



*Christian Counseling*

*Equipping People for Life...*

## **A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, “Why Talk About the Past in Counseling?”**

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As biblical counselors (those who hold to an inerrant view of scripture) the first question we are often asked is, “*Does Scripture address, give basic principles, or imply a course of action in various situations we find ourselves?*” The following is our position on that question with a biblical basis for our response.

We believe that in every person’s life there are significant people, places, situations, and circumstances that impact us in how we think, feel, and experience the world. Those significant events can create barriers to our growth both emotionally and spiritually! Psychological literature calls these barriers a sense of shame or shame-based behavior.

Scripture is clear about how necessary it is to go back and acknowledge certain events as significant and face them with the power of God. Isolation is one of Satan’s biggest tools. Isolation includes denial, no talk rules, and any other form of not acknowledging and addressing issues of our life. In effect, we need to survey the damage or losses in our life, and acknowledge our sense of shame or isolation before we can begin to rebuild. In Nehemiah 2, Nehemiah surveyed the destruction of the wall before he began the process of rebuilding. We believe that metaphorically we need to survey the walls of our emotional lives before we can rebuild them. It would have been suicidal for Nehemiah to leave big gaping holes in the wall, because “they were not that big of holes,” or if he ignored, did not acknowledge, or talk about the holes, pretending they would not really be a problem!

In Mark 5 and Luke 8, we read the story of the Gadarenes Demoniac. The healed man’s desire was to go with Jesus, which would be the easiest thing to do. Jesus did not let him but instead said, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you.” Jesus instructed the man to face his shame with God’s power and go back to his city and proclaim the great things the Lord had done.

Another example is provided for us through the life of Peter with his denial of our Lord. John 18:18 states, “Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves. And Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.” Later in verses 25-27 Peter denies his relationship with Jesus. Imagine the shame, the isolation, and humiliation Peter felt after this event! The next time we find a charcoal fire in scripture is in John 21:9. Jesus is using this as an emotional anchor or marker for Peter as Jesus launches into His three questions of “Do you love me?” Is it a coincidence that Peter denied Jesus three times at a charcoal fire, and several chapters later our Lord at a charcoal fire asked Peter “Do you love me” three times? Jesus was saying to Peter, I want to walk with you in the future, but we must deal with your shame of the past!

Paul is another great example of how we must confront our shameful past with the power of God. After his conversion in Acts 9:29, it is stated that “he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews.” Why would Paul choose the Hellenistic Jews to “talk and argue with”? Paul had one of those significant shameful events with the Hellenistic Jews earlier in his life. Chapter 7 describes the fact that it was the Hellenistic Jews who stoned Stephen, verse 58, “and when they had driven him out of the city they began stoning him and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Saul’s shameful significant event was at least passive participation in murder, as it turns out the murder of a fellow bond servant of God! Chapter 8:1 goes on to state that Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

Only with the power of God can we go back and confront our own particular shame, and acts of unrighteousness. Isolation or shame can keep us bonded to the past and become a barrier to growth and the future Christ has for us. This is why James 5:16 states “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.” It is possible that “healed” in that context includes emotional healing from the shackles of isolation.

Jesus lived out Galatians 6:1. “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, (shame) you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness....” There once was a man who was rich, a chief tax gatherer, definitely branded as a sinner, a social isolate with no support system and whose career was not accepted by the community. Jesus said in Luke 19:5b “Zaccheus, hurry and come down for today I must stay at your house.” Zaccheus’ shame was not only because of his profession, but what that profession allowed him to do in stealing from and defrauding others. Zaccheus, through the power of God, was able to face his shame and give back four times as much as he had stolen.

In conclusion, we believe that it is necessary to talk about the past in order to:

1. Uncover the shame—Romans 13:12 talks about putting on the armor of light.
2. Unlock the sense of isolation
3. Equip one with the Power of God—II Corinthians 2:5 says “that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the Power of God.”

As long as we hide, deny, remain isolated from a sense of community support and fellowship, then we are relying upon the wisdom of men and not on the Power of God.

At Rapha Christian Counseling one of our goals is to provide the best staff of therapists available to meet the needs of our community. Our counseling staff represents eight different denominations. We believe that our diversity within the Christian community is an asset to our ability to reach out to those that may be hurting or those who are saying with the Psalmist, “Guide me with Thy counsel” (Ps. 73:24). With twenty therapists on staff we are able to specialize in many different areas of concern. Some of those areas include: Marriage and Family, Adolescents, Play Therapy for Children, Parenting Issues, Communication, Stress Management, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Addiction, and Alcohol and Chemical Abuse. If you are considering counseling, we are confident that you will find that the counselors at Rapha Christian Counseling can meet your needs.