

## Paul's Confidence in Nouthetic Counseling

Romans 15:14

By Phillip G. Kayser

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In this sermon series we have been going through the foundational issues that drive our vision, give us enthusiasm, that frame our worldview and in some cases, that make us totally different from most churches in Omaha. Now in some cases, those differences are not an issue. We have been called to one part of the vineyard and other evangelical churches have been called to a different part of the vineyard, and there will of necessity be differences. And I just want people to know what my burden and calling is. But this is a case where I am sad to say the church stands in crisis and in need of Reformation. And I do not say that lightly. I myself was trained in humanistic psychology and I have ditched it. I love my fellow pastors in this city, and I want to elevate them and bless them in any way that I can. But I have seen so many people damaged spiritually through psychological counseling, and I have had to undo the humanism of psychological seduction so frequently that I am giving this sermon not just as a distinctive of our church, but as a warning. And I am hoping that through our encouragement, all the churches of this city will eventually embrace Biblical counseling.

In ages past this was really not an issue. The church has always had a confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture to provide answers for counseling, and the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit to provide empowering for counseling, and the sufficiency of the priesthood of believers to provide the support for counseling. But that's not true any more.

Just as the Baal worshippers of ancient Israel integrated the worldly wisdom of Baalism with Scripture and thought they were being faithful to God, today you find seminaries, pastors and Christian psychologists who have integrated the religion of psychology with the religion of Christianity. And you might think this accusation is not fair, but psychology *is indeed* a religion. That has been admitted by many professors of psychology themselves. It has been more and more recognized by humanists that psychology is the substitute religion for the modern man.

For example, Thomas Szasz, a famous professor of psychology at State University in New York, who also edits a major journal of psychology, said, "Psychology... [is] a religion that pretends to be a science." "the human relations we now call 'psychotherapy' are, in fact, matters of religion

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...” And interestingly, even though he is a humanist himself, he speaks of how utterly irreconcilable psychology and Christianity are. They are mutually exclusive religions. In one place he pointed out how this new religion wants no competitors. He speaks of "the implacable resolve of psychotherapy to rob religion of as much as it can, and to destroy what it cannot." No competitors.

Victor von Weizsaecker said, “C.G. Jung was the first to understand that psychoanalysis belonged in the sphere of religion”; Dr. Paul Vitz, professor of psychology and head of the department of psychology at New York University has written an entire book demonstrating that psychology is a religion. It is titled, *Psychology as Religion: the Cult of Self-Worship*. And so, when Christian pastors merge psychology with Christianity, they are engaging in syncretism – the mixture of false religion with true. They may not be intending to do so, but that is the net result. Let me give some other quotes.

Martin Gross wrote, “When educated man lost faith in formal religion, he required a substitute belief that would be as reputable in the last half of the twentieth century as Christianity was in the first. Psychology and Psychiatry have now assumed that role.” Bernie Zilbergeld said, “Psychology has become something of a substitute for old belief systems. Different schools of therapy offer visions of the good life and how to live it, and those whose ancestors took comfort from the words of God and worshipped at the altars of Christ and Yahweh now take solace from and worship at the altars of Freud, Jung, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, Werner Erhard, and a host of similar authorities. While in the past the common reference point was the Bible and its commentaries and commentators, the common reference today is a therapeutic language and the success stories of mostly secular people changers.” (p. 20)

Now the reason I am reading these quotes is because Christian psychologists often try to claim that psychology is simply the objective study of the soul. *Psychos* means soul, and *ology* the study of. But the problem is, science deals with what can be measured, seen and dealt with by the five senses. You can't see the soul, and Scripture says that apart from revelation you can't understand it. **The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can understand it. (Jer. 17:9)** When you are flying blind, you better have the instrumentation of the Holy Scriptures and know how to use them. It's no wonder that psychology which has no infallible standard is in such confusion. Did you know that there isn't just one view of psychology? Depending on how you count them, there are over 400, or if you don't count deviating branches, there are over 250 unique

schools of psychology today, each with its own unique theology, view of man, view of right and wrong and worldview. They are religious systems, some quite different from each other, and others more closely paralleled. Courts are beginning to recognize that there are problems with psychological diagnoses because on any one case you tend to get as many different diagnoses as there are psychologists. It illustrates the truth of Jeremiah 17:9 – “who can understand it?” Modern faith in psychology is not faith founded on fact, but faith founded on faith.

Karl Kraus, a journalist from Vienna rightly says, “Despite its deceptive terminology, psychoanalysis is not a science but a religion – the faith of a generation incapable of any other.” I like that description because it parallels the faith people have in evolution in many ways. Evolution isn’t believed because the facts force them to that conclusion. We all use the same facts, and interpret them in different ways. They believe in evolution because they *need* an explanation and because Creationism is the only realistic alternative, and they have no alternative to believe. He said, “...psychoanalysis is not a science but a religion – the faith of a generation incapable of any other.”

I. What is nouthetic counseling? (from the Greek word *noutheteo*; see Acts 20:31; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thes. 5:12,14; 2 Thes. 3:15)

And when church A adopts Freudianism and sprinkles in some Scriptures and calls itself Biblical counseling, and then church B adopts Rogerianism, and church C adopts Skinnerianism, and they all claim to be biblical, what happens is that people’s faith in the bible wanes. We are in a state of crisis. The church is going to broken cisterns; trusting in faulty experts and merging two religions.

But thankfully, there are Christians all over the world who are resisting this infiltration of false religion into the church and who are raising a Biblical standard to which others can repair. There is the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, the Christian Education and Counseling Foundation, the Biblical Counseling Foundation, the International Center for Biblical Counseling. And there are thousands of pastors who are calling for Reformation. One of the first and boldest testimonies was Jay Adams, and his book *Competent to Counsel* should be read by every parent and every leader.

But here’s the problem. Everyone likes to think of himself as Biblical, don’t he? Even cults call what they do Biblical. There is a huge association of so-called Biblical psychologists who are almost more dangerous than

unbelieving psychologists, yet they have recently coopted the title Biblical. So how do we distinguish ourselves? Biblical counselors around the world have used the term *nouthetic* to convey to people that we don't just add 5% Scripture to what we are doing. All of our counseling flows from the Bible; all of our counseling depends entirely upon the empowering of the Holy Spirit, and all of our counseling takes place in the context of the body of Christ where it's love, accountability and gifts can help. Our goals, methods, strategies, tactics and philosophy of counseling all flows from the Bible. It's not enough to have Biblical goals, but to use pagan methods. That's syncretism; it's not Biblical counseling, even though they call it that.

- A. "nouthetic" comes from the word *nouthetein* in verse 14. No one English word can capture all that is conveyed by the Greek. It involves at least 1) an attempt to change ungodly behavior, 2) verbal confrontation, exhortation, warning or encouragement, 3) empathetic concern for the counselee. One version translates the last phrase "and competent to counsel."

And that's why many of us use the term *nouthetic* to distinguish what we do from what others do. The word *nouthetic* comes from the Greek word *nouthetein* that is found in the last phrase of verse 14: **able also to admonish one another**. It is translated elsewhere as give advice, instruct, counsel, admonish, warn, reprove. One version has, "competent to counsel one another." And I like that translation, but there is more in the term than any one English word can convey. It deals with confrontation, a call to change, empathy and counsel. But I have listed in your outlines the key elements of nouthetic counseling. Let me just read them for you.

- B. The Standard for nouthetic counseling is the Scripture alone. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the Scriptures are sufficient and more than sufficient to make the man of God "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." If we think that we need anything more than the Scriptures for any of the following things listed in these verses, then we make Paul a liar.
1. "doctrine" – the philosophy of counseling deals with the doctrine of counseling, and it must flow from the Bible
  2. "reproof" – the methodologies, strategies & tactics of confrontation are as numerous as there are schools of psychology. Every view of counseling has its methodology of confrontation. But Scripture gives us a standard, and we must confront in the biblical fashion.
  3. "correction" deals with the methodologies, strategies & tactics of putting off old behavior

4. “instruction in righteousness” deals with the methodologies, strategies & tactics of putting on new behavior
5. “good works” deals with the Biblical definitions & goals of mature behavior. Though there are good works that the world offers up that sometimes look close, they are a counterfeit, as we will shortly see.

The bible is sufficient for all of that. We don't need anything more to make the man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. So that is the standard for counseling. Well, that's all psychology is dealing with – good works and bad works. There is a place for medicine and I work hand in hand with physicians when counseling, but that is not psychology.

- C. The Empowering for nouthetic counseling – the full orbbed ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (Romans 15:13) is made possible by our union with Christ (v. 7), and our position in Him (v. 12,16). “Nouthetic counseling” that bypasses this empowering will not be sufficient to provide deep rooted victory over the flesh and the devil.

Let me read point C verbatim: “The Empowering for nouthetic counseling – the full orbbed ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (Romans 15:13) is made possible by our union with Christ (v. 7), and our position in Him (v. 12,16). “Nouthetic counseling” that bypasses this empowering will not be sufficient to provide deep rooted victory over the flesh and the devil.” OK – so let's think about that. If a counselor isn't a believer, he lacks the most important component for victory – God's power and provision. Why in the world would a Christian who is indwelt with all the power he needs, and who has in the bible all the answers he needs, go to a powerless, clueless psychologist for help in his religion? And yet Christians flock to unbelievers who are psychologists all the time. Romans 8:7 says, **the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.** 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, **But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.** The unbeliever cannot even have the spiritual insights needed for counseling, nor does he have the power. Counseling an unbeliever is only going to put a Bandaid on the problem unless God's Spirit regenerates his heart.

Unfortunately, there are some counselors who claim to be nouthetic, but who neglect Spiritual warfare against the demonic, or who fail to help people to walk in the power of the Spirit. They just throw Scripture out and

tell people to do it. All that produces is a dry legalism. When Jesus said, **“Without Me you can do nothing”**, He meant it. We have already preached on the incredible resources that we have in Christ. Ephesians 1 says that He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. We are already blessed with those blessings. But we need to claim them by faith and stand in them by faith. Paul grieved because the Galatians (who were saved by faith) were failing to live their Christian life by faith in God’s power. He said, **O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh.** It’s not enough to have the right standard. We need the very power of God within. Paul warned against people who have a form of godliness, but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5). So, whether you are a counselor or a counselee, you need the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Beware of a counseling that neglects that.

- D. The Covenant context for nouthetic counseling – within the body of believers where ministry, accountability, love and mutual service can occur (Rom. 15:14 with 12:1-8)

And finally, Biblical counseling needs the covenant context of God’s people. In verse 14 it was the members who were doing the counseling as well as Paul. And I’ll get to that in a bit. God has not ordained that we become mature or gain the victory as lone rangers. He wants the congregation to be competent like the church in Rome was, and to be involved in this ongoing admonishment of others through encouragement, motivation, love, support, accountability and mutual ministry. I feel sorry for people who receive counseling without the support system of a church. You are key to success in my counseling. Don’t think that counseling is simply the pastor’s job. It belongs to all of us, and the more mature you become, the more God will use you.

- E. Quote: A.W. Tozer – “True faith requires that we believe everything God has said about Himself, but also that we believe everything He has said about us. Until we believe that we are as bad as God says we are, we can never believe that He will do for us what He says He will do.” (*Gems From Tozer*, p. 54)

## II. Paul had total confidence in nouthetic counseling (v. 14a)

So let’s start to look at these two verses. Let me read them again. Romans 15:13-14. **Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the**

**Holy Spirit. Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.** Or as Williams puts it, “and competent to counsel one another.” There was nouthetic counseling going on in that congregation, and Paul says that he was totally confident in it. He didn’t have to wait until the early 1900’s for Sigmund Freud to come up with psychoanalysis. Paul believed that they already had all the resources that they would ever need to be competent to counsel, and they had it in the first century. And he said, “**I myself am confident concerning you.**” This is a bombshell that needs to be thrown into every church in this nation.

And yet modern pastors and members of churches have been so influenced by the secular thinking of our age that they are not confident in nouthetic counseling. Their confidence lies in the experts of the world – the wisdom of the world to tell them how their soul ought to live.

Ed Bulkley said, “If psychology is necessary to transform the human soul, Jesus Christ becomes a quaint relic of religious antiquity and the church must be recognized as an obsolete cultural vestige that man has outgrown. [Why does he say that? Because the church of the first 19 centuries did not have what it takes to counsel. They were antiquated and hopelessly naïve because all they had was the Bible and the Holy Spirit. He goes on...] If psychologists can duplicate the fruit of the Spirit, sanctification is unnecessary and the Holy Spirit is irrelevant. If psychological counsel is necessary for solving the problems of life, the Bible must give way to *The New Harvard Guide to Psychiatry*. Pastors should sneak away quietly and find an honest job.” (Ed Bulkley, p. 203)

And yet, what does the Scripture say before Freud or Ellis or Rogers or Adler or other worldly experts came on the scene? 2Pet. 1:3 says, **as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.** He says that through the Scriptures and the power of God we have everything that we need to escape from corruption and to live holy lives. 2Cor. 9:8 says, **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.** Do you think God could have put any more superlatives in there? He is wanting us to have the same confidence that Paul had in nouthetic counseling.

And thankfully, there are more and more Christian psychologists who are abandoning psychology completely and engaging in nouthetic counseling. And the interesting thing is that they are finding their success rates skyrocketing. I have a relative who is a shrink, and several years ago he abandoned his training and started following Biblical counseling and found that the results were phenomenal. He is not even remotely tempted to go back to his humanistic training. He has gained the confidence of Paul. And we need to pray that a Reformation would hit the church of Jesus Christ and that it would return to the pure waters of the Scripture and the empowering of the Holy Spirit for counseling.

III. He had total confidence in non-professionals (believing church members) engaging in nouthetic (Biblical) counseling (v. 14a; cf. Col. 3:16)

But I think what is most surprising about Paul's statement is not his confidence in nouthetic counseling. That's easy. You look at the results and it surprises me that anybody would opt for psychology, unless he's just got a lust for academic respectability. The results are staggering. And so it is easy to gain a total confidence in the biblical methods for counseling, or to say, "Sure I believe that Paul was competent to counsel." But Paul goes beyond that. He says something that should be a bombshell to every person who believes in the tyranny of the expert. Let's read it again: **Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren...** He's not just talking to the elders here. He says, **concerning you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and competent to counsel one another.** And this is the beauty of nouthetic counseling. You don't need a PhD. We will be seeing in a moment that there is maturity and experience and training that this congregation had and *needed* to have to be able to counsel. But if you are a believer, you have all of the same resources that I as a pastor have. You have the bible; you have the Holy Spirit and you have the covenant community. The bible levels the playing field and does away with the tyranny of the elite specialist by declaring the universal priesthood of believers. Do we really believe that each of us can be priests drawing others to wholeness, forgiveness and victory over sin? It is dangerous when the pastor alone is the expert and all ministry has to be done by him. Paul had a confidence that believers could do that.

Now it's true that some believers have more knowledge of the Bible, more maturity in the Spirit, more experience, but any believer can aspire to be where I am in counseling. In fact, if you do it enough, and you study the Scripture sufficiently, and depend upon the Holy Spirit, one or more of you



could become better counselors than I am without ever being an officer. One of the delights of my heart would be if we had a church full of counselors – believers who were competent to counsel because they had worked themselves through the process of overcoming their own sins and were now ready to help others to overcome. And some of you are doing that. You have overcome a sin, and you are helping others to do the same. And that’s encouraging to me. That’s what delighted Paul’s heart. Don’t ever think that the only person you can go to for counseling is the pastor. And for sure don’t think that you need to go to an expert shrink.

You know one of the things that makes experts intimidating? It’s not that they are better counselors. I read some fascinating statistics that showed better results from empathetic lay people who were interested in helping a person than from professional counselors. In fact, the statistics are an absolute embarrassment to the psychological association. What makes them intimidating and makes people look up to them in awe is not their success rate. It’s that they have been taught how to label things in a mystifying way that’s intimidating to anyone who looks on. They have learned a humanistic nomenclature (in other words, a way of labeling things and people) and they use these brilliant sounding labels to define, control and manipulate. Let me tell you something: the only labels that you need to use are the labels found in the Scripture. Don’t call habitual stealing kleptomania. That implies that these chronic shoplifters have a disease, and they can’t help it. No, it is not a disease. It is a sin. Call stealing “stealing.” Instead of alcoholism, call it “drunkenness.” One of the things that you will find with psychology is that they have succeeded in re-labeling almost every sin, and placing the behavior in the realm of disease for which people are no longer responsible. And that *may* be one of the reasons why it is so popular. People no longer feel the guilt and responsibility for their sins.

But enough on that. The main point that I wanted to make was that Paul wants every believer to grow in His ability to admonish, counsel, exhort and move people toward righteousness with empathy and personal involvement. And it is my prayer that the church of Jesus Christ would throw off the compromises of syncretism and would become so effective in counseling, that shrinks would go out of business. Don’t we want to put false religion out of business? I do. And psychology is the religion of humanism. We ought not to be intimidated by it.

IV. Even in his capacity as apostle, he still was content to use nouthetic (Biblical) counseling. (“also”; cf. vv. 1-13; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:28)

- A. His inspired endorsement
- B. He should be imitated by pastors

The next point is primarily intended for elders, so I won't spend a lot of time on it. But point IV says that even in his capacity as apostle, he still was content to use nouthetic or Biblical counseling. He didn't think that this was something beneath his dignity. So I don't want you to think that Paul was saying that for the uninitiated and the naïve, nouthetic counseling is OK, but that professionals ought to strive for something else. The little word "also" in verse 14 indicates that Paul put himself in the same boat. You also, along with me, are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, competent also to nouthetically counsel.

But more to the point, pastors must counsel. They must imitate Paul. It grieves me to have to turn away so many people from other churches from counseling. I can't tell you the number of times I have gone to church training seminars where church growth experts tell us that the pastor is a CEO, and that he must not counsel. One expert told me flat out that I was not a good pastor if I counseled. I needed to hire an expert to counsel and spend my time more productively on other issues. Well, I beg to differ. It doesn't matter how hard we pastors may try to get out of counseling, counseling needs will be there. Counseling is an essential part of every elder's shepherding ministry, and without it they have no right to the title of shepherd. Sometimes I wish I did have less counselees – I have 23 right now; sometimes I only have two or three. But counseling is part and parcel of ministry and I would not trade it for anything. In Acts 20:31 Paul said, **that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.** [the word "warn" is our word for nouthetic counsel – it has many nuances. But Paul did not cease to be nouthetically engaged with them day and night for three years. If that characterized Paul's ministry, I dare not think that I can improve on his definition of ministry. No – pastors must counsel or they are failing to be faithful pastors. In Colossians 1:28 Paul said, **Him we preach, nouthetically counseling every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.** There are the three legs of nouthetic counseling: the authority of the Scriptures, the empowering of God and the covenant context of the people of God. Our church is committed to an eldership that counsels, and elders should aspire to counseling.

- V. The foundation for nouthetic counseling
  - A. The God of hope (v. 13)

Let's quickly look at what Paul lays out as being the foundations for Biblical counseling. In verse 13 Paul says, **Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** Apart from God, there is no true hope of deep rooted change. And hope is what people desperately need. The first thing that God did when Adam and Eve sinned was to confront them of their sin. The next thing that He did was to give them hope by promising that their sin could be conquered through Jesus Christ. When you minimize sin, you take away hope just as physicians take away hope when they can't diagnose a problem and they keep telling the patient that it's all in her head. The medical model that psychiatry follows destroys hope because it fails to look at the heart cancer. They put a bandaid on and people know that it's not sufficient, and they have to keep coming back for years (which at \$150 a pop makes the shrink happy). Typically a psychiatrist will counsel a person for years. The average length of counseling for nouthetic counseling for the same problems is six weeks. Sometimes it goes longer. It depends on how motivated people are and how many intertwined problems are present. Hope is generated because God's methods produce results.

In any case, that's not the main point I am making here. I am making the point that Paul sees God as the source of true hope, and joy, and peace and faith. So why would we encourage people to put their hope in a pagan counselor or a pagan counseling method? Why would we seek joy and peace from fountains that do not flow from God? Phil Kayser can't fix things; God can. Your hope needs to be in God and God's methods, not in the messenger.

B. The God of joy, peace and faith (v. 13)

C. The power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13)

I have already alluded to the power of the Holy Spirit in counseling. And point C says that we need His power and point D says that we need Him to be the true counselor. He knows our hearts better than we ourselves do. He can give illumination as to how to apply the Scriptures to the needs of the individual. And so verse 13 says, **by the power of the Holy Spirit.** How many times have I been up against a brick wall and do not know where to proceed in counseling because I thought that I had uncovered every stone? But I ask the Spirit for wisdom and find my understanding opened to uncover a problem that has been hidden. I need the power of the Holy Spirit. But counselees do too. How many times have people struggled to overcome a problem in their own fleshly strength and then eventually given up, thinking that it is not possible? I was that way myself in my younger years. I was plagued with immoral thoughts for a whole year, and fought

unsuccessfully in my own flesh to conquer these and avoid these until a pastor pointed out that I was failing to use God's methods and failing to avail myself of God's power. I was using my own strength and my own authority to resist the devil rather than using God's strength and the authority of God's Word. When there are demonic strongholds in a person's life, you will not get anywhere unless you use God's Word and God's power to tear down the strongholds. Demons are not afraid of Phil Kayser. They are afraid of the Jesus to whom I am united, and with whom I am seated in the heavenlies. Demons are afraid of the Holy Spirit's power working through me. I am nothing. My confidence is in the Holy Spirit's power as counselor. Paul's confidence was the same. 2 Corinthians 2:14 says, **Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.** 2 Corinthians 3:5: **our sufficiency is from God.** 2 Corinthians 12:9 (Jesus speaking:) **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."** And this power of God seems like nonsense to secular psychologists. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** Any counseling method that neglects our spiritual resources for combat is ineffective.

Those are the foundations, and any house of counseling that is built on other foundations is built on sand. And you know what happens to the house built on sand.

D. The Holy Spirit is the true "Counselor" (v. 13,16) speaking through the Scriptures (vv. 4-5)

VI. Qualifications for good counseling (Rom 15:14; Col. 3:16; Is. 40:13,14)

But let's end by quickly looking at the qualifications for good counseling. Many people go to counselors because of their secular credentials for counseling. They are licensed by the state. But Paul was more concerned about God's credentials. And you will search in vain in this passage or in any other biblical passage for the qualifications that counseling centers set up. Paul doesn't say that a counselor needs a degree in psychology, or even that he be able to integrate the Bible with secular wisdom. Paul doesn't even give as a requirement that the counselor have a degree from a seminary. Paul is not enamored with the credentials of man. Let's look at God's credentials.

A. Evidence of a Spirit-empowered life (v. 13)

Verse 13 says that counselors need to be filled with certain things by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's clarify something here. It is common for people to associate the Spirit's power with miraculous spiritual gifts.

Certainly that shows God's power, and other passages indicate the usefulness of those spiritual gifts. But in verse 13 the Holy Spirit's power is needed for what? For hope, joy, peace and faith. In verse 16 the Holy Spirit's power is needed for sanctification. We ought not to underestimate how difficult sanctification is. It takes the Spirit's power. We ought not to be glib about the lack of joy and the fears and insecurities that people have when they need counseling. That is the most natural thing to expect. What takes power from God is hope when everything looks hopeless; to have joy when there is nothing outwardly to give joy; to have peace when your whole world is falling apart. That is the kind of Spirit-empowered life that Paul lays down as an essential qualification. If you have developed that you've got what it takes to counsel.

I don't care how many spiritual gifts a person may have, he is not walking in the Holy Spirit according to Galatians 5 unless he has **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**, etc. That's what he defines as walking in the Spirit. He goes on to say that those who walk in the Spirit's power **have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**. So don't confuse this qualification with spiritual gifts. The book of 1 Corinthians shows how a person with spiritual gifts can many times be carnal and even have strongholds and high things that are exalted against the knowledge of God. Paul said that Corinth had more spiritual gifts than any other congregation, yet they displayed less maturity, less fruit of the Spirit, and less godliness than other churches. We frequently quote 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 when speaking of war against strongholds outside the church. But Paul was directing those words against church members who were exercising spiritual gifts in a way that brought chaos, and whose lives were worldly. If you read the context he was using those words to speak of the church discipline he would bring in that congregation. Spiritual gifts are wonderful and even essential in ministry, but before you seek a counselor you need to find out if they depend upon the Holy Spirit's power to walk their walk. Spiritual empowerment in life.

B. Moral character (v. 14)

So the second qualification is a moral one. Verse 14 says, **Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness...** Unless we are full of goodness; unless we are mature spiritually, how can we lead others into maturity? Yet multitudes of Christians pay \$150 an hour to get unbelieving counselors to fix their souls. Look at God's credentials. Is this counselor full of goodness? Is he mature? Paul says he needs to be.

C. Experiential knowledge (*gnosis*) (v. 14)

The third qualification is knowledge. He says, **filled with all knowledge...** But it isn't just any kind of knowledge. It is experiential knowledge. The Greek word *gnosis* is more than just academics. We are talking about practical knowledge from people who have learned experientially to walk the walk. Book knowledge is good as far as it goes, and Paul valued scholarship and he valued study. But his qualification here is a knowledge that is both facts and experience.

Now let me clarify what Paul is not saying. Paul is not saying that we need to experience sin before we can help people through sin. Look at chapter 16:19. **For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.** Do I want to be a simpleton or ignorant about how to do evil? Absolutely, yes. You don't need to experience drunkenness to be able to help people overcome it. You don't need to watch pornography to know its evil effects. I received an advertisement from a counselor who wanted me to send the members of my church to him for marriage counseling. His first two credentials were listed out as having a psychology degree, and having experienced three divorces. I shook my head at his naivete. It was clear that this pastor thought his three divorces qualified him to counsel people on marriage, and perhaps know when to recommend a divorce.

We need to know the Word, experience the Word being lived out in our lives and know how to apply the Word. That's the qualification that Paul is after.

D. Characterized by God-given hope (v. 13)

The fourth qualification is that he be able to **abound in hope...** And we aren't talking about a happy go lucky person who always looks on the bright side of things or who denies the seriousness of sin. We are talking about a person who abounds in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. No sin problem is too tough for such a person to tackle. I know a national Christian leader who told pastors getting a doctorate, "Don't even bother counseling a homosexual. You're wasting your time. They can't change." He had bought into psychological counseling. And I'm not going to tell you his name, because it may turn you off from using his materials, and there is an enormous amount of good that he does. But he doesn't recognize the degree to which psychology has influenced him. His psychology tells him that homosexuals can't be changed. So he is no longer a man of hope in that area, and is utterly disqualified from counseling a homosexual. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6 that some of the Christians had formerly been fornicators, idolators, adulterers, catamite homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous,

drunkards, revilers and extortioners. He says, **And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.** They were changed because Paul abounded in hope in the power of God and the perfection of God's blueprints. We must become convinced that God's methods work and God's power is sufficient. We must be people who have hope and give hope. Without hope, people won't try. Nouthetic counseling has been successful even with the hopeless who have been locked up and strapped up in psych wards. I read a fascinating case of nouthetic counseling with people who had been labeled as catatonic Schizophrenics for years. But you know what? Many people are trapped by a label. But anyway, it is my prayer that the God of all hope would make you to abound in hope – to have the total confidence that Paul had.

- E. Personal involvement in the lives of others (v. 14 – meaning of *nouthetein*; also “one another”). Nouthetic counseling does not have emotionless, clinical detachment. cf. the involvement of Paul in Acts 20:17-38; 2 Cor 11:29; etc.

The fifth qualification of a good counselor is someone who is personally involved in the lives of those they counsel. And this qualification can be seen in the very word “admonish” or “counsel.” It has as part of its meaning, empathy. Empathy means that you feel for the pain that others experience; feeling for their frustrations, bondage and misery. When Paul spoke of nouthetic counseling in Acts 20, he says that he lived among them (v. 18), wept with them, went through trials with them (v. 19), said that he **kept back nothing helpful** (v. 20), he nouthetically counseled them day and night with tears (v. 31). That kind of emotional involvement is anathema in psychological counseling. Most of them believe that you need to maintain an emotional distance; a clinical objectivity; a professional detachment. What Paul did with his counselees whom he was leaving would raise more than eyebrows today. Acts 20 says, **Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him...** But you see, according to Paul, counselors are part of the body and must love the body. Paul commands us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). And he modeled that. 2 Corinthians 11:29 says, **Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?** Biblical counseling is empathetic, and a personal involvement is essential.

- F. Counseling ability (v. 14), not secular credentials.

Finally, there needs to be some ability. Not everyone is able to counsel, though they should aspire to it. Romans 15:14 ends with the phrase

**able also to admonish one another.** Obviously it wasn't the kind of ability that professionals today claim we need, because here was a church full of people able to nouthetically counsel. And that was long before you could get a degree in psychology from Biola or Fuller or other Christian Colleges of Psychology. Do a search on the web and you will find numerous Christians who say that you are not able to counsel without years of humanistic training. Dr. James Mallory Jr said, "[the Bible] no more presents the total picture of counseling than it does of nuclear physics" and then goes on to make counseling as complicated as nuclear physics. No wonder Christians don't even want to try. I feel sorry for Paul and those poor Christians who lived before our day. Unlike us, they didn't have the privilege of consulting 400 contradictory, fighting schools of psychology before counseling. And I say that because psychology as a united profession is a total illusion. It's a farce. In a sense you could say it was because these Christians looked to God's wisdom rather than to the world's that Paul was totally confident that they were competent to counsel one another.

How can you gain this confidence for yourself? First, grow in sanctification. And the struggles and successes you have can be shared with others. And when you hit a brick wall and can't find success, get nouthetic counseling to overcome your sin, then have the humility to admit that you had that sin to others. Encourage them with hope that they too can conquer it, and share the blueprint that you just learned with them. If they struggle, you may need to refer them on, but more likely than not, you can help them conquer without their ever seeing me. Some of you are doing this. You have been helped to conquer something, and you are helping your friends. That's the way it should be. 2 Corinthians 1:4 says, **who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.** What's the pattern? Their lives were messed up with fear, turmoil and anxiety. They got help, and with fear and anxiety conquered, they went on and comforted others who were going through the same tribulation. One person conquers lust, and cleans up his thought life completely, and he is excited to tell others about how this happened. He encourages friends who have the same struggles and shares with them the strategies that helped him. You become able to nouthetically counsel when you have more and more success in sanctification; and this process is repeated many times over and you transfer your life into the life of another person. It is my prayer that not only our church, but every evangelical church in this city would have such success in sanctification, and such success in nouthetically counseling, that



the church would put psychologists out of business. Let me read the conclusion in our outlines, and then let's pray.

Conclusion: Psychology can never provide "all joy and peace in believing" or enable people to "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (v. 13). Eventually the emptiness and powerlessness of the religion of psychology will be exposed for the hoax that it is. Nouthetic Counseling is gaining more and more adherence, and a trust in God's methods of counseling are returning to the church. May we humbly persevere in promoting nouthetic counseling to the glory of God. Amen

