

LESSON NINE

COUNSELING

A. A PASTOR SHOULD BE A GOOD COUNSELLOR.

Every pastor should understand that some of his most effective ministering will be through counseling. This is very time consuming and the pastor may feel that other duties are more important. However, he must remember that his ministry will only be as successful as he succeeds in helping individuals. He has no alternative than to plan his schedule to permit time in personally dealing with the problems and doing his utmost to help each one. Understanding this part of his pastoral duties should cause him to desire to prepare himself to the best of his ability for pastoral counseling.

There are a few ways in which he may prepare himself for this important work:

1. The pastor should have a thorough knowledge of God's Word. In most cases he will find the answer in the Bible. He should be able to use the Scriptures freely as he counsels those with problems.
2. The pastor should develop a genuine love and interest in his people. Unless he has a real love and interest for the individual it will be very difficult to give the right kind of counseling. A person will quickly sense whether or not the pastor is interested and will respond accordingly.
3. The pastor should be a student of human nature and try to understand his people. This does not mean that he will be a busybody and pry into everybody's business. It does mean that he will understand the actions and reactions, the characteristics, and habits of those with whom he will be counseling.
4. The pastor should have in his library some reference books on counseling and have a working knowledge of what they contain.

B. ETHICAL STANDARDS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ALL PASTORAL COUNSELLING.

One of the first things to remember here is that all personal information should be held strictly confidential. Law from being forced to reveal confidential information protects a doctor, lawyer or minister. Such personal information must be guarded as a sacred trust.

In his personal dealings with his flock, the pastor will be confided in very often. Many of his people will unburden themselves and confide in him many personal and private matters. To him they will confess many times their sins and mistakes. The pastor will give them sympathetic hearing in order to help them but under no circumstances should the confidences be betrayed. His mouth should be eternally sealed. Although there should be no secrets between man and wife, yet in this case there is nothing to gain by repeating such matters even to the pastor's wife, and they should go to the grave with them. He must not even make inferences as this breaks the confidence, and makes the saints hesitate before confiding in their pastor.

A second thing to consider in dealing with ethics is that the place provided should be suitable. Counseling should not be given in inappropriate places such as a secluded corner or a parked car. Closed doors and secret sessions can lead to suspicion and criticism. The most ideal place is the pastor's office. Here is a familiar setting where both may relax and the person in need may receive help.

All physical contacts should be avoided other than shaking hands.

If the counselee is of the opposite sex, the door of the office should be left ajar. The pastor should be friendly and cordial, but at the same time discreet.

Counseling sessions should be kept brief. They should not be so short that the counselee cannot unburden himself and receive help, but they should be kept sufficiently brief that no emotional situation can develop.

C. THERE ARE A FEW BASIC RULES THAT EACH PASTOR MAY FOLLOW IN COUNSELLING.

No attempt is being made in this study to give a detailed and exhaustive instruction in the art of pastoral counseling. However, there are a few basic principles, which each pastor may follow.

1. The counselor should be compassionate. Love and compassion are absolutely essential to effective counseling. After all, many times a person is reached through his heart. Most problems brought to a pastor are emotional and spiritual problems. These only can be dealt with on the emotional and spiritual level. Cold logic may be correct in its judgment but can never help the individual in trouble. It is for this reason the counselor must be able to feel for the troubled and disturbed soul.
2. The counselor should be a good listener. The compassionate pastor will listen carefully to the problem. This does not mean that the pastor will probe endlessly into the person's past. But it does mean that the counselee is encouraged to talk. The best way to encourage him to talk is to let him know that he has an interested and concerned listener. Listening is an art and the pastor should seek to improve his listening skills.

Many times just to be able to talk releases the pressure. Talking in and of itself is therapy. The problem looks much different after having been fully expressed. Sometimes the disturbed person realized the proper solution to his problem after he has talked the problem out fully. It is possible for the pastor to lead the counselee to complete victory simply by listening with prayerful compassionate attention.

The pastor need never be surprised or shocked with what is confided in him. He must remember that he is dealing with human nature with all of its weaknesses and failures. After all, if there were not a problem, the individual would not be there confiding in him. No matter just how shocked he might be, he must never allow it to change his attitude towards the person with whom he is dealing. If he reveals his feelings towards the sin committed, than probably the counseling session might as well be concluded at once. He will be unable to help the troubled soul and generally the one in need will immediately refuse to confide further. The link of communication is immediately broken.

3. The seriousness of the problem should never be minimized. The matter may seem trivial to the counselor but it may be a tremendous difficulty to the one seeking help.

4. The pastor should never give counsel until he understands the situation fully. All the facts should be prayerfully considered and sometimes it means several counseling sessions before the real problem is clearly revealed. Also there are times when the pastor should hear the other side of the story before he comes to a conclusion and seeks to give advice. If the problem involves something that the pastor knows nothing about, he should admit his inability to give sound advice and refer the person to someone who can help him.
5. The final principle to be remembered is that the pastor should always seek out the solution to the problem and to encourage the individual to overcome rather than just endure it. Many times the minister will be tempted to take the way of least resistance and only offer comfort to someone in adversity rather than sincerely trying to find the answer. To inspire a person to overcome is much preferred to offering comfort and encouragement in endurance of affliction and misfortune.

D. THE PASTOR SHOULD NEVER WITHHOLD GOD'S ANSWERS TO A PERSON'S PROBLEMS.

The pastor should not withhold from a troubled soul God's answers to his needs. The Biblical solution should be faithfully presented. Then it is up to the counselee to accept it or reject it.

The counselor should not be stern and harsh. He needs to be firm but at the same time faithful, gentle, patient and loving.

If the individual is not a Christian, this is the time to present the plan of salvation - God's offer of forgiveness of sin. If the individual is a professing Christian, this is the time to teach him that he is not walking in the Spirit.

Always lead the individual to trust God and pray. The greatest help that can be given to troubled souls is to lead them to the Lord.

The pastor must never condone sin and often there is a need for reprimand and correction. However, such correction and reproof should be done tenderly and cautiously.

LESSON NINE

SELF HELP TEST

A. Why should a counsellor be a good listener?

B. Write a paragraph on Ethical Standards in Pastoral Counselling.

C. How may a pastor prepare himself for the important work of counselling?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____
