

You Can Counsel—Romans 15:14—1/20/2013

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As we mentioned, today is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, a time when churches in our country remember that human life is sacred.

Human life, from its conception in the womb of a mother to its feeble, final stages in old age or disease, is a gift from God that should not be taken away by man.

It is a crime against God to end the life of another human being because we are made in the image of God.

The only exception is when God says it is governmental justice to end the life of a murderer who has ended another life.

We hold this day in January because 40 years ago the Supreme Court of our country decided it was ok to kill babies in the womb.

Kids—if your parents haven't explained what abortion is, they need to do so, but I'll help right now with a little idea.

When God blesses a mommy with a little baby growing inside her tummy, an abortion is when someone kills that baby.

It happens by a poison taken or by reaching inside & it is evil.

That's one reason we set aside a day to confess it as a national sin against God and barbaric violence against defenseless babies.

If that is true, then why doesn't it stop?

One of the answers is the cost of unwanted children to society.

The cost of an unwanted child to a person's life or a family or to a community or to society as a whole is seen as too great.

It costs society at large at least \$7-12,000 per year to have a kid in the social services system and seek foster care and meet other needs.

So the warped reasoning is that society is better off killing such unwanted kids before they are visible and protected by law.

But do you ever stop to consider why those with such warped reasoning criticize us and don't listen to what seems obvious to us?

I found one probably valid criticism of us in some discussions I had with a relative at a Christmas gathering recently.

He said that the criticism he had heard about pro-life Christians like us is that we really were not pro-life—we were only pro-birth.

We were for the birth of the children that God conceives in the wombs of mothers and thus we were pro-birth.

And I would agree with that—we are pro-birth (1) because Psalm 127 says children are a gift from the Lord, and more so (2) because it is murder to end the life of a baby developing in the womb.

But then I had to concede the criticism when I thought of it.

If Christian and pro-life Americans were adamantly for life, we might care more for the lives of young and old so that needs were met.

In this critic's mind, pro-life people should provide for such unwanted children, for example, if we are really for their lives.

And I had to step back and examine what I do and other Christians do.

I was thankful to God that I could see in the life of this church together that we are providing care for children in need.

And the more I thought of it later, I wish I could've told my relative to send the critic to watch your lives as a church body over the course of a year and he'd certainly see people who care about life.

I hear it said about you & read it in emails & I don't know half of what you do caring for lives in short-term or long-term need.

You are serving and giving in personal relationships of those who have faced significant struggles and our mercy fund meets some needs.

And I was reminded that that kind of care does not happen best by a government program or merely throwing money, but by the personal, long-term investment in relationships.

Your pro-life stance is seen in personal care for people of all ages.

So I'd love for that critic to see your lives as truly for life.

But to go back to the critic—he was saying we want the child born, but where's the money to support the child once he or she is born?

When someone becomes what others would call a burden on society, where are the pro-life people then?

And I have to say I think the church in our country has failed in this area and left the role of mercy up to the government.

I think some changes are happening as Christian adoption and foster care and elderly care are on the rise and as ministries like the Blue Ridge Women's Center continue to flourish.

But I wonder if critics would have less to argue against if every pro-life Christian were obviously investing in the lives of others?

As I was pondering these things, I've been reading Matthew with my kids and I've been struck repeatedly by Jesus' call to compassion and mercy in care for people.

Of course, we never replace truth with mere social benevolence & we never want to meet physical needs without addressing the spiritual.

But it was Jesus who quoted the repeated OT idea that God desired mercy rather than sacrifice.

What He meant was that God wanted compassion and loyal love rather than merely being right in knowledge and rituals.

God did not care if they knew the right stuff and went through the right motions if they did not have a heart of mercy toward others that would forgive and love and serve.

He wanted a changed heart that flowed out in changed relationships.

And I think that is what is often missing as Christians proclaim pro-life positions while living pro-self priorities.

When there's no sacrifice to show mercy and meet needs even when it's hard, we don't give much reason to listen to our pro-life words.

It's still true that abortion is murder & we're right to say so, but we're much better heard when we back up words with actions.

When we say that a changed life is worth over \$18,500 like you all helped us to do in our recent adoption, it gives weight to the words that we as a church are for life, for helping lives in need.

And I know our country has corrupted mercy ministries by making it easy to be lazy and we need to be cautious.

We dare not throw money just to appear like we're merciful.

A book I read documented the problem of just throwing money without investing in relationships that help people change.

The book is entitled *When Helping Hurts* because helping can hurt if it does not train people how to work and manage money, for example.

And it's especially hurtful if we help people with physical needs and never address their spiritual need.

So we need to be wise in our investments and discern how to show mercy and meet needs most biblically and faithfully.

But we must be engaged in compassion, not necessarily in a programmatic way, but at least in personal ways.

And that's where all this leads into our text for today.

Maybe you thought I was just rambling on the issue of the day, but I raise those issues because it leads into Romans 15:14 where we return today in our study through this letter of Paul.

You see, a frequent excuse I hear for not reaching out to people is that you don't know how to help people with real problems.

Some of you say, "Well, I just don't understand that issue and how people struggle and I don't know where to begin."

And our world promotes that same excuse by saying people need professional help or that you need to study psychology or psychiatry.

But such supposed experts have changed their theories so many times that we should realize they don't really have answers.

I mean how many schools of thought have come and gone over the past 50-100 years of the fad of psychology being for the experts?

And who made people in His image in the first place anyway?

It was not Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung or Abraham Maslow or BF Skinner or Dr. Phil or Oprah or whoever else people trust in.

It was GOD who made humans in His image and He gave us a book to tell us how to think about Himself and about ourselves.

Yes we are an interconnected complex of physical bodies and non-physical souls and since those affect each other, doctors are not evil.

And yes we must be treated as an undivided whole of unseen issues inside and measurable symptoms outside.

But the God who made us has told us enough about how to deal with our problems and how to help people facing difficulties.

God has told us how to think about suffering and sorrow and money and work and children and life and aging and illness and so much more if we'll study His Word to find out.

And since God has given us answers to help with our issues, then He has also given us answers to help with others' issues.

In fact, His Word says such outrageous things as claiming to have given us EVERYTHING we need for life and godliness.

That's 2nd Peter 1:3-4—God has given us everything for life and godliness through knowing Him and His promises.

And 2nd Timothy 3:15-17 promises that the Scriptures give what's needed for eternal life and every good work.

Many of you kids have memorized 2nd Timothy 3:15-17.

In 2nd Timothy 3:15, Paul told Timothy "*that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*"

Then 2nd Timothy 3:16-17 is familiar to many of you when it says, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*"

The basic point is that the Bible has the answers for life.

God's Word is sufficient to tell us how to help people.

And that means it's a lame excuse to say you don't know how to help people because you can go study the Bible and grow your knowledge of God and His truth and learn how.

And if you know enough, then the answer is to get our hearts engaged with God's goodness and be motivated to love others.

Those answers address our knowledge & desires, what we call our heads and our hearts, our minds and our affections.

And that's what Romans 15:14 addresses when Paul told the Roman Christians that they were able to help each other.

He told them that they were equipped and ready to do the work of ministering truth to one another to meet the needs that arose.

I'm thankful to say that I think you are ready to do the same.

Many of you are doing it, but I want us to learn today how all of us can throw off our excuses and be ready to help others.

I want us to learn how we can be people who are both pro-birth and pro-life so that critics can't have anything to say against us.

We want them to see the beauty of God's truth both in what we say and in how we live.

With that long introduction now, I want to let Romans 15:14 give 3 reasons why Christians can counsel, why you can help someone in need or evangelize that lost soul or encourage that believer.

I want you to see from Romans 15:14 why you can be equipped for every good work of mercy or ministry in whatever issue you face.

Romans 15:14 offers 3 reasons you can counsel if you are a Christian.

Now let's read Romans 15:14. [READ]

This verse transitions to all the closing statements of this letter.

It's a long letter and has a long section of closing statements.

What we finished last week summed up with a prayer & then verse 15 transitions to why he wrote & what his travel plans were and greetings.

But here in verse 14 he wanted the church to know something about his estimation of them.

So he wrote emphatically about his personal assessment even though he had not visited the church.

He knew people from their travels and he knew leaders and he had reports from the church enough to make an evaluation.

Paul made clear that this was his estimation because he is the subject of the verb and then he also added the personal pronoun 'Ego' for I and another emphatic pronoun we translate as 'myself.'

So this was emphatically Paul—Paul himself the Apostle who had written this letter to teach them and rebuke them at times.

That same Paul was convinced, meaning he had become persuaded and remained persuaded and was confirmed in his thoughts.

What he was convinced of was concerning them, about them, and he added the emphatic pronoun to make it clear he meant the plural gathering of Christians in that church.

As he shared it, he wanted them again to know and feel his affection so he referred to them as his brethren, his spiritual brothers and sisters.

And he affirmed 3 things about them from which we draw our 3 points about why Christians can counsel.

Point #1—Christians can counsel because we have the Spirit.

Christians can counsel, #1, because we have the Spirit.

I get that from Paul affirming his Christian readers as full of goodness.

He was convinced, 1st in verse 14, they were full of goodness.

Do you know what goodness is?

It's what's good—it's uprightness of heart and life and kindness and benevolence toward others.

It is the noun form of an adjective for good, useful, excellent, happy, honorable and whatever we say is a desired, praiseworthy standard.

And where do we get that standard for good?

We get it from God, partially because He hard-wired a sense of goodness into us as creatures in His image.

That's why many things even unbelievers agree are good.

But God defines what is good and He ultimately is the standard of good and the source of all good.

So being full of goodness involves being full of grace from God, full with the work of God in the heart to create good.

In fact, guess where we find this word goodness the next time in the NT if you are reading through it.

It's in Galatians 5:22—the fruit of the Spirit includes goodness.

Goodness is a product of God's Spirit in the heart and life of a Christian, of someone who trusts and follows Jesus.

And let's recall what a Christian is, by the way.

A Christian is someone who has realized that we are not good, that we do not have goodness in us and we cannot create good to get to God.

Becoming a Christian starts with admitting our bankruptcy, confessing that we can't do good works to make God accept us.

Instead, we admit we are bad and have sinned against God and need His forgiveness for all the bad in us & the bad that has come out of us.

But then we become Christians by trusting God's free gift of His goodness to us through what He's accomplished in Christ.

Jesus lived the perfect life of goodness and being a Christian means we trust His goodness and not our own.

And Jesus died as a substitute for us to pay our sins' penalty so that our bad can be forgiven.

Then He rose from death in victory and sent His Spirit to apply His work to those who believe.

That's what it means to be a Christian, to turn from trust in self to trust only in Jesus Christ to get us to God.

Only in Christ can we also begin to experience true goodness from our hearts flowing out into our relationships.

Unbelievers can laugh and enjoy some good things that God has created, but only by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts can we become people who are full of goodness.

Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit so being full of goodness requires being full of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is the One who puts good desires in us to love and reach out and serve and meet needs and to do it all for God's glory not for our own recognition or praise.

And when the Spirit is ruling our hearts and lives like that, we are full of goodness and we can counsel one another.

Not only can we counsel, we will want to counsel.

The love and goodness that God's Spirit produces in our hearts will make us WANT to serve other people with His truth.

And by the way, that's all I mean by the word counsel.

Counseling is just speaking truth in love, just helping people with their problems and trials in life or shedding light on their issues.

Look at that 3rd phrase in verse 14—Paul said they are able also to admonish or instruct or counsel one another.

That's the word sometimes translated 'counsel' in the NT and it's the word transliterated to describe 'nouthetic' counseling.

The Greek verb 'noutheteo' is a compound word from the root of the verb for place or put 'the' and the word for mind.

So it literally means to place in mind, to put into the mind.

And that's where we get the translation as counsel or instruct—to place truth into the mind of a person to counsel or instruct them, to put biblical wisdom into their minds to help them.

That word is the end goal Paul is getting at in verse 14 and that's why we frame this verse as a verse about counseling.

Christians can counsel, #1, because we have the Spirit.

To have understanding of truth, we must have the Spirit.

But to have the heart to love others and want to help them, we need to be filled with the Spirit bearing the fruit of goodness.

If we have the Spirit—and thus if we are Christians, then we should have some level of goodness and be able somehow to counsel others.

Some people will be better at counseling than others and you may need help to get insight on some issues.

But the fact is that having the Spirit should move us to this ministry.

Even in the flow of Galatians 5-6 where we find goodness as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, we find 5 verses later in Galatians 6:1 a call to counseling.

Look at Galatians 6:1 and read that. [READ]

Galatians 6:1 addresses brethren, meaning Christians, and adds that if you are spiritual, which after Galatians 5:22-23 means if you have the Spirit in you and bear the fruit of the Spirit.

So the point is that if you are a Christian, if you have the Spirit, then you should engage in the ministry of gently restoring those who are caught or snagged in sin somehow.

Counseling is not an option for the really gifted types who like to talk to people.

Counseling is a command of the Christian life in Galatians 6:1 and many other passages like the NT one-another commands.

And you don't need to be intimidated by trying because we all fail in relationships and learn through our ups and downs.

Just know this—if you are a Christian, the Spirit of God dwelling in you will empower you beyond what you think as you obey Him.

If you are a Christian, realize that God loves you and He loves His Word and so He loves for you to have the joy of sharing His Word with others.

So you can bank on Him showing up to empower you for good.

So Christian, you can counsel because you have the Spirit.

That's point #1—Christians can counsel because we have the Spirit.

Then #2—Christians can counsel because we have the Word.

Point #2—Christians can counsel because we have the Word.

We learn that from the second commendation Paul gave the Roman church in Romans 15:14.

He said he was convinced they were filled with all knowledge.

What kind of knowledge did he mean?

He meant knowledge of God and knowledge of human nature.

He did not mean they were so good and so knowledgeable that they had any problems or questions.

He did not mean they had figured everything out & reached perfection.

We know that because this verse comes after nearly 15 chapters of teaching and correction for this church.

So when he mentioned them being full of goodness and filled with all knowledge, he did not mean they had no issues or areas where they needed to grow or things they needed to learn.

He meant they had grasped the fullness of the Gospel and knowledge of who God is and what He has done in Christ and how we relate to Him by grace through faith in Christ.

Paul often used this term for the knowledge of God in the Gospel, for knowing the truth by which we gain eternal life that begins now and will abound increasingly forever in heaven.

And he described the Romans as having been filled—perfect passive participle in Greek for you grammarians—meaning it was done to them in the past with lasting effects in the present.

God had filled them with knowledge in the past & it was still there.

That knowledge of God and the Gospel and of how to live was still influencing them, transforming their lives increasingly.

And it was a comprehensive, life-encompassing, whole knowledge.

They were still learning just as Paul wanted them to learn and grow deeper in the rich doctrines he taught earlier in this letter, but they had the core anchored in them.

A huge part of that core was the commitment to Scripture as their authority and Christ as the center of God's revelation.

With God's revelation of Himself in Christ and Scripture, they had the storehouse from which to mine treasures more deeply.

We find that same commitment to the Scriptures in verses we quoted in 2nd Timothy 3:15-17 & 2nd Peter 1:3-4 & we could mention others.

But suffice it to say that to counsel, we need the Spirit's power & motivating love in our hearts so that we are full of goodness.

And then we also need the Bible as our authoritative Guidebook and sufficient source of wisdom.

God's Word has the answers for how to respond to life.

We can use God's Word to direct our own paths and to help others.

You don't need a degree in behavior observation to counsel, but you do need a devotion to God's Word.

The Roman Christians could counsel because they had all knowledge that came from God and His Word.

So if you are a Christian, you can counsel with the Word.

Christians can counsel, (1) because we have the Spirit, and (2) because we have the Word.

Now quickly and lastly—point #3—Christians can counsel because we have the church.

Point #3—Christians can counsel because we have the church.

When I say that, you might wonder where I find the church in Romans 15:14, but it's there in the Greek word for one another.

The reference to one another is a reference to life in the church, to relationships with other Christians in the family of God.

We can counsel each other as Christians because we share the same life by the Spirit and the same authority in the Word.

So even if we are scared to speak truth to others, we can start trying in the loving relationships of the local church.

After all, as Greg John said about baptism in his message a couple weeks ago, if you can't stand for Christ with believers who love you, how will you do so elsewhere?

Similarly, the training ground for evangelistic counseling, as we might call it, is counseling one another within the church.

That's the focus Paul was giving in Romans 15:14—that counseling should happen in the normal, ongoing relationships of life and ministry in the local church.

As we interact with one another and inevitably see issues and sin against each other, we can lovingly help each other.

We can instruct or warn or admonish or counsel each other by putting truth in mind.

If we are around each other enough, we will need it to happen.

None of us is perfect, so we might as well admit it and be ready to welcome and offer counsel with each other.

We should be ready to give and receive the application of truth put into our minds to help us in whatever we are dealing with.

We need that and as Christians we are able to give it.

Of course, we all have seasons where we are able to do more than at other times or where we need more counsel than at other times.

But collectively as a whole, the church is the place for counsel.

And I know that you as a church body are able to give it.

I am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to counsel one another.

I'm convinced because of what I see in you and I'm convinced because we have the Spirit, the Word & the church.

Christians can counsel (1) because we have the Spirit & His goodness, (2) because we have the Word and its knowledge, & (3) because we have the church and its relationships.

And if you are saying to yourself, "Yeah, but I'm not sure I want to do that", then you need to submit to the Spirit and pray for love for others and step out in faith and try anyway.

Or if you are saying, "Yeah, but I don't know enough doctrine or how to deal with issues," then you need to get in the Word and ask for good books and study helps to grow in truth.

You should be ashamed if you say the Bible is God's Word and our only authority and you are not faithfully growing in its truths.

If you don't feel equipped, don't make excuses—get equipped.

And if you are saying, "Yeah, but I'm scared I'll mess up," then you need to know I feel that way every Sunday I get up & open my mouth.

The only way to overcome that fear is to step out in faith and prayerfully try to love others by sharing truth.

You could even start by asking questions or by opening your own life to be counseled by others and watch relationships develop in that way.

But we have the church to grow each of us in relational ministry as the training ground also of reaching out to the lost.

And if you say, "Yeah, but I'm not sure I have any of that," then start today by turning from your sin and entrusting yourself now and forever to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Come talk with us afterwards and we'd love to help you because we believe that Christians can counsel.

So feel free to seek biblical counsel from any Christian here or from one of our leaders available after the service.

We'd love to introduce you to life as a Christian and we'd love to pray with you and offer counsel on what you are facing.

We say that every week because we really believe it and meant it.

Now pray with me as we close.