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A Critique of Two Theories:

*Effective Biblical Counseling* by Dr. Larry Crabb and

Dr. Ron Hawkins *Model for the Counseling Process*

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### *Effective Biblical Counseling* by Dr. Larry Crabb and Dr. Ron Hawkins *Model for the Counseling Process*

The oftentimes hectic lifestyle that many people experience can sometimes create circumstances that are difficult to deal with. Nobody is immune to problems, and it is life's challenges that enable us to grow as individuals. The way people approach problems varies markedly. Some people live in fear and in discouragement. Others feel that they created their own problems and that they themselves are the only one that can solve it. Still others feel that their problems are no fault of their own, but a product of their environment. Our reactions to our difficult life experiences take one of three forms: guilt, resentment, or anxiety (Crabb, 1977). According to Crabb (1977), many of our difficulties are simply the way we interpret our experiences. Those that have negative feelings towards their experiences are more likely to struggle with guilt, resentment, and anxiety. Those who have positive feelings are better able to cope with their problems and are more psychologically healthy. For this reason, people need a better way to deal with their difficult experiences. For simple problems, the counselor does not need to be a professional, he can be a friend, a confidante or a colleague who can sit back and listen to the person unload his stories and sort out his experiences.

There is no question that the majority of counselors are secular and feel that there is no place for religion in the counseling office. The fact of the matter is that most people in society are religious to some extent, and prefer to work with a Christian counselor. Christians typically rely on their pastors and their Christian friends in helping them through their problems. More than simply looking at psychological matters and issues, Christian counselors usually look to the Bible and to the traditions of the faith in dealing with psychological and mental health issues. In

some cases, counseling that makes use of psychological and psychotherapy strategies is criticized by evangelicals as unbiblical and bordering on the occult. Some evangelicals take a nothing buttery approach which means to hold the Bible as the sole source of authority even for counseling their church members and other Christians.

Christian counseling tends to be seen separately from secular counseling. The reason behind this dichotomy is that Christian counseling relies upon a number of biblical concepts, which are not recognized by secular counselors. These concepts include the nature of salvation and sanctification in Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people, and the integration of the various aspects of the personality and life of a person. Secular counselors believe that there is no place in the counseling office for these concepts. On the other continuum, some Christian counselors discount the benefits and strategies of psychological theories and techniques. Dr. Crabb argues that such a disregard of the strategies offered by psychology is irresponsible and that incorporating strategies of counseling and therapy that are supported in scripture can help a Christian counselor in helping an individual develop a new life in Christ. Dr. Crabb wrote *Effective Biblical Counseling* in an attempt to bridge the divide between what psychology has to offer and use these principles and theories to enrich the view and practice of Biblical counseling. (Crabb, 1977)

In his book, Crabb's thesis is on the transformation of the mind. He does this by focusing on the role of the local church as a community of believers. He stresses that Christians as a group are analogous to a big family helping each other. The local church becomes the main venue for counseling. According to Crabb, counselors do not necessarily have to be trained as lay members of the church. However, they should be able to learn the principles and the practice of biblical counseling. This is the idea that every Christian is a minister.

One of the interesting, and a controversial one too, pronouncements of Dr. Crabb in his book is “spoiling the Egyptians.” Through this idea, Dr. Crabb is of the position that Biblical counselors should learn what they can from what the world has to offer, pick up the good stuff and evaluate them in light of the Bible as God’s word. This pronouncement strikes to the heart of the issue of the dichotomy between secular and Christian counseling.

Throughout *Effective Biblical Counseling*, Dr. Crabb discussed the scriptural basis of counseling and offered a model counseling program to be used in the local church. He outlines a three-level counseling program that can be implemented in the local church level. The first level talks about educating the members of the church with the basic ideas, tools, methods and strategies of biblical counseling. The goal is to equip Christians with the ability to help people who are experiencing mental or spiritual anguish.

The second level deals with the use of exhortation in counseling. Exhortation, as defined by Crabb, requires the use of bible passages and principles to apply in different situations in the lives of people. Those who should implement this kind of counseling should have a certain degree of familiarity with the Bible so that they can readily point out to it when they are in the process of counseling anyone who is in need of encouragement and spiritual and emotional support. Sunday school teachers and pastors are encouraged to take the lead in implementing this kind of counseling for the members of the local church that they are serving.

The third level in this counseling program is in establishing a godly character and display behavior that conforms to the standards of Christ. This is the most challenging part of counseling in some instances resembles the process of Christian education. Inculcating Christian values and principles in the lives of people takes time, and for some, it may take a lifetime. Crabb argues

that the ministry of Christian counseling should always complement the other ministries of the church especially in helping Christians follow Jesus Christ.

Throughout *Effective Biblical Counseling*, Dr. Crabb used pictures and charts to demonstrate his ideas and charts can greatly help the reader in grasping his message in the passages where these aids can be seen. In addition to that, Dr. Crabb masterfully uses the Bible to support his positions about Christian counseling. He puts these biblical principles alongside the theories and practices that he pulled out from psychology. What makes his book effective, and at the same time controversial, is his acknowledgement of these principles and practices as well as claiming that they may be used for the purposes of biblical counseling.

#### Concrete Response

Dr. Crabb's book is a wealth of information for Christians who are interested counseling. He presents the different schools of thought of counseling in both secular and Christian points of view. In doing so, he also added his own comments and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these schools of thought of counseling.

He did not engage in the useless tirade of using Christian jargon and assumptions to dismiss these secular perspectives. Throughout the book, he carefully noted their strengths of both disciplines and what they have to offer. He used a variety of examples to demonstrate these concepts in a real life context. He provides a glimpse of the kinds of dilemmas that Christian counselors may face on a daily bases in their practice of counseling.

Rather than bashing these schools of thought, Dr. Crabb carefully outlines the assumptions and basic ideas of these schools so that the average Christian could understand where the practitioners of such a school of thought are coming from. In addition, he subjects these schools of thought to the lenses of the Bible. Furthermore, he provides his ideas of how

biblical counseling can work if the best features of these schools of thought were adapted into the Christian practice of counseling.

Hawkins (2010) model of counseling is one that conceptualizes of human personality by utilizing a set of concentric circles to demonstrate the factors that make up an individual's personality. His model begins with the innermost self, which represents the core self. He goes on to explain that a more psychologically healthy person has the Holy Spirit at the core. He then adds two more circles to demonstrate how the individual personality is influenced. This is similar to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System theory, which looks at an individual's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment.

Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex "layers" of environment, each having an effect on an individual's personality. This can further explain that one's personality is not stable throughout an individual's lifetime. An individual may be a loving and trusting person, but after a particular event, can become distrustful and neurotic.

Contrary to Crabb, Hawkins places more emphasis on working with the client to build a strategy for delivering the intervention and then engaging the client in taking ownership of this strategy and the process of personal change. Hawkins identifies the first step of a four phase model as gaining an understanding of the real problem. The client talks and the counselor listen. Phase two moves on to reality testing by setting the direction and tracking what the person is saying and reality test what the client presents. From there, a plan of action is formulated and the client is engaged in taking ownership of this plan of action and responsibility for its outcome. Finally, the counselor is active in helping to build support and accountability into the process of change regarding the client. Unless the client takes ownership for implementation, the action

plan cannot be finalized. The counselor takes ownership for developing the plan, whereas the client takes ownership for implementing the plan.

## References

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