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A Contrast and Comparison of Counseling Methods

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There are two sections of counselors in the world today. There are Christian counselors, and Non-Christian (secular) counselors. Both groups of counselors have the ultimate goal of helping their client, but do not always have the same method or ideology to achieve that goal. The purpose of this paper is to examine the similarities and differences of the two counseling groups and to reflect on how Christian counselors are at a distinct advantage to help their clients better.

Goal of Christian Counseling

The goal of Christian counseling is to bring the client to a place in their life where they are mature in Christ, ready for worship, and equipped for effective service (Crabb, 1977). That is to say that the client thinks like Christ about himself and those around him. The client arrives in a place that they can worship God on high, and have the skill sets necessary to overcome whatever obstacle they are facing to be an effective servant for the Kingdom.

Crabb (1977) suggests that maturity involves two parts, immediate obedience and long-range character growth. These are similar to the goals set forth in secular counseling. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a method that is goal oriented ("Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy," 2010). The concept of this method is to set attainable goals each session for the client. This is comparative to the method set forth by Crabb in the sense that both are looking for short-term and long-term change. Maturity is determined by how one acts and behaves in different situations.

Another method that has great comparison in achieving maturity is the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. This model seeks to work in such a way that the client overcomes irrational thinking based on emotions to realize reality (Johnson, Ridley, & Nielsen, 2000). In comparison

to Christian Counseling, REBT seeks to have clients become more mature as they realize what is or is not reality in their life.

A third comparison can be found on the Rogerian Theory which seeks to have clients go on a mission of “self-discovery (Kensit, 2000). Like Christian Counseling, this moves to see the client mature in a way that they could not do on their own without counseling. With the direction of the counselor being supportive and direct, the Rogerian method allows the client to mature by coming to self-conclusions about their world and how they can and need to change.

The main contrast between secular counseling and Christian counseling is that the Christian counselor is not just wanting the client to become a better person, but to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The main goal of the Christian counselor is to see the person discover Christ in such a way that true healing takes place and regeneration and sanctification continue to process in their lives.

Basic Concepts

Crabb (1977) defines some basic concepts for the Christian Counselor. First, he puts focus on the personal needs of the client. Everyone has two basic needs, the need to feel secure, and the need to feel significant. Second, he puts focus on motivation of the client. He notes that motivation is fueled by our needs. Everyone will be motivated to pursue something of greater satisfaction based on their needs. The third focus that is emphasized by Crabb is personality structure. This area focuses on what actually makes up the person in our client? Areas like the mind, will, and emotion are all taken into account.

To compare, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy uses sensitivity to the client religious leanings in order to foster an increased motivation for change (Johnson et al., 2000). REBT utilizes religion to the advantage of the counselor to learn behaviors and beliefs of the client.

Understanding the religious beliefs of the client, allows the counselor to then understand the client themselves.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy also has similarities to the concepts of the Biblical model proposed by Crabb. CBT has the goal of meeting the personal needs of the client by letting them work out their thinking to realize and change what their self-defeating behavior is in their life ("Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy," 2010). CBT also focuses, according to Andrews, on acquiring skills to meet the needs of the client. Also, by giving the counseling relationship a time limit, CBT motivates the client to work hard at true change.

The Rogerian Theory is similar by way of focusing on the personality structure of the client. According to Kensit (2000), Rogers suggested that the intent of the theory is for the client to self-actualize to find their full potential. Like Christian Counseling, the Rogerian Theory focuses on those personal traits for the client to discover purpose and self-worth.

The differences between the secular approach and the Christian approach is leaving out the work of the Holy Spirit. Crabb (1977) recognizes that the Holy Spirit is the one who creates real change in the life of the client, everything else is a mere human attempt and not adequate. Secular approaches do not recognize the work of the Holy Spirit and of Christ in the life of a client, or the lack of Christ. Therefore the transformation of the client would be extremely difficult to achieve in a non-Christian setting.

Basic Strategy

Crabb sets forth a basic strategy in his book Effective Biblical Counseling (1977) for Christian Counseling. He recognizes that first we must determine how the problems that a client is facing developed to begin with. Crabb asserts that most of the perceived problems a client faces stem from a misunderstanding of their basic needs. Crabb asserts that the Christian

Counselor must educate the client to a right way of thinking about their true needs in order to see a positive change in behavior. The focus of the strategy for the Christian counselor should be what we are actually trying to change. That focus needs to be more than just behavior, it needs to be the thinking of the client as well.

There are similarities with this thought in the secular counseling world as well. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy focuses heavily on changing the thinking of the client as well. According to (Johnson et al., 2000) this approach to counseling seeks to ask questions about the beliefs of the client in trying to understand their behavior. For instance, they want to know whether or not the client's beliefs result in thinking that alters reality and may be potentially harmful.

According to Andrews ("Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy," 2010), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy is also fused with Behavior Therapy. They seek to find what is causing the behavior, and how to change the behavior in a positive manner for the client. This goal oriented approach makes the client play an active role in identifying bad behavior and the necessary steps to change the behavior.

The Rogerian Method also maintains a goal of behavior change, however, the theory assumes that no person can know what is good behavior for an individual other than the individual himself (Kensit, 2000). The client must make decisions for their own personal benefit and the job of the counselor is to remain unconditionally positive in order to help the client reach that goal.

Crabb (1977) actually points out the contrast between Christian Counseling and Secular Counseling. The difference is that the strategy of Christian Biblical Counseling is not to merely change the behavior, but to change the person in Christ. Secular Counseling focuses on

whatever makes the client “feel good.” In other words, to the secularist, as long as it makes you feel good and does not harm anybody else, the mission of the counselor has been accomplished. For the Christian, our mission is to have the client gain a deeper relationship with Christ and to grow in His love.

Developing a Counseling Program in the Local Church

Crabb (1977) suggests that the need for Biblically-based Counseling is growing rapidly. He notes that the church should equip its people to serve as lay counselors for the masses. He does not ignore the fact that sometimes this model of counseling will not be fully sufficient and professionals will need to be brought in, but he does believe that a great deal of growth can be attained through counseling ministry.

Crabb believes that there should be three levels of counseling within any counseling ministry. Level 1 should be encouraging, level 2 should be exhortation, and level 3 should be enlightenment. With each level comes a necessity for a higher degree of training, though not necessarily professional training or licensing. He suggests that level 1 should include everyone within the church by utilizing encouragement for meaningful ministry. Level 2 should have people that are knowledgeable of the Scriptures and well trained in interaction skills who can apply practical application to the Biblical principles. Level 3 could take up to a year of training because of the demands necessary to counsel in a nonorganic way for the needs of the local church.

The contrast between the Biblical model and the Secular model should be obvious. The secular model does not have a use for a counseling ministry within the church. In the secular world counseling is done by trained professionals as they have the skill sets necessary and the

education necessary to undertake such a task as complicated as understanding, or trying to understand the human mind.

Conclusion

There are many similarities between Christian and Secular counseling, as well as many differences. However, Christian-based counseling has a distinct advantage. Biblical Counseling focuses on Christ while the secular world focuses on feelings. It is this focus of the Biblical Counselors that give them advantage as they pursue what is an eternal Kingdom reality and not just earthly perceived reality.

Without this perspective the secular community cannot give clients what they truly need to find, Jesus Christ. They cannot help a client understand the importance of the Holy Spirit or how He can change their life because they do not understand or care to understand that realm of reality. Their main goal is to make people feel good within their own perception of reality.

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