

# THE THREAT OF ECLECTICISM

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Alluring as it may be, eclecticism is a serious threat. It is a decided hindrance to achieving excellence in biblical counseling. The eclectic way offers encouragement from professionals and highly recognized degrees leading to plush positions and money. It requires little original thought and demands virtually nothing in the way of character growth. As a result, it is precisely the place for those who are not willing to make a commitment to biblical craftsmanship.

There has always been a sinful tendency among God's people to abandon God and His Word for something else. The entire Old Testament is replete with incidents of the sort. Speaking for God, Jeremiah puts it this way:

*My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that cannot hold water.* (Jeremiah 2:13)

This is a serious problem that has plagued the church of Christ ever since counseling began. The problem with eclecticism is that it is based on the idea that the wisdom of man may be blended with the wisdom of God to produce a third and better thing than either provides alone.

In Acts 17:18 the philosophers in Athens used a derogatory word to describe the apostle Paul. They called him a *spermalogos*. This term I have translated "an eclectic babbler" in my *Christian Counselor's New Testament*. It describes exactly what the eclectics do. The word pictures a bird going about picking up various sorts of seeds here and there. That, at its core, is eclecticism—it is filling the pot with a little

Rogers, a dash of Freud, some Maslow, a pinch or two of Adler and a sprinkling of Scripture. Then the whole is mixed together and poured out into a pan to harden. But that simply should not be done. God tells us that in His Word **everything necessary for life and godliness** may be found (2 Peter 1:3).<sup>9</sup> The eclectic procedure runs counter to Peter's statement. Indeed, to add to the words of the living God is nothing less than unbelief. It is an act of rebellion. Isaiah describes God's people as **rebellious children** when they engage in this sort of thing (Isaiah 30:1). He decries the fact that they **go down to Egypt to make counsel** that He says **is not [His]**. He speaks negatively of the alliance they make with Egypt as **weaving a web** that is **not of [His] Spirit**. That is, such a thing is not of His doing. Why? How is that rebellion? He goes on to say, that His people **didn't ask for a word from [His] mouth** (v. 2). In other words, they trusted in the promises and schemes of the Egyptians rather than in the word of God. As Isaiah also points out, **the Egyptians are men and not God** (Isaiah 31:3). What utter foolishness! Why turn to the words and wisdom of men rather than to the words and wisdom of God? The entire second chapter of I Corinthians denounces

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<sup>9</sup> See also 2 Timothy 3:15ff.

the very same thing. And the Psalmist opens the book of Psalms warning against the **counsel of the ungodly**, urging the reader instead to **delight in the law of the Lord**.

The importance of this matter cannot be overstated. The entire church of the Lord Jesus Christ is filled with the ideas of men, largely brought in by so-called “Christian counselors.” One does not question the salvation of these *spermalogoi*,<sup>10</sup> but he must not approve of their thinking in this matter. Rather than calling themselves “Christian counselors,” they more properly might refer to themselves as Christians who are eclectic counselors. But because they (wrongly) use the title “Christian counselors” they deceive many—often including themselves. It is not a matter of their motives, but it is a matter of their commitment to biblical counseling.

It is impossible to grow as a biblical counselor, making **evident progress** toward excellence, when one continually compromises his counseling with a mixture of alien elements. Take, for instance, the idea that one’s past must be investigated in detail in order to help solve his problems today (an essentially Freudian concept widely propagated within the church). When one subscribes to this idea, he will spend inordinate amounts of time attempting to do the impossible. No one can trace back all the past experiences that have led to a person’s becoming what he is today. It would take as long to do so as it did for one to live through them (or longer). Then at the end (which he could never reach because while following up leads his counselee would be experiencing new events that would need to be tracked down—*ad infinitum*), how would he know that he didn’t miss the most crucial experience?

No, going outside of the Scriptures is very harmful to progress in biblical counseling. It has deleterious effects in other areas as well. Consider but one. Delving into the past to find the reasons for present behaviors (attitudes, beliefs, etc.) is a method that seems designed to provide excuses<sup>11</sup> for a counselee. After all, if someone (or something) did it to him in the past, he is probably stuck with it for life. Very little (if any) change can be expected. He is a victim rather than a violator. He is a pawn to be pushed about by people and circumstances. Since this concept runs counter to all that the Bible teaches about human responsibility and change, it impedes the pursuit of excellence in biblical counseling. Unfortunately, too few of the *spermalogoi* seem to understand this fact.

Now, what I have looked at in terms of one concept eclectically brought into the church may be multiplied many times over. And all of it keeps one from a true commitment to biblical *craftsmanship*. The entire process is deceptive. Most counselors who adopt the eclectic stance have no idea of the damage that they are doing to their counseling ministries and to their counsees. The Spirit of God produced His Word over a long period of time. He, Himself, declared that it makes the counselor **adequate**, and **equips him fully for every good work**. The work in view is the work of changing people by means of the Scriptures (for details, see my book *How to Help People Change*, which is devoted to the exposition and application of 2 Timothy 3:15–17 in counseling).

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<sup>10</sup> *Spermalogoi* is the plural of *spermalogos*.

<sup>11</sup> Doubtless it was so designed by the evil one.

Moreover, the eclectic counselor must necessarily hold contradictions. You cannot say that all things necessary for life and godliness are found in biblical **promises** on the one hand, and then on the other hand, search for worldly wisdom that will add necessary dimensions to what you read in the Bible. That is but the beginning of the contradictions that abound in this approach.

In addition to holding confusing contradictions, the *spermalogoi* are themselves personally influenced by the principles and practices of the world as they imbibe and practice them in their counseling. A person cannot spend years in training of any sort and not be influenced by it. And when day by day he works in the atmosphere of those principles and practices, advising others to follow them, his influence is deepened. Whether it is the direct influence of teachers and associates or the continued influence of the pagan system, the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:33 applies: **“Don’t be misled; bad companions corrupt good habits.”**

The warning is apropos. The eclectic counselor is **misled**. He may not realize it, but over time he will be led farther and farther away from the pure simplicity of the Scriptures into the world of human wisdom. His whole life will be affected by it. Often this defection takes place over a long period of time. Incrementally, as more and more he lays the Bible aside preferring to study the books of men whose views are in competition with God, his home life, his relationship to the church and other Christians, and (preeminently) his relationship to God are affected adversely. If he doesn’t divorce his wife (as far too many have done), he may effectively divorce himself from God and His people. Even when he doesn’t go that far, the little worldly beliefs that continually fill his heart and soul harden him to God’s word. He may eventually become an adversary of the biblical pastor who attempts to be faithful to Scripture.<sup>12</sup> In some ways, the one who runs off with his secretary is better off—at least he is aware of the radical changes that have occurred.

The incremental changes in one’s orientation are described by the Psalmist who speaks of **walking, standing** and (at length) **sitting**. Here is a dangerous progression. First, one becomes enamored with ungodly counsel and walks toward it. Next he is fascinated by it and stands there eating it up. In the end, he himself becomes a teacher sitting in the seat, scornfully speaking against that which he once held to.

I am not saying that this course is inevitable; it is my sincere hope that the words of the psalmist may jolt some of those walking along the road toward the wisdom of the ungodly and cause them to turn back. It is also my hope that some of those who have become enamored by such teachings may wake up. I even have an outside hope that some who now scoff may come down from the seat of the scornful. Since the Spirit of God is at work great things are possible!

Why, then, do I say that progress toward excellence in biblical counseling is impossible for the eclectic? Because so long as he continues his *spermalogic* course, he is heading in the wrong direction. You cannot go east and west at the same time (without coming apart). You cannot serve two masters. You will come to love one and hate the other. And that is exactly what happens. If one is making **evident progress** in biblical counseling, he is in retreat from eclectic counseling. If

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<sup>12</sup> He may at length **sit in the seat of the scorner** (Psalm 1:1).

he is progressing toward the seat of the scornful, he is leaving biblical counseling behind. Which way are you traveling?

\*From [\*Committed to Craftsmanship in Biblical Counseling\*](#) by Jay E. Adams. It is available now for a limited time [from Amazon at 35% off](#).