

Should a Christian go to a secular psychologist for counseling?

Maybe. But with caution.

Radical differences in world view exist between Christianity and secular psychologists. These incompatibilities can result in counsel worthless at best or even sinful.

The questions below expose this.

- What is a human being?
- Does God exist?
- Does absolute morality exist?

I have a minor degree in psychology. One of my professors said that 90% of the psychologists who publish literature are atheistic humanists. This results in definitions irreconcilable with Christianity.

What is a human being?

Christian view

A human is a spirit living in a body. When the body dies, the spirit continues elsewhere.

Mankind is made in the image of God. Since God is holy, he requires holiness of man, consistent with his moral law.

Morality is absolute, universal and eternal, not relative to any individual or culture.

We are born with a corrupt nature inherited from our first ancestors. The doctrine of original sin is central to our understanding of human behavior; sinners by nature and only secondarily by choice. Until the sin nature is dealt with by regeneration, moral improvement is superficial at best. This is the core of the gospel.

Secular psychology view

A human being is an intelligent evolved animal. No such thing as spirit exists because God does not exist and therefore humans have no spirit or soul. People are born morally neutral but subject to negative influences from family or society and are sinners by choice but not by nature.

Absolute morality does not exist. Morality is a social construct and varies between cultures or individuals. Counseling should focus on how a person is hurting oneself by their thinking or conduct. Actions may be deemed immoral because they have negative consequences to the individual, not because they violate a universal standard to which they may be accountable to a superior authority.

How do we view the world?

Christian view

The Bible teaches that all events in the life of Christian lead to sanctification. (Rom 8:28) Life is meaningful because God is teaching us, not because we ourselves are making it meaningful. God is ultimately in control of it all.

Secular psychology view

For the secular psychologist, events of life are not designed by God to teach anything to anyone because God does not exist. Therefore, neither does sanctification. Adjustment to social norms and improved relationships to oneself and others is the only goal.

How do Christians and secular psychologists view each other?

As delusional. Either the Christian is living in a fantasy world or the secular psychologist has a truncated view of reality.

To the humanist psychologist, religion is fantasy at best and a neurosis at worst. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, taught that belief in God is a neurosis caused by the subconscious need for an adequate father image. When this need is met properly by psychology, the fantasy of a divine being should dissipate and neuroses such as Christianity should disappear.

The secular psychologist may try to use one's belief system to help, but since they do not know the Lord, such help may be limited or even harmful.

The problem of guilt

During a psychology course I attended in college, the professor spoke at length about guilt feelings and how to help people overcome them. His focus was entirely on feelings of guilt, not guilt as an objective reality. This bothered me.

I said to the professor, "I have an uncle who has committed every sort of sin except murder and incest. The last time we saw him, he was pacing the floor, wringing his hands, eaten up by guilt. He knew he was guilty. Everyone knew he was guilty. His guilt feelings stemmed from real, objective guilt. What could you do for a man like that?"

You won't believe the response of the professor. He said nothing at all, just shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "I don't have a clue."

When it comes to the issue of guilt relative to an objective, unchanging divine standard, the secular psychologist lacks responses consistent with his world view. He can only deal with *feelings* of guilt, not guilt itself.

Can a secular psychologist help a Christian?

Yes, with certain kinds of problems. Post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), caused by war, accidents or crimes. Some forms of schizophrenia are genetic and can be helped with counseling combined with medicine.

Some forms of depression are also genetic or symptoms of an underlying physical condition treatable with medicines and exercises, both mental and physical. Secular psychologists can help identify psychological problems.

Demonic influences

Christians are aware that Satan exists. We know demons can exacerbate problems of any kind. An experienced Christian may be able to distinguish between what is natural versus supernatural. A secular psychologist is unable to do this.

Results?

Psychologists underestimate the power of the gospel. In getting to know the members of churches we have attended or founded, we discover ex-alcoholics, ex-addicts, families restored and ordinary people whose lives are enriched beyond expectation.

We have never seen or heard of psychologists able to duplicate these effects of the gospel. A biblical church is the most smashing social and psychological entity in the history of humanity, when we get to know the membership as individuals.

Where do we look?

In Christian counseling, we are taught to look to Christ as totally sufficient, not to our own resources.

Some years ago, my wife and I took a course advertised as training in Christian counseling. After the first three classes, we realized the course was presenting Rogerian Non-Directive counseling as the method and disguising it with Christian vocabulary. This form of counseling was invented by the secular humanist Carl Rogers and advocates avoiding direct advice to counselees to allow them to come to their own conclusions and cure themselves.

The teacher, at one point, said we should tell the counselee to follow their own heart. That is when we resigned the course. Where do we see in Scripture a directive to look to our own corrupt hearts and ignore the counsel of others? These teachers were professing Christians but their methodology was anything but Christian.

Conclusion

A Christian might seek counsel from a secular psychologist as long as they keep in mind aspects of spiritual reality of which the psychologist is completely devoid.

Within specific limits, a Christian might profit from the counsel of a secular psychologist. Qualified Christian psychologists exist and a Christian should give priority to these.

