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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Competent to Counsel

Romans 15:14

Introduction: Analyzing Psychoanalysis

The November 29, 1993 issue of Time Magazine featured a series of articles on the turmoil in modern psychology. The magazine cover featured an artistic rendition of Sigmund Freud, with the top of his head being assembled like some kind of three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle... the Time Article asked the question, “Is Freud Dead”?

The gist of the article is that psychotherapy, originated by Freud in 19th century in Vienna, with its pictures of skilled therapists with notebooks listening to patients who are reclining on couches and remembering their pasts... that whole approach is under severe attack, but yet Freud’s influence is actually increasing.

there are now more than 200 talking cures competing in the U.S. mental health marketplace, and 10 to 15 million Americans doing some kind of talking

The mere fact of so many approaches to counseling (“talking cures”) shows the confusion in this supposed “science”

The mere fact that 10-15 million Americans feel the need for this kind of counseling points to the desperate need our neighbors and co-workers have for genuine answers to the problems that are making them miserable

I. A World Crying for Good Counsel

A. Sin’s Ravages Visible Everywhere

1. Addictions
2. Family conflict and destruction
3. Escalating mental anguish and temptations
4. The world’s response: “Get some counseling”
5. More and more the counseling is coupled with medications: prescriptions for mood and behavior altering drugs are proliferating

6. All of this is intensely important for us as Christians who have the gospel as the only true solution to man's problems:

Franklin Graham: Key to evangelism is running your finger around the cup of their hearts and finding where sin has left its cracks

Psycho-therapy stands as a direct challenge to the spiritual healing ministry of Christ, who said

Luke 5:31-32 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

B. A History Lesson on Psychology

1. Sigmund Freud's twisted revolution

- a. Key to all "mental illness": what happened to you in the past, and many of the most significant issues lie in repressed memories
 - i) "Medical model" of mental illness: it's not your fault
 - ii) Essentially the issue is what others have done to you
 - iii) Your mother was too protective, your father too harsh, some bully in school terrorized you, etc.
- b. Purpose of counseling: to dredge up past memories and deal with them
 - i) Recently especially: the idea of a "hidden past", suppressed memories
 - ii) Counselor's job: to trigger these memories and help the patient to address them constructively
 - iii) Some problems starting to emerge: to outlandish claims of satanic ritualism, bizarre abuses, infant human sacrifices, etc., all held as true and accurate even though there is absolutely no evidence these things ever happened... leads to a Salem witch hunt cycle of accusations and denials
- c. Many of Freud's theories showed more about his own perversions than about the real care and cure of souls
- d. However, the basic ideas remain: man is not responsible... guilt is imaginary, the key to therapy is digging up the past

2. Major schools that followed

- a. B.F. Skinner: Behaviorism

- i) Basic concept is that man is totally conditioned by training, by positive and negative reinforcement
- ii) To understand behavior, you have to understand the environment that shaped it
- iii) To change behavior, you have change the environment, retrain the mind
- iv) Bottom line: man is nothing more than a machine to be programmed by external stimulus

b. Carl Rogers: Reflection

- i) Human beings are basically good, and like all living creatures will try always to make the best of our existence
- ii) Evolution has given us everything we need for being all we can be
- iii) A counselor's job is to help the person find their own solutions to the problems they face
- iv) The idea is: they know themselves and their situations far better than the counselor ever will
- v) The counselor's job is just to reflect back to the client their own ideas and feelings
- vi) The goal is to help the person reach their own highest potential
- vii) So, the counseling session involves the counselor simply repeating back to the person what they are saying, like a mirror:
 - "So you're saying that you would really like to quit your job but you're afraid of the consequences"
 - OR "You feel that your husband doesn't appreciate you for all the ways you care for his needs"
 - OR "It seems that you wish your son would be more responsible"
 - "You feel like you're on a roller-coaster, and there's no way to get off."
- viii) The most famous question for the Rogers technique of counseling is **"How does that make you feel?"**

3. Twenty-first century counseling: widespread chaos

GRAND DELUSIONS: *Psychotherapies Without Feeling*

by Dr. Arthur Janov (Posted June 2005 on primaltherapy.com)

In no other area of medicine is there such disagreement about the nature of a disease, what its symptoms are, and how it manifests itself, not to mention its causes. In short, the field of psychotherapy today is nothing less than chaotic.

Janov listed counseling techniques as wide ranging as prescribing drugs, using hypnotism, analyzing guilt into oblivion, acting out therapies like gestalt, using mild shock treatment, retraining people to think differently about their actions and redefine them, biofeedback therapy, and daydreaming and image therapies.

Janov's final assessment: None of them treat the causes of neuroses, only the symptoms!!

4. "Christian counseling": imitating the world
 - a. My training at Gordon-Conwell, an evangelical seminary, was essentially Carl Rogers' technique with a thin coating of Christianity over it
 - b. Text book, *Practical Psychology for Pastors*, had almost NO Scripture verses, even on topics like anger or anxiety for which straightforward Bible verse would have helped
 - c. At the root is the concept that the Bible doesn't have much to contribute in the counseling of angry people!!
 - d. The whole approach was one of "reflective listening", of helping people find the answers within themselves
 - e. In order to do this effectively, we had to learn not to do any of the following:
 - i) Ordering, directing or commanding
 - ii) Warning or threatening
 - iii) Giving advice, making suggestions, providing solutions
 - iv) Persuading with logic, arguing, lecturing
 - v) Moralizing, preaching, telling them their duty
 - vi) Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming
 - vii) Agreeing, approving, praising
 - viii) Shaming, ridiculing, name-calling
 - ix) Interpreting, analyzing
 - x) Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling
 - xi) Questioning, probing

- xii) Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, changing the subject
 - f. When the time came to give solutions, our basic role was to help them solve the problems themselves, in whatever way seemed best to them
 - g. “Christian counseling” all over the country is often very little different than worldly counseling... it’s just done by Christians
 - h. Also, fundamentally pastors and other Christians are told that real counseling must be done by professionals, that we are incompetent to deal with the weighty issues of the cure of souls... that is best left to the PhDs and the trained psychiatrists
5. Jay Adams’s healthy revolution
- a. In 1970, Jay Adams published a revolutionary book called *Competent to Counsel*; It shattered many of these myths
 - b. Its fundamental approach was something called “nouthetic counseling”, which I will define for you in a few minutes
 - c. It is essentially using the Bible to address the effects of sin in people’s lives
 - d. It was genuinely biblical, starting with the primary role of the Holy Spirit as THE Counselor, and of the Bible as sufficient for all counseling needs
 - e. His groundbreaking work has led many to call Jay Adams the “Father of Biblical counseling”

6. NANC

- a. National Association of Nouthetic Counselors
- b. Founded in 1975 as a direct result of the ministry and writing of Jay Adams and the need for an organized movement of truly biblical counseling
- c. Centerpiece: **the Bible is sufficient for the counseling needs of God’s people, and God’s people, complete in goodness and knowledge, are competent to counsel**
- d. NANC exists to help give God’s people the training they need to be fully competent as counselors

C. Key Verse on Christian Counseling: Romans 15:14

Romans 15:14 I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and competent to counsel one another.

II. A Church Competent to Give Good Counsel

A. Two Basic Fundamental Doubts of Secular Psychology

1. The insufficiency of Scripture for the cure of souls
2. The incompetence of common Christians to counsel each other
3. These two doubts originate at the human level in the secular world, not in the church
4. BUT the church acts like it agrees
 - a. More and more psychology had worked itself into pastoral ministry
 - i) **Sermons** can frequently be dominated by the most popular psychological theories or approaches rather than sound exegesis of scripture
 - ii) So also **pastoral counseling** can contain very little Biblical counsel, but rather a saturation of psychology
 - b. Pastors were also encouraged to refer church members quickly to trained psychiatrists rather than try to treat them themselves
 - c. Much Christian counseling simply reads the latest trends in secular counseling and dips them in spiritual language
 - d. So, Christian counseling acts like the Bible is insufficient for life and godliness... for solving the problems sin causes
5. So also the church acts like most problems of the soul can only be solved by trained psychiatrists or at least by professional counselors
 - a. Assuming that most serious problems will have to be solved by **medications** anyway, and
 - b. **Buying into the presuppositions** that the Bible is insufficient to solve human problems, and
 - c. **Fear of lawsuits**, and
 - d. **Awe of secular degrees and high-falutin' terms** like "obsessive compulsive disorder" and "attention deficit disorder" and "transference" and "blocking" and
 - e. **Fear of the commitment** of really opening up to people and getting down and dirty in helping people grow

f. FOR ALL OF THESE REASONS we have bought the idea that the bible is insufficient and the church is incompetent to solve people's problems

6. BUT let us understand one fundamental thing: "Psychology" is literally "the science of the soul"... and if the Bible isn't given to study the human soul and cure it so it can worship God, what was it given for? And if fellow Christians aren't just the persons who can wield this powerful weapon, who can?

B. Paul's Context: The Roman Church

1. Well acquainted with their faith... they were a very famous and important local church

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

2. Has now completed over fourteen chapters of doctrine and exhortation
3. Roman church a mixed church, Jew plus Gentile

C. Paul's Assessment of them

Romans 15:14 I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and competent to counsel one another.

1. Persuaded, satisfied
 - a. Having investigated their conversion and growth into maturity
 - b. He has become convinced of the statement he is about to make
 - c. Therefore, it is not a given that EVERY CHRISTIAN is "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and competent to counsel one another"
 - d. BUT I maintain that every Christian CAN be this!!
2. Two criteria for competency in counseling
 - a. "full of goodness"
 - b. "filled with all knowledge"

D. Full of Goodness

1. The essential problem of Freud and Skinner and especially Rogers: they all assume the basic innocence or goodness of the human being
2. One very good insight:

- a. Secular psychology believes the cause of the problem is OUTSIDE every person, and the solutions to the problems are WITHIN every person
- b. Biblical counseling has exactly the opposite view: the cause of the problem is INSIDE every person, and the solution to our problems must come from OUTSIDE every person... from God through Christ

3. Basic anthropology already covered in Romans 3:

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Just as Jesus had said earlier:

Luke 18:19 "No one is good-- except God alone.

This is an especially relevant question when it comes to counseling, since we have already said the Freud, Skinner, and Rogers all deny this basic concept that no one is good

- 4. So, how did the Roman Christians get to be “full of goodness”?

 - a. The gospel has the power to make evil people good

Ephesians 5:8-9 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

- b. To be “full of goodness” is the direct work of the Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

- c. To be “full of goodness” is evidence of spiritual maturity, of the progress of the gospel through a Christian’s life
- 5. Why is it essential to be “full of goodness”?
 - a. True counseling must involve true love for the person you’re trying to help; a genuine commitment to their well-being
 - b. Without genuine goodness, our ulterior motives will pollute our counseling
 - c. One of the issues with professional secular counselors is the possibility of stringing along clients who are paying \$135/hour, counseling them for years... the client is reduced to a meal ticket, a loaf of bread
 - d. True Christian counseling means a commitment to what is good... and not always what that person wants to hear

E. Filled with All Knowledge

1. Paul also says these Roman Christians are “full of knowledge”
 - a. Lit. “having been completed” or “fulfilled” with ALL knowledge
 - b. Strong statement of their full training having been completed
2. that implies a **full training in Christian doctrine**, a knowledge of the deep things of God
3. how does this happen?
 - a. Basically by the word of God... by solid teaching in the wisdom that Scripture alone can give
 - b. The wisdom of Scripture is clearly in view
 - c. So also the teaching ministry of the church
 - d. No one begins their Christian lives “full of knowledge”
 - e. This only comes with time, with immersion in the word of God by the ministry of God anointed teachers
4. Why is it essential to be “full of knowledge” in order to be competent to counsel?
 - a. People are searching for answers... not just “reflective listening techniques”
 - i) A Christian couple, a husband and wife, want to know how to have a godly marriage when they both came from broken homes and have gotten in the habit of arguing about everything angrily
 - ii) Someone else is struggling with habitual lust through internet pornography
 - iii) Someone else battles depression in their daily walk, and has even toyed with thoughts of suicide
 - iv) Someone else wants to know how to discipline their children in a way that will produce loving godliness in them
 - v) Someone else is trying to battle laziness and procrastination
 - vi) A wife is married to a non-Christian husband who ignores her and who mocks her Christian faith
 - vii) Another person has an alcoholic brother and they want to intervene in some way and help them break their sin pattern

- b. These are the issues of discipleship... real issues requiring real answers, real wisdom
- c. The Bible has all the answers we will ever need for life and godliness, according to 2 Peter 1... but it takes a person skilled in wielding the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”
- d. Thus we must be “full of knowledge” in order to be “competent to counsel”

F. Competent to Counsel **One Another**

- 1. These two basic competencies are intrinsic to the Christian life
 - a. Goodness and knowledge are there in seed form from the moment a person is born again
 - b. Therefore, ANY Christian is more competent to counsel on matters of the soul than ANY non-Christian, no matter how much training or how many PhDs or how many award-winning books they have written
- 2. Paul’s phrase: “able” or “powerful” or “competent”
- 3. “One another” shows the family nature of this counseling... we are looking after one another in brotherly love

III. How Should We Define “Good Counsel”?

A. “Nouthetic Counseling”

- 1. Paul uses a key word for “counsel” here: “noutheteo”
 - a. It’s made up of two Greek words: “nous” meaning “mind” and “tithemi” meaning “to put or place”
 - b. The idea is of putting something into someone else’s mind or of calling something to mind
 - c. Nouthetic counseling rests on the primacy of the mind... of the understanding... in the living of the Christian life
 - d. Bad living can always be traced to bad thinking
- 2. The word, however, is used in a wide array of settings that gives sense of the range of its meaning
- 3. It usually has a sense of warning or admonishment based on spiritual truth
- 4. Jay Adams translates it “to confront nouthetically”

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

[Note the passion, the love, but also the WARNING aspect... be on your guard against false teachers who like wolves will spring among even from among your own flock, seeking to devour the sheep]

Paul's warning to the Corinthian church, who were thinking about the Christian life in a worldly fashion UNLIKE the apostles who were like the refuse of the world:

1 Corinthians 4:14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

Paul's gospel ministry was one of "nouthetically confronting" everyone based on the gospel:

Colossians 1:28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Paul says this kind of ministry is precisely the kind all Christians should be doing for each other on a daily basis:

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Paul tells the Thessalonian church to respect elders whose task it is to admonish (nouthetically confront) church members:

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

Paul gives the Thessalonians two commands to warn idle or rebellious people:

1 Thessalonians 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

B. Warning in Love

1. Summing up the biblical evidence, good counsel (nouthetic counseling) involves a loving concern, like a father for children or like a brother for another brother

2. It also involves a sense of danger, a sense of warning of the effects of sin
3. Why necessary? Because we are in a WAR ZONE, with two enemies around us (the world and the devil) and one enemy within us (our own flesh)
4. Our salvation is not yet finished... we are on a dangerous journey through occupied territory, and we must be ADMONISHED... warned... about the dangers that still face us
5. Thus Jay Adams uses the sense of “confronting” someone... helping them to face the danger of sin in their own life

C. Jay Adams’s Three Aspects of Nouthetic Counseling

1. There is a problem to be solved

Adams: “Nouthetic confrontation always implies a problem, and presupposes an obstacle that must be overcome; something is wrong in the life of the one who is confronted.”

- a. Though the Greek word “noutheteo” is closely related to the Greek word for “teaching”, yet teaching alone does not imply a problem... noutheteo does imply a problem... some way that sin has entered or could enter in
 - b. This word implies the need for a change in the person
 - c. SO there is a problem that must be solved
2. This problem is solved by VERBAL means
 - a. You are using your own words, and especially, the words of God from Scripture, to solve this problem
 - b. The problem is not solved by medication, nor by primal scream therapy, nor by acting out skits, nor by aroma therapy, nor by shock therapy
 - c. The problem is solved by verbal means... by WORDS... spoken boldly and clearly, with the authority of Scripture

Adams: “Nouthetic confrontation aims at straightening out the individual by changing his patterns of behavior to conform to biblical standards.”

Clear example: Nathan confronting David after David’s sin with Bathsheba... he told him a story and drew him in, then said “You are the man!!” A strong verbal confrontation

Adams cites a negative example of Eli, who was rebuked by God for NOT confronting his sons who were sinning greatly and bringing the priesthood into disrepute

SO... the second aspect is that the problem is solved by WORDS... by verbal means

Nouthetic counseling doesn't focus on WHY someone does something (Eli asked his sons,

1 Samuel 2:23 "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours."

Nouthetic confrontation more has to do with WHAT

“What did you do?”

“What is the problem?”

“What have you done to rectify the problem?”

“What does God's word say about this problem?”

Freud and Skinner and Rogers may be interested in the “Why?” because their view of therapy is intrinsically different than biblical counseling.

We already know the answer to “why”... it is because “All are sinners and fall short of the glory of God”

Nouthetic counseling seeks to get at the “WHAT” by verbal means

3. The PURPOSE of the counseling is to BENEFIT the counselee
 - a. The goal of the nouthetic encounter is the GOOD of the person
 - b. We see now why being “full of goodness” is essential to this counseling
 - c. The desire is not to harm but to heal, to enable a person to be freed from a destructive sin

IV. All Christians Can and Should Grow in their Competency in Counseling

A. Not Every Christian is Fully Competent to Counsel

1. Paul had to become convinced or persuaded that the Christians at Rome were “full of goodness, complete in knowledge and THUS competent to counsel one another”
2. It is not automatic
3. Some Christians make very little progress in their sanctification... they do not meet Paul's two-fold accreditation of being “full of goodness and complete in knowledge”

B. Every Christian Should Become More Fully Competent to Counsel

1. Every Christian has the full potential to become “competent to counsel”
2. We lack nothing but the spiritual growth that sanctification brings
3. As we grow in our goodness by the power of the Spirit AND in our knowledge by the ministry of the word, we will become more and more competent to counsel
4. THEREFORE: It is part of a Christian’s calling to become more and more “competent to counsel” our brothers and sisters

C. Proof from the Text

1. Note Paul’s train of thought: they are ALREADY “full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to counsel one another”
2. YET look at the next verse:

Romans 15:15 But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder

- a. The verse begins with a disjunctive: “But” or (KJV) “Nevertheless”
 - b. NIV just skips it
 - c. Paul’s train of thought is: “I know you are already full of goodness and complete in knowledge and therefore competent to counsel one another”
 - d. NEVERTHELESS I have written you very boldly on some points by way of reminder
3. This shows the need for ongoing training, even for those already “competent to counsel”
 4. Even the mature in Christ still need more training and more input, if only by way of reminder

V. Biblical Counseling is Essential to our Journeys

A. Two Infinite Journeys

1. Internal journey of sanctification: consistent growth to maturity in Christ
2. External journey of worldwide evangelization

B. Paul’s Connection of Training for Counseling AND His Mission in Life

Romans 15:15-16 But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ

Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

1. Paul considers the training he has given them by writing boldly the Book of Romans as ESSENTIAL to his call to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles
2. Paul considers his training of the Roman Christians so they will be competent to counsel as ESSENTIAL to God's final purpose that the Gentiles themselves will be acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit
3. WHY? Well, we are not finished with the internal journey until we are perfectly sanctified by the Spirit and eternally offering up a sacrifice of praise
4. AND the Church is not finished with the external journey until all the elect from every tribe and nation is also reached with the gospel
5. The ongoing NOUTHETIC ministry of the church is VITAL to the completion of these two journeys
6. We must continue to counsel and encourage and warn and correct and love and cherish each other until everyone is perfect in Christ

Colossians 1:28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

7. Until everyone is perfect in Christ and until the gospel has been proclaimed, we must be in ongoing training to be competent to counsel
8. The process of becoming competent to counsel is itself a part of our own internal journey
9. And using your skills in each other's lives will help advance other Christians in their internal journeys

C. Counseling Each Other

1. Until we are all perfect in Christ, we MUST be involved in counseling each other
2. This is the nature of "watching over one another in brotherly love"
3. It is the nature of discipleship as well
4. As sin rears its head and temptations take root and produce sin patterns in the church, the church must be ready to administer the word of God to bring about repentance

D. Counseling the World

1. Our neighbors and co-workers and friends are drowning in a sea of sin
2. Their marriages are struggling, their children are rebelling, their coping mechanisms are addictive and damaging
3. Sin is killing them, and they are turning to psychiatrists who are numbing the pain and medicating the symptoms and persuading them they are not to blame, it's someone else's fault
4. The gospel is the only answer, and the church is the only one who can administer the remedy
5. A church full of qualified biblical counselors, offering the bible's solutions to sin's damaging effects, could be used mightily by God in bringing about the repentance and faith that will save their souls
6. They will come to us, hurting in some specific way, and we will show them that the gospel reaches down to the root of their souls and heals them through and through

SO... biblical counseling is at the root of our internal and external journeys

VI. Application

- A. Understand Biblical Counseling
- B. Seek Biblical Counseling As Needed
- C. Get Trained!!
- D. Use the Word of God to Solve Problems for Friends, Co-Workers,
- E. Pray for a Developed Biblical Counseling Ministry Here at FBC
- F. Pray for Evangelistic Fruit