

The Need for Counsel

Today we live in a world in which support is available for every type of human problem or difficulty. If a major disaster occurs, support by the means of counselling is immediately offered to those affected, to help them regain a sense of normality, to overcome the stresses and the anxieties created by this situation.

Most of those means of support that are available today, have developed out of the social sciences of the 20th century with the fields of psychology and psychiatry leading the way. Today the aspect of counselling is a well-established feature of our society. There is hardly any area of the human life for which you can't get counsel! In fact, if you want to, you can go and get a degree, a PhD in counselling.

But there is one area of life in which people seldom want counsel: the spiritual area of their lives. Counsel, in certain physical areas of their lives may add to the means whereby they can accumulate a fortune, or improve their status. On the other hand, the spiritual area of their life is so often "theirs and theirs alone"! Society in the Western world encourages that element of independent thinking about religion.

When all is said and done, as far as religion is concerned, the "pay-off" is tomorrow or next week or some future time - "and there is so much I can do today!" We are focused very much on the here and now. There is so much that society feels it needs to focus on in terms of the here and now.

Some time back, Mr Hulme suggested to me that I give a sermon on the value of counsel. It is a subject about which many wrong impressions exist.

The first thing we need to learn about counsel is that the Bible establishes the necessity of it. Spiritual counsel is not some product of the 20th century. Spiritual counsel is a product of the Garden of Eden! If Adam and Eve had listened to the counsel they received from the Eternal in the Garden of Eden, rather than from a serpent, this world would be a very different world today.

In other words, spiritual counsel is as old as humanity! The need for it, the desirability of it, has existed as long as human beings have drawn breath. So we are not talking about some modern-fangled idea that will change and develop as our understanding of the human psyche develops, etc!

The Bible is REplete with examples of counsel. Cornelius was a unique individual. From what we understand he was the very first Gentile to be called into the Body of the Church. It was a unique "first." There were proselytes who HAD been Gentiles before, who had become "Jews" by conversion and who became part of the Church. We see that in Acts 2. But Cornelius, a Roman centurion, certainly wasn't a Jew.

***Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,
2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.***

This man was a God-fearer, one of those unique people that are referred to in the book of Acts and in secular history (Josephus) as well. They attached themselves to the synagogue and sought to follow the ways of God. Cornelius gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. He was following some of the aspects of righteousness that are established in Matthew chapter 6.

3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?"...

He probably had quite a quaver in his voice, as most of us would have if we were confronted with the vision of an angel!

4 ... So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

"Your righteousness is accepted!"

5 *"Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.*

6 *"He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."*

"He will counsel you in the way in which you must walk."

7 *And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually.*

8 *So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.*

In due course, Peter came.

24 *And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.*

25 *As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.*

Peter had to start counselling immediately! He had to point out to him that that is not how you treat another human being.

26 *But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."*

"You don't worship men!"

27 *And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.*

28 *Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

29 *"Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"*

Cornelius then recounts the situation he had found himself in. He told Peter that the angel had told him, "Peter will give you instruction as to how you are to conduct yourself."

Peter instructed Cornelius in the way in which he should react, and the relationship he should have with Jesus Christ.

44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.*

45 *And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.*

46 *For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,*

47 *"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"*

The end of that counselling session was baptism!

A similar situation occurred a couple of chapters prior to this, with the Ethiopian eunuch who had come to Jerusalem to worship. As he was returning home in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Acts 8:26 *Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.*

27 *So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,*

28 *was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.*

This man was obviously a proselyte to Judaism. He had undoubtedly come to Jerusalem for a Holy Day, at great expense to himself.

29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

This might seem to be a strange thing today, but most reading in those days was vocalised, rather than silent reading as we do today. The Ethiopian was reading the book of Isaiah out aloud.

31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

**"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.**

**33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth."**

34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

The Ethiopian was asking Philip to counsel him, to explain these things to him, to grant him understanding and insight into what he was reading.

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

From the examples I have given you, some might jump to the conclusion that counsel is only necessary for coming to baptism because the two examples I have given you relate to people coming to baptism. But such is definitely not the case.

A few chapters later, we find the apostles having to gather together to come to understand how God desires the Gentiles to be brought into the Body of the Church. Peter had to rehearse the account of Cornelius and his family and the way in which God's Holy Spirit had been given to them. They had to counsel about this matter. The apostles, the leaders of the Church, had to counsel about it! Acts 15, which recounts that detail, gives a wonderful example of this Proverb:

**Proverbs 15:22 Without counsel, plans go awry,
But in the multitude of counselors they are established.**

God's will was established through the multitude of counsel on this occasion, the counsel that arose from the experience of the apostle Peter with Cornelius, of Paul with the Gentiles, and the comments of James, the brother of the Eternal. So we see literally all elements of the Church seeing the need for counsel.

David himself, as the king over all Israel, had to have counsel about some of his desires. David desired to build a Temple to replace the Tabernacle. David had been responsible for bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. Having the central piece of the meeting place of God, the Tabernacle, in Jerusalem, he desired to build a fitting home for it. He wanted to build a Temple for the Ark of the Covenant, as a place for the worship of God.

**2 Samuel 7:1 Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around,
2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains."**

"There's a lack of appropriateness here. There's a disconnect between where I am as king, and where God is as Creator and Ruler of all! This disconnect needs to be corrected."

3 Then Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

Nathan wasn't "jumping the gun." He knew that God was with David. He saw the generosity, the desire in David's heart being right before God. But even Nathan had to be counselled!

4 *But it happened that night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying,*
5 *"Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in?"*

"That's a very noble ambition on your part, David."

6 *"For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle.*

7 *"Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"*

In other words, God said, "I have never made this demand on anyone. That is not what I am seeking for Myself."

8 *"Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel.*

9 *"And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth.*

10 *"Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously,*

11 *"since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house.*

David wanted to make a house for the Eternal. The Eternal says, "Hold on David! I am the One who makes the houses here! I am going to make a house for YOU because of your diligence to Me!"

12 *"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.*

13 *"He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

David, the king, was a man who loved God's law with probably a greater degree of intensity than anyone else we know of. We can look at the Psalms that he has written and the way in which he was able to express his appreciation of God's law. He was a man who was DEEPLY devoted to God and His ways.

Yet the Eternal had to say, "David, you don't quite see it from My perspective. You have a great and noble idea, but I have a different priority - and this is going to be done by your son."

David was able to "prepare the ground" for Solomon, to collect the precious metals, stones and the various materials that were going to be used in the building of the Temple. He was able to help in that regard, but he wasn't able to do it. God intervened and said, "No, David. That's not the way it is going to be."

Another Old Testament example is Moses. Moses had to be counselled how to rule the people. Having been in the Pharaoh's court, having been in charge of an imperial army of Egypt, with all of his knowledge and education, he still had a blind side in terms of how to conduct himself in terms of the people of God.

His father-in-law, Jethro, said, "I have some counsel for you Moses. You need some help here." Exodus 18 sets that out for us.

Let's return to the New Testament briefly. If we read literature about Paul, the normal view of him is that he was, "a self-sufficient individual who needed no input from anyone! He was a self-made man who 'created Christianity' by himself." They are not quite sure what part Jesus Christ had in that. That's the approach that many people take as they write about Paul. I know it's not the way in which WE approach Paul, but it is the frequently held view of Paul: "a self-sufficient individual who needed no input from anyone because he, and he ALONE, knew exactly what God wanted, and nobody else knew but he."

That wasn't the view that Paul had of himself!

Galatians 2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas ...

... talking about a particular visit to Jerusalem 14 years after the first one.

1 ... I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.

2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation (those who seemed influential), lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

He went to the leaders, the pillars of the Church, Peter, James and John and set out for them what he was teaching - to make sure that he was on the right course! The ultimate purpose of counsel is to make sure one keeps on the right course, that one doesn't lose sight of the course! Paul was doing exactly that thing - going up to counsel, to make sure that he had not misread the situation, to make sure that this was the way the other apostles understood and appreciated it. He was able to receive that confirmation from the apostles.

The same is true today. Most of the ministry counsel with Mr Hulme and others from time to time about situations that arise, to make sure that they take the appropriate action, or that they provide the appropriate counsel - because we don't necessarily see things in their fullness.

Before we come to that, let's touch upon some of the reasons why people DON'T counsel.

I think that one of the reasons people don't counsel is because there have been false teachers in the past. People can very quickly become "gun shy." But I do believe that amongst the brethren of God's Church there is a level of maturity that is able to determine whether the true fruits of a minister are present as opposed to the false ministers and teachers that you may have encountered in the past. There is a level of discernment.

If there is no level of discernment in your life, I wonder why you are here! You are here today because God has given you a level of discernment to understand where the truth is being taught. If the truth is being taught, then the concern about the false teachers of the past becomes a non-issue. It may take time to get over it, but it shouldn't be an excuse as to why we don't counsel as needed.

Another reason why people find counselling difficult is because in the past, confidentiality has been abused. That is neither right nor godly. Obviously, as we will see as we go along, there are occasions in which other people have to be involved in the counsel because of the nature of the situation. A minister may need to bring something to Mr Anderson, to Mr Hulme or to Mr Andrews to get advice as to how to handle a particular situation. The details of the situation may have to be laid out for the person's benefit - but in that case it is not an abuse of the confidentiality. It is a desire to help the individual.

Yes, there have been times in which confidentiality has been abused. I must say this much: I am constantly impressed with the way in which Mr Hulme is circumspect with the knowledge that he is privy to! He never, ever, passes on something to another person! I have always been very, very highly impressed with his level of circumspectness in terms of respecting the confidentiality that a person has placed in him. He doesn't consider the confidentiality that people place within him a matter of discussion.

My wife's father used to have a little saying:

"Great minds talk about concepts.
Middle-sized minds talk about things.
Little minds talk about people."

There's a large amount of truth to that!

That confidentiality has been abused in the past, I can only apologise for. I hope I have not been a party to that. I have not sought to be a party to that.

Another reason why people don't counsel is one we have discussed already and very clearly "nailed on the head." "I know it all! I've been in the Church 30 years. I've heard everything! I know everything!"

I don't believe it. I learn every day! I constantly learn. I learn from the questions other people raise. I learn from the examples of other people's lives. I learn from the things I read and study. I am constantly learning.

For me to have the idea that I know it all would be vain, at best. As a matter of fact, even before I give a sermon, I will quite frequently discuss it with Mr Hulme. Why? It is to make sure that I have the right "take" on a situation, rather than drifting off on a tangent, to somewhere that is irrelevant.

We don't know it all! We should not ever allow that to enter our mind. I hope that is not a motivating factor of any of us.

But more sensitively, people oftentimes are very careful about seeking counsel because there is a sense of "losing power" over the self. "I am no longer in control of my situation."

But I have to look at myself and ask, "Am I in control of my situation? Am I REALLY in control of my life?" The answer is no! No matter how much I would like to present myself as being in charge of my life, I am not! I am Somebody else's servant! No matter what I want to think myself, I, ultimately speaking, have to do what HE desires me to do. That's the beginning and end of it for each of us. None of us are an island to ourselves. None of us are sufficient to ourselves.

The idea, so often presented in some of the counselling environments of losing power over the self is, in fact, a non sequitur - because I lost power over myself almost 40 years ago when I got "pushed under the water." I am no longer my own boss! I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ.

So our situation in life is very different. We don't have power over ourselves in the same way that the counselling sciences would like to present a person as having. We are the servants of Jesus Christ - whether we are ordained or not!

Losing power over the self can also feed into another idea that obviously plays out more in a masculine role model of being "macho." "If I have to counsel, I am less of an individual. I know. I've been there. I can work this out for myself. I don't need anybody else to work this out."

Yes, you do - very much! We may THINK of ourselves as being self-sufficient. We may think of ourselves as knowing the answers that exist. We may think we know what the person who counsels with us is going to tell us. You may be exactly right - but they can add something to you as well. They can provide some support. They can help you realise you are not in this battle by yourself, that it is a joint battle: that we are, "arm-to-arm, shoulder-to-shoulder," in this battle together, that there is Someone to help, to call upon.

So the idea of becoming vulnerable, or losing power over oneself or losing your "macho" status is not a valid reason NOT to counsel. They exist as part of human nature. We love to see things that way. But in reality they are not viable reasons not to counsel.

Let's now look at some of the reasons to counsel:

1. We Don't Always See the Wood from the Trees ... or the Trees from the Wood

Sometimes when we are in situations where there is so much confronting us, we need someone else to say, "This is where you need to focus. This is where your focus needs to be at this point in time." We need someone to help break what is to be attained down into some easy attainable steps so that the goal can be accomplished. To put it another way, we can be too close to the problem or the situation to really SEE the way to the solution.

2. We Don't Know Everything!

None of us do! On the other hand, God's Word sets out a scenario to help us. God has always seen the need for human beings to be helped.

Moses speaks of the Children of Israel before his death. Speaking very clearly under the inspiration of God, he sums things up:

***Deuteronomy 32:28 "For they are a nation void of counsel,
Nor is there any understanding in them.***

"They don't have counsel. They don't understand the need for counsel."

**29 Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this,
That they would consider their latter end!**

"Where's it all going? What's the purpose of this?"

I think one of the greatest blessings that we, as God's people, have is that we know the purpose of it. We can see the end. We can understand that, in part. But each and every one of us needs some help to reach that end.

Israel was without counsel. It didn't value counsel in any way whatsoever. They lacked understanding. They didn't see the end. They were solely interested in where they were at that point in time. In fact, God makes it abundantly clear that at times they were more interested in where the next meal was coming from than the greatness of the Eternal!

Speaking of the miraculous deeds God performed in bringing the Children of Israel out of Egypt, the Psalmist writes:

**Psalm 106:13 They soon forgot His works;
They did not wait for His counsel,**

They were so busy involving themselves in the next thing they wanted, they forgot that the Eternal wanted to teach them something through the events they had been through. They weren't interested in that. "Where is the next meal coming from? Where is the next good camping spot?"

**14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness,
And tested God in the desert.
15 And He gave them their request,
But sent leanness into their soul.**

God gave them what they wanted. They wanted food. He gave them food - food called "What Is It?" *Manna* is a Hebrew word which means, "What Is It?" It was food. "You wanted food? You've got food each morning - but none on the seventh day if you didn't collect enough on the sixth day."

**Psalm 81:12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart,
To walk in their own counsels.**

... what was right in their own heart. The people of God are not supposed to have stubborn hearts! The heart of the people of God is supposed to seek the counsels of God, not their own counsels.

Psalm 107 is the start of the fifth book of Psalms. It really focuses on the millennial period of time. Talking about the way of the Children of Israel, it says:

**Psalm 107:10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
Bound in affliction and irons -**

Why were they in that situation?

**11 Because they rebelled against the words of God,
And despised the counsel of the Most High,**

God didn't have a part in their thinking. They were so physically motivated that all they saw was the physical. They didn't see what God was seeking to do in their lives and with them as a nation.

**12 Therefore He brought down their heart with labor;
They fell down, and there was none to help.**

They followed their own best counsels. They sought their own way. They sought what was right for themselves. God says, "I made sure it came to nothing." There was no one there to help them, and, physically speaking, there still is no one there to help them.

Contrast that with the scenario that God sets out for us in His Word of being able to respond to what He has to offer. Solomon writes about a godly quality. He says:

***Proverbs 8:1 Does not wisdom cry out,
And understanding lift up her voice?***

He then goes through a section in which wisdom and understanding are personified as a godly woman.

***2 She takes her stand on the top of the high hill,
Beside the way, where the paths meet.***

Paths are intersecting. Our paths intersect with the ways of this world every day. We can get off course because of that. At those points, wisdom is lifting up her voice.

3 She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city ...

Why is that important? It is because the gates were where judgment was to be executed within a city. It was where the elders of the city were to gather to execute godly justice and godly judgment.

***3 ... At the entrance of the doors:
4 "To you, O men, I call,
And my voice is to the sons of men.
5 O you simple ones, understand prudence,
And you fools, be of an understanding heart.
6 Listen, for I will speak of excellent things,
And from the opening of my lips will come right things;
7 For my mouth will speak truth;
Wickedness is an abomination to my lips.***

You don't find abomination on her lips!

***8 All the words of my mouth are with righteousness;
Nothing crooked or perverse is in them.
9 They are all plain to him who understands,
And right to those who find knowledge.
10 Receive my instruction, and not silver,
And knowledge rather than choice gold;***

This is what is to be sought - not wealth, but wisdom and knowledge.

***11 For wisdom is better than rubies,
And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.
12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
And find out knowledge and discretion.
13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.
14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;
I am understanding,
I have strength.***

... all the things we really need, all the things that are great priority as far as God is concerned are given here in terms of sound wisdom, understanding, strength and counsel. Solomon talks about that. He talks about the way in which that was laid out for them.

Israel was given a programme whereby they could use this aspect of counsel. Moses records:

***Deuteronomy 17:2 "If there is found among you, within any of your gates which the LORD
your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of the LORD your God,***

in transgressing His covenant,

3 "who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded,

4 "and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel,

He said that a certain course of judgment was to be followed.

5 "then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones.

6 "Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

It can't be person on person. The charge had to be established on the mouth of two or three witnesses.

7 "The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death ...

If you are going to accuse another person of unrighteousness, of breaking the command of God, then you have got to be the first to pick up the stone to stone them. That puts a lot of onus on a human being. What do you say about another person? But that is not that which I want to focus on today.

7 "The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

... so they were going to be able to live before God in a pleasing way, in accordance with His covenant. The next verse "ups the ante" a little for us.

8 "If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates ...

If there's a problem and you don't know the answer to it, do you sit around and debate it for the rest of your lives? No, problems had to be RESOLVED! They had to be dealt with.

8 ... then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

... to where the Tabernacle or the Temple were.

9 "And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

They will give you the answer. We could look at this in a little more detail by adding material from other parts. If something was too much for the priests to understand, they could ask the High Priest to consult the Urim and Thummim, to find out what the will of God was in a particular matter, or what God's wisdom was.

Here was a situation set out for Israel whereby they could have wisdom within them as a people. They could come to understand these things.

This is a great parallel to what we have in Ephesians. The apostle Paul talks about the nature of the Church:

**Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,**

In Acts chapter 15, the teachers within the Church were bringing to the apostles a problem and asking, "What is God's will in this?" They did that for the purpose of the "edifying of the Body of Christ."

As I have already said, from time to time a minister may be confronted with an area of counsel with which he is not particularly aware. He can go to Mr Hulme. Somebody approached me the other day about a particular

problem that they needed some counsel to help an individual with. I said, "The person in the ministry who probably has the MOST experience in that is so-and-so. Why don't you send him an email and ask him to give you some direction?"

That particular minister has no idea who the individual is who is being discussed. But the wisdom that God has given to some of the elders and the ministers in the Church is available to edify the Body of Christ, to enable an individual who needs help to receive the help that he needs, rather than to be left floundering by himself, not knowing what to do.

The Eternal has established something within the Church so that we can be edified.

13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

We have a goal! There is a purpose for us being here - and that is to come to be an "image" of Jesus Christ, the Being that we are to marry in the future, as part of the bride of Christ, so that we can be a suitable bride for that very special Husband. The end result is ...

***14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,
15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ -
16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.***

We have just read over a rather interesting word. It talks about the whole body being joined and "knit" together. The word "knit" probably creates a mental image for you of someone sitting down with wool and two needles. My mother knitted. My grandmother knitted. Somebody taught our children to knit on one occasion. We got up one morning and the two children were sitting knitting in the guest bedroom, practising what they had learned the night before. It was quite cute to see that.

We have this idea of knitting, but that is not what Paul is thinking of here. Paul is talking about the kind of knitting that Steven and Karrie are more concerned about for William in terms of his leg becoming ONE WHOLE PIECE again, not fragments.

We find the same word being used in a different context in 1st Corinthians 2. If we had the time we could go through some of the Scriptures that talk about the need for counsel.

We all come to a knowledge of the truth with amounts of worldly baggage from the past. Some have had the privilege of growing up within the Church. From their earliest recorded memory, they probably remember coming to Sabbath Services and having to sleep on the floor while the minister is speaking.

They have grown and gone through the various stages of childhood. They have come to adulthood and they have been baptised. Some of them even have children of their own for whom it is happening yet again. That's a very great blessing for them.

Others of us came into God's Church from different backgrounds. We brought part of our baggage with us. The challenge for each and every one of us is undoing, releasing and getting rid of that baggage. I'm not saying that those who have grown up in the Church have no baggage! Let me never be accused of saying that. They have all sorts of experiences whereby they can add baggage to themselves whether they wish it or not, baggage that needs to be released and got rid of. We are all in this situation together.

Paul shows that we are to have the mind of God. We are called to have the mind of God through the Spirit of God. It is supposed to bring about a change in our lives. Paul sums up what he has said:

1 Corinthians 2:16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" ...

Some translations state, "that he may counsel Him ..." It is appropriate.

Interestingly, it is exactly the same Greek word as "knot" in Ephesians 4! Do we want God to "knot," to become one with OUR way of understanding of life, or do we see our responsibility as to become like God?

In Romans 8, 9 and 10, Paul has been talking about God's dealings with people, the way in which He was dealing with Israel and the Jews, and the way in which He was dealing with the Gentiles, bringing them into His family. It is all going to be brought together. Paul sums it up by saying

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

Quoting from Isaiah, he says:

***34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?"***

I think that Job at one stage thought he could qualify for that. So have lots of other people! "If only God saw it from MY point of view."

Actually, God is not interested in seeing it from ANY of our points of view! He is desperately hoping that we will see it from HIS point of view and that we will become knot together with Him, rather than the other way around.

***35 "Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?"***

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The apostle Paul very clearly understood the nature of counsel. He understood the greatness of God and the fact that we have a role of counselling to help one another become like God.

You don't have to become like Mr de Gier. You don't have to become like Mr Hulme, Mr Andrews, Mr Anderson, Mr Nathan or anyone else - except insofar as they are like Jesus Christ. That's all that it is about: that we become like Jesus Christ!

Solomon made a number of comments in which he paralleled the aspect of counsel with various other concepts.

***Proverbs 19:20 Listen to counsel and receive instruction,
That you may be wise in your latter days.***

... that you may gain wisdom in the future. This ties back to wisdom crying aloud in Proverbs 8. This is something of great importance. Solomon coupled counsel with instruction.

Job 12:13 (English Standard Version) "With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding.

It is worthwhile seeking!

Speaking of the One who has become the Messiah, Isaiah was inspired to write:

***Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.***

We find these things being coupled together, things we already noticed in Proverbs 8. Counsel is coupled with understanding, with might and with instruction.

***Proverbs 8:14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;
I am understanding (insight),
I have strength.***

... the coupling together of all these things that it provides for.

On the other hand, there was a problem for some people:

***Proverbs 1:25 Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke,***

Sometimes reproof comes with the counsel to help get us back on the right track.

Proverbs 1:30 (English Standard Version) [They] would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof,

They didn't see ANY value in it whatsoever.

***Micah 4:11 Now also many nations have gathered against you,
Who say, "Let her be defiled,
And let our eye look upon Zion."
12 But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD,
Nor do they understand His counsel ...***

***Isaiah 5:19 That say, "Let Him make speed and hasten His work,
That we may see it;
And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come,
That we may know it."***

There are some wonderful examples of the value of counsel in the time of David and Absalom.

You may also like to look at 1st Corinthians 2:6-16.

The aspect of being knit together can be coupled together with:

Colossians 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Being knit together means becoming ONE. The "Head" being spoken of in verse 19 is Jesus Christ. In the Greek language, the term "knit" is related to the term "counsel." It's quite a remarkable thing.

How do two become knit together? It is through counsel, through receiving that wisdom and understanding.

We provide counsel in terms of the sermonette and sermon at Sabbath Services. It gives us an attachment to the Word of God. It helps us understand the mind of God so that we can then compare our own lives to it.

Is there a need for counsel outside of that? Certainly. Each and every one of us face situations in our lives of crises or difficulties. There are times when we come to a crossroads and we have to know what is the right way to go.

I know a lot of parodying about counsel has been done in the past: about what colour car one should buy. I don't believe that that is counsel! That is called "personal opinion." It is irrelevant. We are not talking about such mundane things as that.

We are talking about the way of life we should live. It may involve whether a person buys a new car, or how they go about buying a new car. It may involve some of those things. Can the person really afford it?

Sometimes there is a need to counsel about those things, so that somebody else can reinforce the enormity of the decision we might be making, so that we can very clearly see things, so we can't come back later and say, "I didn't understand this."

Counsel is a very, very important part of our lives. As Solomon said, "By counsel issues are established."

We come to understand the way we ought to go. You and I have the ability to counsel. It's one of those things that we can do above all else to help us maintain that course to which we have been called, and the goal and purpose to which we aim.

... *Peter Nathan*
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