Dr. Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, "The Studies In The Sermon On The Mount," (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976) P.101

⁴ Wilkins, Michael J. "The NIV Application Commentary On Matthew", P. 210

⁵ Romans 15:33; 2Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9; Romans 15:33; 1Corinthians 14:33; 2 Thessalonians 3:16; Leviticus 26:6; 1 Kings 2:33; Psalm 29:11; Isaiah 9:6; Ezekiel 34:25

⁶ MacArthur, John *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7*, (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 1985) P. 209

⁷ Ibid.

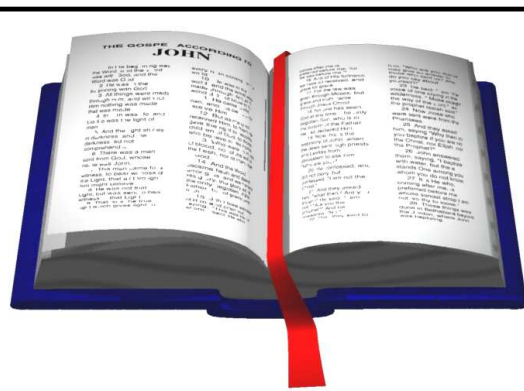
⁸ What is going on this week in history is that there is a riot happening in Baltimore Maryland, the government is going to discuss a redefinition of marriage to appeal to same sex marriage, and there was a huge earthquake in Nepal;

⁹ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matt. 1-7. P. 209;

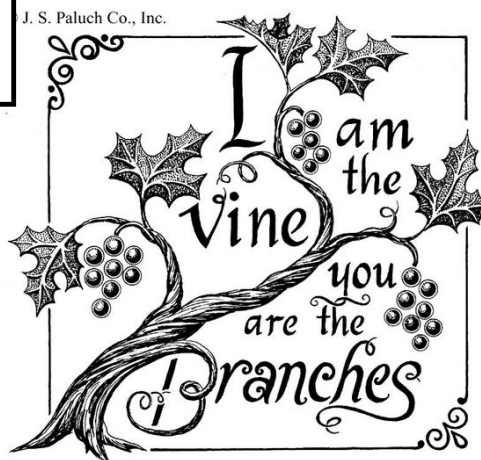
¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Dr. Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, "The Studies In The Sermon On The Mount." P. 107 (parentheses mine)



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Q&A with Pastor Blake Shaw

Question: Does Biblical Counseling ever fail, and if so, why? How does a Biblical Counselor respond when failure does happen?

Answer:

This question is one that comes up quite often in various training classes and I believe it is appropriate to deal with it over the span of several editions of the COG. I would guess that, of all the people who serve as a part of our counseling team, it is only appropriate that I tackle this question regarding failure in counseling, for that seems to be a common theme in my experience. Oh, to be sure, not all counseling situations are failures. Actually, it is quite the opposite, but I've experienced some incredible failures in the counseling room. So the question is, "Why? Why does it fail?"

It is critical to understand that there are actually two responses to the first question, "Does Biblical Counseling ever fail?" The first answer is, "No, Biblical Counseling never fails when it is received and, by faith, applied to the person who receives the counsel. It never fails. God's word never returns void without accomplishing exactly what God wants to accomplish. God never fails. There are many who will testify to the fact that when they repented and began to embrace God's counsel and apply it to their lives, change happened. Hope was secured. God was exalted. Joy returned. Relational conflicts were resolved. Unity in the marriage began to take place. Thus, at the risk of sounding arrogant, Biblical counseling doesn't fail when it is received and applied by the one receiving the counsel."

Yet, there is a second answer to the "Does it ever fail?" question. That answer is, "Most certainly!" I'm guessing every Biblical Counselor has experienced this — some more than others — but it's a common experience nonetheless. Perhaps the better question is, "Why does it fail when it does fail?" That will form the content of this column in the months ahead as I hope to lay out an in-depth understanding of why counseling fails when it comes to Biblical Counseling. To answer the question, what I hope to do is provide a list of questions that point to the reasons why counseling fails.

When Counseling Fails

First, when counseling fails, we must ask, "Is the counselee a believer?" This is a critical starting point. Is that person, sitting across the table or desk from me, the counselor, an unbeliever? Am I trying to counsel someone who is described in God's Word as spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), an enemy of God's (Romans 5:10), even a child of Satan (1 John 3:10)? Am I trying to counsel a person who is described in Scripture as "the natural man"?

1 Corinthians 2:14 states, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can they know them because they are spiritual discerned...."

Religiousness

The obvious implications of such a statement carries great weight in the counseling relationship. Sometimes we find ourselves failing in Biblical counseling because we are trying to provide God's counsel to someone who can't understand God's counsel because he has no life in him. The question is not, "Does this person attend church, sing in the choir, give money, take notes during the sermon, help people, greet people, or even serve in some official capacity in the church?" While all of those are good things, everyone of those actions can be, and are practiced consistently by lost religious people every week. The question always centers on whether the person has placed his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Is this person born again? Has he repented and believed? Does he have spiritual life? Has he been brought to life or is he merely a walking dead man? This is where the counseling can be very hard, for there are many who seek counseling, who know the right words to say but there is nothing in their life that would give evidence to a love for, a submission to, or a living active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sorting this issue out is critical for the counselor. If I am going to open up God's Word and ask the person to apply the truth to his life, I have the prerequisite challenge of ascertaining whether, from what I can tell, I am dealing with a believer or an unbeliever. Asking an unbeliever to apply God's Word in an active, faith-filled action, is like rearranging first class furniture on the Titanic. It might make things look really nice for a time but it is still sinking. If I get the unbeliever to apply God's truth to his life, I've done him no good, simply in helping him to become a moral person on the broad road to destruction. This is the critical starting point for all counseling. We don't assume anyone is saved. In some ways, the approach is to assume that the person seeking counseling is not saved until they give you evidence that would argue that they are. I am comfortable with that approach.

God's Counsel Never Fails!

Regardless, the one question we must ask when faced with the reality of failure in a counseling situation, "Am I meeting with and trying to counsel an unbeliever?" There are other reasons for failure which we will examine in the months ahead. Until then, rest assured that God's counsel never fails when it is embraced and obeyed. We humans fail in counseling and there are many factors that need to be considered to understand why.

For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'

Isaiah 46:9b-46:10