

Can you Recognize A Good Therapist?

Text: James 3:13-18

Introduction: We live in a therapeutic society. It's almost a badge of honor to have your own therapist. We want our hobbies to be therapeutic. We want our work place to be therapeutic. We are drawn to seminars, books and churches that specialize in emotional cures.

Several years ago I was invited to the Berkley campus of the University of California. There was a group of brilliant sociologists directed by a committed Christian named Robert Bellah. Together they wrote a national best seller entitled *Habits of the Heart* followed by another outstanding book entitled, *The Good Society*. In their collaborative writings they portrayed the American historically as a strong willed individual who wants autonomy, i.e. freedom to choose, make his own decisions. This is an individual somewhat described in the signature song of Frank Sinatra, "let the record show, I did it my way." Perhaps that trait gave the impetus to begin this great country. That spirit was an exercise in democracy in the beloved words: "of the people, by the people and for the people." The Bellah group identified three institutions that have acted as governors or safe guards that soften the strong autonomous stance saving us from anarchy. They are the home, the church and the town. Those institutions have begun to unravel as vital forces in the American culture.

One of the movements gradually ripping away the stability of our social ethic is the therapeutic technique. Many of us have purchased the coinage of secular psychology. It is heard in our speech, the sharing of our feelings, expressing our emotional needs, our call for sensitivity, the art of openness, being vulnerable and using words such as introverted, extraverted, intuitives, sensors, etc. Along these lines, Ann Rowen wrote:

I WENT TO MY PSYCHIATRIST TO BE PSYCHOANALYSED TO FIND OUT WHY I KILLED THE CAT AND BLACKENED MY HUSBAND'S EYES. HE LAID ME ON A DOWNY COUCH TO SEE WHAT HE COULD FIND, AND HERE IS WHAT HE DREDGED UP FROM MY SUBCONSCIOUS MIND; WHEN I WAS ONE, MY MOMMIE HID MY DOLLY IN A TRUNK, AND SO IT FOLLOWS NATURALLY THAT I AM ALWAYS DRUNK. WHEN I WAS TWO, I SAW MY FATHER KISS THE MAID ONE DAY, AND THAT IS WHY I SUFFER KLEPTOMANIA. AT THREE, I HAD THE FEELING OF AMBIVALENCE TOWARD MY BROTHERS, AND SO NATURALLY I POISON ALL MY LOVERS. BUT I AM HAPPY NOW, I'VE LEARNED THE LESSON THIS HAS TAUGHT; THAT EVERYTHING I DO THAT'S WRONG IS SOMEONE ELSE'S FAULT.

Here is another witty way to describe this trend. Welcome to the psychiatric hotline!

- If you are obsessive-compulsive. Press 1 repeatedly.
- If you are co-dependent: Please ask someone to press 2.
- If you have multiple personalities: Please press 3, 4, 5, and 6.
- If you are paranoid-delusional. We know who you are and what you want. Just stay on the line so we can trace the call.
- If you are schizophrenic: Listen carefully a little voice will tell you which number to press.
- If you are manic depressive; It doesn't matter which number you press. No one will answer.

Please don't think I am opposed to good counseling. In the early sixties I was intrigued by Dr. Clyde Narramore's ministry in Southern California. I used his book for a class in pastoral counseling. Later Dr. Jay Adams wrote a classic book on nouthetic counseling which I used as a textbook. It calls for the alignment of our mind with the word of God. My efforts in counseling calls for the counselee to begin to take responsibility for their action, and repent and set out a reasonable plan for acceptable behavior. I also am acquainted with some godly counselors to whom I refer people to who need professional help. But I respectfully question much of what has happened in modern day therapy.

I believe this saying by Robert C. Roberts explains why Christians are drawn to therapy.

THESE THERAPEUTIC VIRTUES ARE OFTEN SIMILAR TO THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES, AND THIS IS PERHAPS ONE REASON CHRISTIANS ARE ATTRACTED TO THE PSYCHOLOGIES AND FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THEM. BUT THE THERAPEUTIC VIRTUES ARE NOT ONLY SIMILAR TO THE CHRISTIAN ONES; THEY ARE ALSO, IN IMPORTANT WAYS, **QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THEM "EVEN INCOMPATIBLE WITH THEM"**.

This concern between competing value systems is not new. James the half-brother of Jesus wrote a brief letter to the Hebrew Christians who were under attack for their faith in Jesus as the True Messiah and the One and Only Savior. They were subject to abuse and being ostracized. James feared that in reaching out for help they would seek counsel from the wrong sources and in so doing harm their walk with God. He claimed that there are two sources of wisdom with two different recommendations and two different results.

You have a choice in the words you allow to shape your life.

- First, You need to avoid horizontal wisdom, James 3:15. Notice the source earthly speaks of wisdom derived from human experience and speculation. It is secular in orientation. It is measured by worldly terms. Its aims are measured by what the world deems successful.

The New English Bible renders the word "earthbound." It has no horizon beyond the temporary. It can rise no higher than what humans can do on their own.

- James calls it unspiritual. This word speaks to the sensual. It is related to the animal world where we speak of the instincts. The dog will bark, bite and snarl for no other reason than personal survival. They are doing what comes naturally.
- Then James reaches way down and describes it as of the devil. This is because the words of counsel that are earthly lead to selfishness and disorder.

THE GESTALT POEM illustrates this way of thinking I do my thing, and you do your thing, I am not in this world to live up to your expectations And you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I, and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped.

You may be able to go along with that attitude. The follower of Jesus seeks a higher standard. The follower of Christ desires the words of Jesus to be their way of life. The Christ like practice leaves the believer to become more open to God and others. Wisdom to the Hebrews and to James is not about words or feelings but conduct, v.13 (a good life, a productive life, a fulfilling life.)

YOU NEED TO SEEK VERTICAL WISDOM it flows down from God. II
Timothy 3:16

- It is all PURE, v. 17 free from self- interest, self-ambition, ulterior purposes, and no unjust motives.
- Peace loving, restful, desiring to bring people closer together and closer to God, grieves to see strife and division.
- Considerate, sweet reasonableness, treating others the way we would want to be treated.
- Submissive, easily persuaded, and willing to work toward a solution. Not inflexible or defensive, but gladly corrected.
- Full of mercy, certain compassionate acts. Those acts are fruit, i.e. practical acts of help.

CONCLUSION: We all are trying to reap the harvest which a good life brings. That harvest depends on the words that we hear and apply to our lives.

Isa. 32:8 The noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands. Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." We are verbivorous beings, the words we chew, swallow, and digest will determine how we see the world, and will determine our behavior and character. Begin to ask God for this wisdom each day for each event and experience that comes into your life.

(These sermons are essentially the notes that I use when preaching. They were not printed like one would if writing a book. Hopefully I have removed some of the errors of spelling and grammar, but without secretarial help I know that mistakes will occur. My hope is that the communicator will catch the idea and make it a better sermon for God's glory.)