



Counsel from the Cross

Based on book *Counsel from the Cross* by Elyse M. Fitzpatrick & Dennis E. Johnson

Authentic Fellowship Conference March 9, 2018

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I. What is Cross-based Counseling?

- A. Gospel-Centered:** One Christian coming alongside another in need of counseling with the goal of helping him grow in his understanding of the gospel in all its aspects, and helping him apply it to each area of his life, in all circumstances, and then respond in grateful obedience for the glory of God and the building up of the church. (Gal. 2:20)

- B. Gospel-powered: for sanctification,** the progressive process of becoming more and more like Christ, as we live between our salvation (the already) and our glorification (the not yet). Romans 1:16-17.
 - 1. The cross is brutally honest about our guilt and impotence;
 - 2. The cross assures us of our welcome by the Father in His beloved Son.

- C. Gospel Components** (Ephesians 5:1)
 - 1. Gospel Declarations (WDJD)-neglecting these leads to works righteousness, pride, and/or despair; failure to extend grace to others.
 - 2. Gospel Obligations- neglecting these leads to laziness, excuse-making, loose living, ingratitude.
 - 3. Combine both of these

- D. The Gospel informs**
 - 1. How we think of God? Generous, overwhelming grace in forgiveness or as a Pharaoh who demands we make bricks without straw.
 - 2. How we think of ourselves? Forgiven, dearly loved children or slaves trying to earn God's favor by making up for past failures. Fearful of failure, loveless.
 - 3. How we think of others? Family members, loved and adopted and forgiven by the Father, or as fellow slaves who had better pull their own weight.
 - 4. God's view of us before the cross? We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, and more loved and welcomed than we ever dared hope.

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II. How is Gospel-centered counseling different from other approaches?

- A. Psychological: humanistic self-reformation; no unifying system that clearly defines man and his problems. Each system brings own presuppositions.
- B. Materialistic determinism: problems can be diagnosed and solved by balancing chemicals, taking the right pill.
- C. Biblical: sometimes integrates prominent systems of psychology with the Bible. Often omits Gospel declarations, focuses only on “put off” and “put on” duty.
- D. Gospel Centered-In context of relationship (Titus 2:11-14)
 - 1. Allowing the Bible to define who we are, the origin of our problems, and how we can be helped.
 - 2. Goal of counseling to glorify God, not merely alleviate suffering. (Rom. 15:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:9) Jesus’ road to glory was through suffering.
 - 3. Transfer trust from self and counselor to power of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit. (Psalm 40:4)

III. How can we use the Gospel in our counseling?

- A. Focus on the glory of God in the face of Christ through the gospel. (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - 1. Word preached
 - 2. Word studied (examples given from *Crosstalk*, by Michael R. Emlet, p. 57.
 - 3. Sacraments
 - 4. Compassion and correction of our siblings in the family of God.
- B. Address our love problem as genesis for every sin we commit. We either don’t obey the command to fully love God, or to love our neighbor (Mt. 22:37-38). Trusting God’s love for us alone, as demonstrated by the cross, will ignite a passion in our hearts. Only the gospel annihilates self-condemnation. Only love stimulates love. (1 John 4:19) “We love because he first loved us.”
- C. Examples of love-filled obedience and dutiful obedience: (Hebrews 12:2) “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” (Neh. 8:10) Repent and mourn sin for one day (Atonement), followed by week of feasting and rejoicing. (Feast of Weeks)
- D. Examine what the gospel details tell us about God, ourselves, and others:
 - 1. **Incarnation:** 1) God so loved he gave...; Jesus knows exactly what it’s like to walk in my shoes. He sympathizes with my weaknesses and suffering. He lived this life perfectly. 2) His righteousness is mine. I am not alone in a hostile universe. 3) God loves my enemy too. Jesus offers his righteousness to him as well. Because Jesus served even his betrayers, I can serve mine also. (Apply this to circumstance: because of this...I can...)

2. **Substitutionary Death and Burial:** God turned his back on Jesus so I would never be forsaken. Jesus suffered God's wrath so I don't have to. God loves me based on the performance of his Son, not anything I can do. I am utterly helpless, a sinner, traitor; I have no basis for pride, self-righteousness, contempt for others, yet I am loved and no longer an object of wrath. As I mourn my sin, I can know God's comfort, knowing I am forgiven, and my old self is buried with Christ. I can forgive and comfort the one who hurt me.
 3. **Bodily Resurrection:** God is satisfied with Jesus's sacrifice. He overcame evil with good and continues to do so. He forgave, adopted me and united me with Christ. The power of sin is broken, and I can live confidently, pursue righteousness, be free to love because I have been made new and ultimate glory is assured. I can love my enemy. If he is a believer, he is my brother.
 4. **Ascension and Reign:** God promises my inheritance, victory over evil, Christ's intercession and care. I am confident in his loving rule; that this trial isn't all I'll ever experience; I can have faith to persevere today.
- E. **Apply the Gospel to emotions (such as anxiety, depression, or anger) which are mirrors of the heart telling us something we treasure is being threatened.** A thumbprint look at gospel and anxiety: we have other gods, such as respect, a good reputation, success, love. Our treasure is not in our Savior's kingdom and his righteousness (Mt. 6:33).
1. What does **incarnation** say about this? We can rest assured that the One who bore our flesh is providentially watching over us. Because of His sinless life, we can stop worrying about our reputation or trying to make ourselves look good in others' eyes! We are sinful and flawed, but loved and welcomed, and counted righteous.
 2. What does the **crucifixion** say? Every debt we owe for failure to love, honor and obey him and others has been paid in full. We are forgiven.
 3. What does the **resurrection say**? We can rejoice his new life is flowing in us. We don't have to establish our identity. Christ is our life. Because he **ascended** we can trust we are his children, not slaves, and he has glorious plans for our future (pp 136-137). We can see anxiety as a good gift because it reveals our false gods and points us to our true treasure Jesus Christ. "The Lord is near" (Phil. 4:5b) comes immediately before Phil. 4:6a "Be anxious for nothing." Then we can obey Paul's command to "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 4:4-6) as part of renewing our minds. The goal is not just thought-replacement, but a relational experience that involves the whole being, and realigns our thoughts, attitudes and actions to God's truth and service to others.

IV. Summary

- A. *Counsel from the Cross* trains us and others to self-despair, leading us to Christ. All our obedience is by his power and for his glory, a *cruciform obedience*, because of the cross, not as slaves, but as thankful children. “The point is precisely that the power to do good comes only out of this wild claim that everything has already been done.” (p.171)

- B. Remember what the Gospel says about us: *we are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, but more loved and welcomed than we ever dared hope.*