

50 Years: How CCEF Has Grown—and Seeks to Keep Growing



by EDWARD T. WELCH

CCEF has grown and changed since it was established in 1968. Many gifted people have come and gone during these 50 years, and each one has had an impact. Outward changes have come in building improvements, technology, administration, partnerships, and educational programs. But the ways we teach and counsel have also grown and changed. It is these deeper developments that I want to identify.¹

We Value Growth and Change

Any institution that wants to get better at what it does places a high value on growth and development. The work can always be improved. As a ministry, CCEF shares this value.

We work with a timeless, unchanging, authoritative text. Scripture certainly needs no development. We are confident that Christ has come in the flesh, died for sins, is risen, and his Kingdom is growing because he gives his Spirit to us. We are confident that Scripture speaks with breadth and depth to the human condition.

¹ *Growth* and *change* can be used interchangeably, and I will use them in that way. But they also connote slightly different means of development. *Change* usually suggests that we are out of kilter in some way, and need to be righted. *Growth* suggests that we are on the right path but there is so much more for us. Our corporate development has included both growth and change.

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But we are not so sure about ourselves. We know that we are sinners, and sin makes blind spots. We know that we are finite, and our knowledge and gifts are limited. Our corporate growth depends on the Spirit sanctifying us. It depends on learning from each other. It depends on listening to critics. Consider each of these.

We grow from the Spirit sanctifying us. Progressive sanctification is an elemental reality. As individuals, we will only fully arrive when we see Christ. But we are now in him and empowered by his Spirit. We can grow in love and wisdom, and we can change by turning from stubborn sins. If we are spiritually static, then something is wrong. As individuals, we hope to be different—to grow and change—from one year to the next.

CCEF's growth rests, in part, on the individual growth of the men and women who serve here. Yet, it is more than that. Institutional growth in wisdom is more than the sum of the growth of its employees. There is something that happens when God's people work together that is greater than the aggregate of each person's growth. Just as marriage creates something more than the joining of two people's strengths and weaknesses, so each member of our staff is part of the growth of one body in ways that the maturing cannot be ascribed to particular individuals. The Spirit is involved in the work of the whole.

We grow from meeting together. For us to be more than the sum of parts, we must meet together. But this goal can be undermined by the reality that counseling and teaching ministry often demand a good bit of solitary time. As counselors, we rarely co-counsel. As teachers, we close our office doors and prepare for the next day's lectures. As writers, we read, think, and compose, and we tend to bring others in after we have completed a significant amount of work. So, to combat this, we intentionally *plan* to meet together so that we can learn from each other.

To this end, we hear devotional wisdom from each other in daily prayer meetings. Our faculty, counselors, and ministry departments meet together weekly. We read the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*. We read each other's books and the writings of others in the biblical counseling world. We hear each other speak at our annual conferences. We speak at other conferences and meet with other counselors. We talk together about institutional goals, challenges, and

initiatives. We know that our personal styles and the nature of our work can steer us inward, so we are consistently fielding ideas for how to work better together in community.

We grow from critique. We learn from each other—and we also learn from those who disagree with us. For example, in the early 1990's we were publicly criticized that we were getting too cozy with secular ideas and practices. Though our attempts to explain and seek understanding with that critic failed, the experience of being critiqued was invaluable. It became an occasion to consider whether there were kernels of truth in what was being said. It was also a time to learn what it was like to be criticized. Simply put, we did not enjoy being misunderstood and misrepresented. From there, it didn't take long to consider that others might not enjoy being misunderstood and misrepresented by us.

The typical rules for engagement in the public square are that when someone publishes an article or a book, those publications are open for public evaluation, however harsh. At CCEF, we had always wanted to be fair in our response. Once we were harshly criticized however, we recognized our need for more scriptural rules of engagement. We arrived at this: we want to write about someone's ideas in a way that first understands those ideas accurately. We want to identify the person's thoughts in such a way that he or she would say, "Yes, that is what I wrote and what I believe."

We want to write as if we are face to face with the author of the book we are evaluating. We aim to critique in such a way that the author is edified by our interaction, whether he or she fully agrees with our biblical rationale or not. Even more, we want to give authors a first look at a book or article review so they have opportunity to respond before we publish it. This has happened, but not often enough. We have more room for growth.

We are grateful for the Spirit, the Word, our colleagues, our partners, our students, our counselees, and our critics. Together they reshape us.

Three Areas of Development in Our Understanding

The actual changes we have made can be tracked through our books and *Journal of Biblical Counseling* articles. They all emerge from insights into and applications of biblical doctrine. For example, *How Does Sanctification Work?* brings fresh insight into progressive sanctification. *Marriage Matters* and *Age*

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