

Chapter 1

The Source of Wisdom

Life's great principles have been written down in the Holy Scriptures, but too often they are disregarded, being considered old-fashioned and out of date. Ephraim, a man whose experience is written about in Old Testament Scripture, typifies the person who wavers between advice from God and advice from men. The Scriptures term him "a cake not turned." (Hosea 7:8.) Today we use a slightly different term - "half baked." Of Ephraim the Bible says, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." Hosea 8:12.

No one thinks it old-fashioned today to study the owner's manual after he has bought a new car. The maker of the car knows more about it and how to secure the maximum performance from it than does the purchaser. Is it strange, then, that God, who created man, knows more about man's problems than man himself does?

"The priest's [minister's] lips should keep knowledge, and they [the people] should seek the law at his mouth." Malachi 2:7. A minister is the messenger of God, and as the owner's manual gives information about how to operate the automobile successfully, so the minister imparts information about how man can live successfully.

When someone comes to the minister for an opinion about a problem, he is not to offer his own counsel. A messenger boy who altered a telegram would instantly be discharged. So the minister must not alter God's Word. The text previously quoted teaches three principles:

1. The counselor conforms to these laws himself.
2. He presents Biblical principle as the foundation on which the counselee can build his life. "Like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock." Luke 6:48. This represents one, says Jesus, who "cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them." (Verse 47.)
3. The counselor heeds the text which says, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from

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it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” Deuteronomy 4:2.

Following the principles found in the Bible will not handicap the effectiveness or understanding of the counselor. Instead, he has the promise, “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” Deuteronomy 4:6.

Two cases will show how the minister should apply the Biblical method of counseling and how he reduces his effectiveness by failing to use it.

While I pastored a college church, Jack came to me. Standing in the doorway, he said, “I vowed I would never again go to a preacher for advice.”

“And yet you have come,” I replied.

“Yes,” he said, “I’m trying once more because I think your advice will be good.”

“Jack,” I questioned, “what caused you to be disappointed in former counselors?”

“They didn’t stick by the Bible in what they told me.”

Though I had not at that time fully developed the principles of counseling presented here, a recent experience of my own had prepared me for Jack’s comment. After a close friend had counseled me about a personal problem, I had felt certain that his advice was not correct and not effective. Seeking the reason, I discovered that the Bible did not authorize his ideas. Consequently, I could talk to Jack with a conviction coming from shared experience.

“Jack,” I began, “first of all I want to read you a text of Scripture found in Jeremiah 17:5: ‘Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.’ Instead of trying to tell you what to do, I am merely going to present some Biblical guidelines. We will use these like the stakes farmers used in the winter years ago. The only way they had of following a road in deep snow was by tall, slender stakes driven into the ground along its edges. When between the stakes, they remained safe. They knew they were on the road. Had they ignored the guiding stakes, they would easily have run into the ditch. Following the farmers’ example, we shall use Biblical teachings to guide us.”

Afterward Jack left the church study as if walking on air. He had discovered why so many of his previous counselors had erred. Good

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men, well-meaning Christians, they gave their own ideas and opinions instead of outlining God's guidance.

Later, after the concepts of Bible-oriented counseling had more fully emerged in my mind, I had the privilege to help a young married couple in trouble.

The young wife's mother asked me to call at her daughter's home. During a short first visit, I carefully used the Bible as my authority in approaching their problem. The mother arrived a half hour after I left and, as she later told me, heard her daughter exclaim, "Mother, a minister came to my home, and, using only the Bible, gave me more help in five minutes than all the counselors in this area combined."

When the time came for me to leave the area, I recommended that the couple go to either of two well-known counselors. They declined. Finally the young husband explained why he did not feel free to go to either one of the clergymen. "He is not a Christian."

"What do you mean, he is not a Christian?"

"He offered me poor counsel."

"What kind did he give you?"

"He told me that the man who had come between my wife and me ought to be split down the middle. And that's not Christian."

The minister to whom the young husband referred was not merely a good Christian, but a good counselor as well. He just missed the mark that time. By letting his own feelings of sympathy for his client and his indignation against the extramarital intruder overwhelm him, his emotional comment, instead of helping the young husband, hurt him and ended his influence with him.

Time spent defending the minister who gave this poor counsel would be wasted, I thought to myself. I had done worse than that in my time. But I did resolve not to make such mistakes again. Then I referred the young husband to the other counselor in the area.

"No, I can't go to him either."

"Why not?"

"Well, he is not a Christian either," he grunted.

"What did he counsel you?" I questioned, interested to know how one young man could have had such an unfortunate experience with two ministers in the same area.

"Well," he replied, "he suggested abortion."

Both of these fine clergymen failed the young husband because each had failed to find the Biblical answer or suggestion. They had forgotten their duty to present Scriptural guidance.

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Could the average minister-counselor, as he looks back over his many counseling blunders, not agree with Solomon “every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar”? (Proverbs 30:5, 6.)

Remembering his sacred obligations as a Christian counselor, the minister or trained layman might pattern the introduction to his counseling sessions somewhat like the following:

“Now Mr. —, may I first suggest that you not accept anything I say unless I read it from the Bible. For the Bible says, ‘Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.’ Jeremiah 17:5.

“Moreover, you are under no obligation to believe my interpretation of the principles we find in Scripture or to follow any course of action implied by what I say to you. Your part will be to meditate on the principles and ask God to aid you in applying them to your particular problems. God is your counselor, not I. My role is to present Scriptural principle and explain it as best I can within the limits of my training, experience, and understanding.”