

HOW TO COUNSEL FROM THE BIBLE

Biblical Principles to Follow When we Mentor or Counsel One Another
Hebrews 3:7-15,13:7, Titus 2:3-5, Proverbs 8:1-3,22-36.11:14. 15:22, and 18:24
Pastor Richard Carlson

This past week I talked with a Christian man who called me wanting help with his marriage. His wife has left him, and she refuses to receive counsel. He has even been blocked legally from speaking with her. The problem in counseling or mentoring is that if help is not sought in time, there can come a sad moment when minds are made up, and when counseling is not possible. That moment is when either the husband or the wife have said, "I have made up my mind, and I refuse to seek counsel." Those are tragic moments. Yet, there are times when counsel is needed, necessary, and God wants to use you; when each of you can be counselors if you know the Word of God. Peer counseling with each other is a wonderful way God uses to stop believers from going down a road to danger, divorce, and death.

Since counseling each other is so integral to body life in the family of God, I want to share a few biblical principles God has shown me in counseling within the Body of Christ that work. These are principles that are necessary if we are to help each other make it past crises-points that arise, which perhaps only one or two of us even know about. God wants us to stand in the gap for him day after day, and He calls us to be willing watchmen and women who can see trouble ahead, and who are willing to risk for Jesus to use His Word wisely so families, marriages, and personal lives can be saved. Periodically I am asked as I was this past week, "What should I say to someone in the body of Christ who is facing problems with their parents or with their spouse? Today, I want to bring us biblical principles we need to agree on, so we can guard those we love at all costs, from bitterness, taking up umbrages, separating, and divorce. What are these Biblical principles that God wants us to acknowledge and use in counseling each other? Here are eight simple principles that we can hold on to as we try to avert disaster when we see storm clouds rising in our lives or in each other's lives.

THE PRINCIPLE OF PRESERVING UNITY IN THE BOND OF PEACE.

(I.) We as born-again believers are the family of God. We must act as one. The scriptures are so clear in Ephesians 4:1-3. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is so easy to help each other in a sad way where one person is helped at the expense of the other. If we are counseling couples, we must do everything possible to be careful to never take sides. God wants us to listen and strive to preserve the unity of every marriage. If we decide that a particular marriage is not worth saving, we should not seek to counsel for God because that strikes hard against His Word. We read in Malachi 2:15-16, "But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit... Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel... So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." If

we are counseling parents of children or teens or counseling children and teens, we must do everything possible to foster respect and honor for everyone concerned, children to parents and parents to children, and never take sides. When we take sides, we almost always help one person at the expense of another. That is not counsel from the Lord. God's counsel is for each person, and no one is beyond the help of God or beyond hope if he or she receives and follows God's Word. When you find yourself saying, taking up for one side or the other, "If I were you, I wouldn't put up with that, we are counseling, but our counsel is the counsel of the world and not from God. God's counsel is not giving others our opinion. Secondly,

THE PRINCIPLE OF LISTENING AND TELLING. (II.) The Bible says, "He who gives an answer before he hears, It is his folly and his shame." (Proverbs 18: 13) In other words, shot-gun counsel from the hip, with words saying, "This is my hunch," such words whether insightful or not, without hearing our story, are out of God's boundaries of wise counsel. Once in a great while, I counsel people from out of state, when they come up here for a full day's counsel. Before they come, I ask them to send me their whole story. I ask them about how they grew up in their early preschool years, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood including since marriage. I want to know the main joys, the main sorrows, and should God reveal something else, they think I should know, whatever that may be for them to share, that information may be part of the key to understanding and wise counsel.

But as we share with others, we need to be good listeners, and not jump to conclusions. If we won't hear their whole story, it is almost always true, our counsel will be unwise, unprofitable, and wounding. Chuck Girard in his song in 1983, wisely says, "Don't shoot the wounded, they need us more than ever They need our love no matter what it is they've done. Sometimes we just condemn them, And don't take time to hear their story; Don't shoot the wounded, someday you might be one. It's easy to love the people who are standing hard and fast, Pressing on to meet that higher calling. But the ones who might be struggling, we tend to judge too harshly And refuse to try and catch them when they're falling. We put people into boxes and we draw our hard conclusions, and when they do the things, we know they should not do, we sometimes write them off as hopeless and we throw them to the dogs; our compassion and forgiveness sometimes seem in short supply. So, I say, "Don't shoot the wounded, someday you might be one."

THE PRINCIPLE OF TRANSPARENCY. (III.) God's Word tells us, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4: 13) Whenever a person needs help, and they are open to receive counsel, it never helps unless there is total honesty, integrity, and openness.) If we desire to be counseled, we should never purposely refuse to disclose who we are, because God knows us. Why desire help and then deceive? Total transparency takes time and trust. It's not always that everyone we counsel with is confidential. When we need counsel, most of us know we are trusting whomever we are talking with, to keep our confidence. Sadly, many well-meaning people tell only their best friend who does the same, and soon everyone knows our story.

Don't attempt counseling without God leading you and depending on Him completely. To start a process, you don't intend to finish, or do not have the skill from the Lord to finish, is like leaving a person on the surgical table while you go fishing or go get on Google for help. Peer counseling takes time to get to know each other. I recommend to us all that most peer counseling and mentoring be done by couples or two women or two men with couples or persons of the same gender. There will be "aha" moments when we or others share our story. Those sorts of times are when God is showing us ourselves, or another person we love. Those moments can help dramatically. It is sinfully natural for us to be critical and see each other's weakness. It is holy and spiritually life-changing to see ourselves and others in the light of God's truth. Fourthly,

THE PRINCIPLE OF FULL DISCLOSURE. (IV.) I Kings 19: 9 records, "Then Elijah came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold the word of the Lord came to him and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God's question to Elijah is a good question to ask or to be asked. "What are you doing here?" It is so important for us all to have some sort of idea in our heads and hearts and souls about what we believe is the reason we are in the place we are in. We may miss the right reason, but we learn much about ourselves by simply verbalizing what we believe is the problem. You'll notice the next time you go to a doctor; he will almost always ask you your presenting problem—"What's going on?" It would help us all when we realize we or another person we love are not acting or talking or seeming normal to ask them prayerfully and kindly, "What's going on? You don't seem yourself." God requires that I give it my best shot to know what is going on in each of your lives. He says to me in Proverbs 27:23, "Know well the condition of the flock that is among you." Peter goes on to elaborate in I Peter 5:2-3, saying, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." Parents and spouses, when you ask the question, "What's going on? Something is off kilter with you," don't quickly accept the answer, "Nothing." That nothing is almost always definitely something. Seek it out with love and tenderness.

THE PRINCIPLE OF KNOWING WE ALL FACE COMMON PROBLEMS. (V.) I bank on one Bible verse for every time I counsel. That verse, as I told you about last Sunday, which is found in I Corinthians 10: 13. "No temptation has overtaken you. but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to bear it." We all are unique people who are facing common problems. Honestly facing our common sins and our common struggles is hard on us all, though uniquely different for each of us. The spiritual surgery God wants to do in our lives is not easy, but it works, if we stay on the altar, as living sacrifices. Romans 12: 1, 2 is God's cure for most of our counseling needs if we will surrender. "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMBLY RESPECTING GOD’S AUTHORITY AND HIS DIVINE BOUNDARIES.

(VI.) God’s divine boundaries are love, respect, honesty, and obedience. God tells us to love Him with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. Jeremiah 31:33 states the word of the Lord, saying, “I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Each of us tend to either abuse authority with a harsh or domineering attitude, or misuse authority, meaning we reinterpret God’s Word to our comfort and liking as to what God says with authority, or we neglect authority—acting as if we are on our own and don’t have to answer to anyone. We all were reared in different ways, and we have uniquely reared our own children, often similarly to how we were raised. Sometimes, just sharing how we were raised and how we have raised our children, being open about our weaknesses and our struggles with authority on all sides, is a huge key to unlock doors in being counseled or in counseling or mentoring others. It can be the door to victory in our home or in our marriage. Our relationship with authority affects all of our life, our childhood, our marriage, and our work relationships as well as our relationships in church. If we do not personally accept God’s biblical boundaries, we will not be able to give or to receive biblical counsel. This is the elephant in the room for most counseling. Is there a humble respect for the authority of God’s Word? If not, all bets are off as to whether we will give or receive anything of value from biblical counseling.

THE PRINCIPLE OF GOD’S UNCHANGEABLENESS, IMMUTABILITY.

(VII.) James 1:17 declares, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” God’s Word always works in every culture, including in America in 2023. Those who explain away what the Word of God teaches, saying our culture and our time are different, they forget that God cannot lie, and His Word is forever true. God’s Word tells us in Psalm 119:89, “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled and firmly fixed in heaven.” This principle allows us to counsel, and to be counseled from the Word of God without concern that the Word is not accurate or a proper foundation to stand upon. Should you ever say, “I know the Word of God says this, but I believe, stop mentoring, peer counseling, and get right with God, and trust His unchangeable Word, forever settled in heaven, for He cannot lie. He is God. If you are being mentored and your counselor or mentor tells you, “I know the Bible says, but I have found that...” – stop right there, that is your last time to be counseled by this person, because they have no biblical frame of reference to help you. It’s no more helpful than asking counsel from anyone or everyone on social media and receiving everyone’s idea as being true. Many years ago, G.K. Chesterton said, “If people deny believing in God, they never believe in nothing. No, they believe in anything.” Lastly,

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFESSION OF SIN, REPENTANCE, AND HEALING FROM GOD.

(VIII.) James 5:16 teaches the amazing path to ultimate victory, repentance, forgiveness, and healing. “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Should you hear people put down confession and forgiveness, simply know that they are not close

to victory. You may hear many people characterize God's Word in James 5:16 as "You're just one of those "kiss and make up" people that believe mutual confession heals. Yes, I am. I make no apologies. Where there is no repentance from any known sin, no matter how justified you claim you are, there will never be a victory or a healing from heaven. This coming week, I will be Zooming with four people as I have been asked to be a Philippians 4:3, "yokefellow," to seek two wonderful men of God—living many states apart, to find reconciliation. I am in my flesh, if I am honest, apprehensive, because I know how we all are in our spirits. We tend toward pride, and pride makes us dig in our heels and refuse to budge or give an inch. But I know the power of God. I believe in His Word when He says mutual confession brings healing. It can, it does, it has done, and it will always bring healing.

But I hear an anvil chorus of good and godly folks saying, "I believe in contingent confession and healing." You show me change and I will forgive you. Plenty of good and godly people (not following the Word of God) demand change before they will forgive and look to God for healing and victory. Demanding change is like asking a peach tree to bear apples. It won't work. Ignoring the problem and thinking time will heal the wound is like asking peat moss to become lasagna. It won't. All lasting healing in relationships comes with contrite confession of sin, and most often in parent-teen relationships or spouse relationships, that healing must begin with mutual repentance, confession, and forgiveness. You may say, "There's no way in the world I am going to repent, when they are the only one in the wrong." Sadly, for most of us, we forget in our lives, in our mentoring, or in our counseling, there is rarely a time when all the sin is on one side, with one party wrong 100% and the other lily white.

That's why the Word of God deals with life as it usually is, with two sides who have sinned in one way or another, and the Word declares, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." There are many more great biblical principles, but this week, these are the eight principles God has placed on my heart to share. I know These principles work. They are eternally settled in heaven. They have worked for me, and they will work for you. May God help us guard His Word and His character as we seek to help others, in mentoring and counseling them, and may none of us settle for counsel that denies the power and authority of God's Word. I love you all. Amen.