PRINCIPLES OF COUNSELING [LECTURE I]

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(*Lecture I*)

Counselling has increased markedly in popularity within the last few decades. It is somewhat difficult to decide whether this is due to the fact that there are many more problems with which responsible people have to deal in our stress-filled days, or whether this is because psychology itself has assumed such tremendous importance in our lives that we want also to play the game. Perhaps there is an element of truth in both.

However that may be, if counselling is correctly done, in counselling we will be doing nothing more than many people of God have always done throughout the ages. We have given it a new name, dressed it in a new suit of clothes, added to it certain insights; but it remains, for all that, what the Church of Christ has always been busy with in the problems which confront the people of God. We must not lose sight of this but must sink our roots deeply in the past and recognize that essentially we have nothing new to offer; but what has been characteristic of the Church in all times remains our calling.

It may be that the stresses of modern life create new problems and more problems. It may be that people are much more open to discuss their problems with others than in earlier days. It may also be that we have received some insights into human behavior which others before us did not know. But all of this does not give us an advantage over the work of the Church throughout all time which is of any significant value. It is well to remember this from the outset lest we become unduly enamored with our subject and lest we be attracted to gimmicks and psychiatric tricks which will do the cause of Christ no good.

The subject which we shall be discussing in the next few days is an extensive one, one not without its difficulties. The field is very broad. Implied in this subject is the whole question of the basis for Christian education which must serve as background for our discussion. Implied also are the goals of Reformed education which are in the nature of the case also goals of counselling. But the subject of counselling itself is very broad. As Jay Adam's points out in his book, *Competent to Counsel*, the whole teaching situation in the classroom is really a counselling situation. There is to be sure specific counselling required for individual children who have unique problems, but these problems too are myriad and the reasons for them more than we can count. But even then, we must be careful that we remember that every child needs counselling, for we must not fall into the trap of permitting counselling to become strictly problem-oriented. Added to all this is the fact that you teachers are responsible for the education of children from age five to age seventeen or eighteen—a period in the life of the person when the greatest changes take place in spiritual, physical and psychological development. These changes give rise to different problems and counselling must be directed to these specific needs.

All this requires that we face the grim prospect of sharply curtailing our subject, of recognizing that there are aspects to the whole subject with which we cannot deal, and that there are matters which we shall treat only cursorily.

The general subject however, we are going to divide into two parts, one dealing with principles and the other dealing with practice.

I. The Place of Counselling in the School.

When counselling first became the thing to do such work was understood in a purely psychological context. Under the influence of rather worldly conceptions of psychology the idea was accepted that psychology occupied an area which was independent of religion and pastoral care. It was some kind of esoteric science that stood apart from the religious life of man, had nothing to do with the spiritual calling of the church and the home, and could perform wonders in the treatment of mental illness and in the solutions to life's problems which no other work could ever hope to accomplish. With this notion came also the necessary conclusion that this type of work could only be handled by psychologists who were skilled in the intricacies of the trade.

Countless teachers, ministers and even parents decided that it was essential to take courses in psychology and to gain the expertise of which the experts boasted, for without these skills they could not hope to do well the work assigned to them. Or failing this, it was urged upon us to turn all our problems over to experts who were alone qualified to deal with them.

Jay Adams called us back to our senses when he set forth his principal thesis that counselling is, after all, nothing else but the preaching of the Word of God. Presupposed in this thesis was the assertion that all the problems of life are problems which have their origin in sin. Because only through Christ can sin be removed, so only through the preaching of the Christ revealed in the Scriptures can the problems which result from sin be taken away.

But it is this very position which creates a problem. If the preaching of the Word is the solution to all the problems of life, and counselling is preaching, is not the role of counselling limited to the official preaching by the Church? If this is the case, all counselling must be referred to the Church, and we need deal no longer with the matter.

On the other hand, the question of the role of the school in counselling arises because of the relation of the school to the home. Teachers work *in loco parentis.* In this connection a somewhat erroneous idea has been cultivated among us in recent years. Some have taken the position that parental education means that each parent has a complete say-so concerning his child, the education he receives and any problems which arise in the course of his education. This leads to the idea that each parent has complete control over his child and the teacher only carries out the specific instructions of the parents. This too would seem to leave no room for teacher counselling.

But there are also parents who go to the opposite extreme and turn all responsibilities for education over to the teacher. They show little or no concern for or interest in the education of their child,—at least until their child is in some serious trouble of one sort or another when their complaints can be heard over vast distances. Thus almost all the work of bringing up a child—especially as far as Christian influence is concerned—falls upon the teacher.

And so there is the problem of the relation between the school and the home. It is important that we find the proper balance in the meaning of parental education. On the one hand, we must not be independentistic in our conceptions of Reformed

education, but remember that we work together and that this sometimes means that individual concerns must sometimes be sacrificed for the good of the school as a whole. And yet we must also show a vital concern for the education of our children and parents must work with the teachers in all aspects of the training of their children.

The ideal situation is a school where parents and teachers work together in the whole education of the child and each helps the others also in the area of counselling. It is where this ideal is unattainable that we have problems.

What then is the specific role of the teacher in counselling?

It is at this point that definitions become all important. Jay Adams defines counselling in "the Christian school context (as) concerned with helping students to solve problems God's way." (*Competent to Counsel*, p. 255.) Perhaps we can alter this a bit and define counselling as, "that aspect of the teachers' work in covenantal instruction which concerns itself with the specific application of the Word of God to all the behavior of the child." This is a somewhat broad definition, but the importance of this will, I hope, become apparent presently. What I am saying in this definition is that counselling, in distinction from the ordinary work of the classroom, is an aspect of instruction which deals with *behavior* in a very general sense of the word, and which brings the Word of God to focus upon that behavior. It stands to reason, of course, that the Christian school teacher is not concerned with all the behavior of the child. The sixth grade teacher is not, e.g., concerned particularly with the fact that a girl does not readily wash the dishes at the command of her mother. The teacher is interested in behavior in so far as it directly or indirectly affects the life of the child in school.

In a way, counselling, under the definition offered above, is an inescapable part of the work of a teacher.

That this is true follows from the fact that behavior cannot be separated from the educational work of the school. God created man a unity. While we cannot go into detail on this matter, we may certainly point out that while man has a body through which he lives in this world, a soul which includes his mind, his will and his emotions and a spirit which puts him in an inescapable relation to God. These three can never be separated from each other. Man always functions, in all that he does, as body, soul and spirit. And in this way he functions in the classroom; in this unity of his being he must be educated.

This is not difficult to illustrate. Problems may arise out of any aspect of his God-given nature. He may have problems which are physical in origin such as physical defects, insufficient sleep, poor diet or physical abuse at home. He may have problems which are intellectual in nature: low I.Q., poor memory, difficulty in reading, etc. He may have volitional problems so that he simply does not want to study or finds his desires directed along the lines of breaking rules and disrupting classroom work. He may have emotional problems due to other problems in his life or due to the prevailing notion in our day that mere feeling is all-important: "If it feels good, do it." And he may have spiritual problems which involve all the others. But they all stand related to each other and cannot be separated or categorized neatly. The problem, whatever its chief origin, affects the whole man. And the education of the child is stymied to the extent that these problems remain unsolved. The treatment of them therefore, involves the whole of the child's nature.

The point is that the whole child must be educated by the teacher. No teacher can, even if he wanted to, concern himself with just the development of the intellect while ignoring all the other aspects of the child's God-given nature. It may be that the primary purpose of the educational process is indeed the development of the intellect; but the intellect cannot be reached except the whole man be addressed. The "man of God" must be thoroughly furnished unto all good works and this implies that there is always the moral dimension of a child's life. The education of a child cannot ignore this moral dimension. It lies indeed at the very heart of Reformed education. The will, the emotions, the spiritual aspect of the child's life come under the care of the teacher.

How can this then be fitted into the Reformed conception of preaching? You understand the problem. Problems in our lives arise because of sin. The cure for sin lies in the means of grace which God has ordained: the preaching of the Word of the cross. We have stressed in our Churches, and properly so, that the official preaching is *the* means of grace. But it is just possible that we have done this to the exclusion of the effectiveness of the Word in other areas of life, as, e.g., in the whole area of Christian witnessing.

We must look at the concept of the Word of God in an organic way. Rev. H. Hoeksema, in his *Reformed Dogmatics,* in discussing the means of grace, reminds us that for the child of

God all things are finally means of grace because all things work together for good to them that love God. The organic conception of the preaching surely means that at the very center stands the official preaching of the Word by the Church as a vitalizing power. But under that power, the Word is also powerful in every area in which it functions. Whether that Word is used in the home in personal Bible study or in family devotions or in the covenantal instruction of parents; whether it is a Word spoken in Christian witnessing in the world; whether it is the mutual edification of the saints or whether it is the instruction of Christian school teachers, that Word is a means of grace. Not separated from the official preaching, but vitalized by it and subordinate to it. But it must always be remembered that the Word remains the two-fold power of saving and hardening. It is always a two-edged sword and it always accomplishes God's purpose.

Thus the teacher has a role in bringing that Word. That is, as always in the life of the Christian, the only power which the teacher possesses. You must learn to rely upon that Word in counselling. Nothing else will do what that Word does. Trying to become some sort of psychologist, making yourself adept at psychological techniques, relying upon the wisdom of modern day psychology will finally accomplish nothing. It is that Word alone that will be your means of counselling and you must labor in the full assurance that God will use it. It will function as a means of grace; it will therefore save or harden. But it will alone do what has to be done.

II. The Goal of Counselling.

The goal of counselling cannot be divorced from the goal of Christian education as a whole. What the goal of Reformed education is need not be discussed in detail by us. We need only mention a few points. While the Scriptures define that goal in many different places, it will be sufficient for our purposes to remind you of what Paul writes to Timothy in II Timothy 3:17. If it is true that the Word of God is the only means of counselling, then this text defines precisely the purpose for Paul is speaking here of the Scriptures and tells us that they are "profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." In a booklet prepared by the Propaganda Committee of the Society for Protestant Reformed Education of Adams School

prior to the erection of that school, we find the following:

> The more we realize that the main purpose of educating our covenant children is to train them for service in God's kingdom, the more we will realize that this educational training must proceed from specific and distinctive points of view. If our purpose in educating our children is to equip them to meet the world on its own level, to equip them to progress financially and socially in the world in which we live, there is no need for the sacrifice involved in Christian education. The world itself, that is the public schools, are far better equipped to do this work. But if our aim in educating our children is to bring them up in the fear of the Lord and equip them to take their stations in His church, then Christian education is essential. It becomes our calling and our duty and then we do all in our power to provide a specific type of education which will best train them in our distinctive interpretation of God's Word in all spheres of life. (p. 15)

> Let it suffice to point out that the fundamental Protestant Reformed principles in which our lives and the lives of our children find their purpose are of necessity bound up in the education we receive and give to our children in the home, in the church and also in the school. To impregnate the minds of our children, to mold their convictions from earliest infancy on, with a distinctive religious view of life, and the world, is our calling and duty as Christian parents. In our lives as Christians while we are in the world, we are constantly behaving and acting from a distinctive motivation. This motivation is necessarily the viewpoint from which we proceed in our evaluation of all of life and our relationships to the world in which we live. This motivating force must be positively and intellectually presented to our children by teachers who are convinced of the specifically Reformed principles which we maintain in our churches. Because we are religiously persuaded of the truth of our world and life view, we want our children trained in it as a personal, as a religious view of life and the world. And if it is to be their personal viewpoint, it must be for them one whose truth is increasingly witnessed by all that they learn as they learn it, by all with which they become acquainted as they make its acquaintance. Religion and truth and the right education unite in this demand. Our children should be trained in so knowing and so acting. (p. 20, 21)

The goal of counselling is subordinate to that main purpose of Reformed education. There is one overriding goal directing education in our schools. But there are many subordinate goals as e.g., the subordinate goal of the teacher in teaching a course in

history. Counselling has also such a subordinate goal as it relates to the behavior of the child and as it concentrates on the moral aspect of education.

So we may be more specific.

The chief and central goal of counselling is, quite obviously, to assist the child in overcoming and solving his problems. There are problems which are barriers to successful education and problems which arise out of education. The problems which are barriers to successful education stand in the way of and hinder the learning process. They are the problems which arise specifically out of the life of the child as he is called to live that life in all the areas in which God calls him to walk. They must be removed if the child is going to be successful in the educational enterprise. It is in this area that there is the greatest need for counselling.

To be yet more specific, Waterink, in his book, *"Opvoeding tot Persoonlijkheid"*, speaks of the goal of bringing up a child as that of forming the child into a personality. By forming a child into a personality he means that a child finds his own unique place in all the relationships of life and that a child be equipped to occupy that place. Specifically, says Waterink, that implies three things.

It implies, first of all, an integrated life. An integrated life is a life in which the whole man functions in proper balance. The mind, the will, the emotions, the body—each in its own capacity and function, operates in harmony with the whole without being out of balance. The spiritual aspect of man—his relation to God—functions as the deepest directing principle of the whole of man's life.

Secondly, a regulated life is characteristic of a person who has been formed into a personality. By this Waterink means that the whole man lives an ordered life under the firm control of the person so that he is not moved in his activity by prevailing opinions, by pressures from outside which he does not control, by mere subjective impressions; but that his life is a consciously and deliberately directed life along given and consciously chosen paths.

And finally Waterink speaks in this connection of the need for the development of the conscience. The whole man must be consciously directed by the Scriptures in such a way that he lives his life with spiritual and moral sensitivity.

In that way the child of God functions in his place and calling in a way that is approved of by God.

III. The Qualifications of the Counsellor

As we turn to the qualifications of the counsellor, there are some general remarks which I wish to make first of all.

It is important to understand, above all else, that a teacher in the classroom is, by virtue of his role as teacher, a counsellor. I am not referring now to specific and conscious counselling of an individual pupil, but am referring instead to the very presence of the teacher, his daily work of instruction in the classroom and his entire conduct in relation to the pupils.

It ought not to surprise us that this is so. After all, a parent is also a counsellor in the home every moment whether he wills it or not. An officebearer in his work in the congregation is also constantly a counsellor and he cannot escape that responsibility. It is no different with a teacher.

There are two aspects to this. On the one hand, the teacher, by all his actions in the classroom, is constantly counselling simply by way of example. This is inescapable because the child is made by God in such a way that the child is constantly looking for examples to follow in his life. The teacher constitutes one of the most important examples that a child has. By way of that example, the teacher is, in effect, counselling. The other side of the picture is this: if a teacher does not conduct himself in the whole of his life as a fitting example, there is no possibility of that teacher ever doing any effective counselling in a person-to-person situation. The child will simply not accept it; or, and the danger is greater, the child will accept the example of the teacher rather than the specific instruction.

This is, without question, the most important aspect of counselling and it is in this way that the teacher has the greatest impact upon the child.

There is, I think, no question about it that the teacher's *attitudes* are here the critical thing. What is the teacher's attitude towards material things overagainst spiritual things? Does the teacher who expects the child to be a disciple of Christ, himself live as a disciple, denying himself, taking up his cross and following Christ? What is the teacher's attitude towards sports, towards studies, towards God's Word, towards spiritual exercises of prayer and devotions? Does the teacher always, in the whole of his life, give the emphatic impression of a godly, virtuous, pious and upright servant of the Lord? There is much lacking here in all of us. What I am saying of teachers holds, of course, equally as well for ministers of the gospel. And then I shudder a bit. The virtues which we expect of our children we do not practice

ourselves. There must be, in fact, what can almost be called, an exaggerated virtue—not in the hypocritical sense, but in the sense of extraordinary piety, for the disciple always falls somewhere below the level of his teacher. The teacher must pull the child up to a high level, but cannot do this unless standing there himself. And so the teacher must conduct himself as one of whom the students say: That is the kind of person I would like to be.

More specifically, we have to say just a word about counselling of individuals. There are specific problems which arise directly in the classroom and are part of classroom life and must be dealt with on an individual basis. While, generally speaking, each teacher is able to handle these problems, the more serious ones must be referred elsewhere. It is well, in my judgment, that each school chooses someone to handle this type of work. What I am saying is that each school should have its own counsellor who possesses the necessary qualifications and who can be freed from classroom responsibilities during part of the day to deal with these matters. This is especially necessary in the high school where all the students may have many different teachers in the course of the day.

The qualifications for a counsellor are spelled out by the apostle Paul in II Timothy 2:24-26: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

We ought to take a brief look at some of these qualifications which are listed here.

The servant of the Lord must not fight! Notice the way this is phrased. Undoubtedly the apostle puts it in exactly this form because of the great danger to fall into this pattern. We might consider it necessary, but it is not. Never must the servant of the Lord engage in arguments, disputes, debates, wranglings, shouting matches of any kind. Why not? The answer is that his power is in the Word of God. All he must ever do is bring that Word. And when he brings that Word there is no place for disputes or arguments. The Word stands. It is there as the Word of Christ—of Whom the teacher is but a servant.

The servant of the Lord must be gentle to all. The opposite of gentleness is anger, harshness, coldness, bitterness, stridency, etc. A servant of the Lord must possess a calmness, a spiritual

tranquility and serenity which nothing can breach or destroy. He must be able to deal with others quietly, carefully and in full confidence of the power of the Word. If he attempts to perform his work in his own strength, he will have to resort to all sorts of methods to gain his ends. But when the Word will, through him, do its work with a power inherent in itself, then quietness and calmness are all that are required.

The servant of the Lord must be apt to teach. Once again the emphasis lies upon the Word of God. He must be able to bring the Scriptures to those who must hear this Word. He must be able to teach from the Scriptures, to make it clear what the Scriptures say. This requires special gifts the chief of which are thorough familiarity with the Scriptures on his own part.

The servant of the Lord must be patient. He must be patient because he shall have to bear with ills and wrongs, with opposition and with sin in every form. He must be patient because the Word of God does not always do its work as swiftly as he would like. In impatience the temptation is to lay aside the Word and go his own way.

The servant of the Lord must be meek. He must, in meekness, instruct them who oppose themselves. Those who walk in sin oppose themselves in the sense that they seek that which is really evil for themselves. They choose a path which leads to their own destruction. Humility or meekness arises from the consciousness that this is true of each one of us apart from the sovereign operations of grace. This will always remind the teacher that he must never send a child to the cross, but must rather go with the child.

And so we have the Scriptural picture of the counsellor. All the emphasis falls upon that Word. The teacher who engages in counselling must live a life of diligent and prayerful study of the Word. That Word must be at his finger tips; it must be in his heart and on his lips. It must be the Word which governs and controls all his own life and which functions as a lamp unto his feet and a light upon his pathway. It must be out of that Word that he lives. Then and then only will he be able to bring that Word to those who need it greatly. And then he will be able to counsel in a God-approved and God-blessed manner.

"...And what establishment and stability in the faith might not be produced in the students if every teacher could be depended upon to give any student faithful, sympathetic counsel based upon the Christian view of life?" Dr. J.G. Vos