

The core tenets of Biblical Counseling

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Consider the following characteristics that should have a place in the life of every healthy local church:

- ✓ Counseling One Another
- ✓ Loving one another
- ✓ Reproving one another
- ✓ Warning one another
- ✓ Bearing the burdens of one another
- ✓ Edifying one another
- ✓ Encouraging one another
- ✓ Serving one another
- ✓ Instructing one another

Maybe you read those and thought to yourself that you're doing those. You see others doing these things in your church. It goes far beyond the pastor or the elders in your church because there are many men and women who are helping each other in love and with biblical fidelity grow in Christlikeness. And truly, all of these biblical phrases have a part to play in biblical counseling relationships as one Christian helps another Christian walk in a Christ-honoring way through life.

WORKING DEFINITION:

Biblical counseling is the skilled application of God's sufficient Word to the hearts of God's people.

Let's break that down piece by piece to understand this definition even more.

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I. SKILLED...

Biblical counseling is true Christian soul-care. Far from being a self-help book, the Bible does provide everything a child of God needs for life and for godliness. This does not mean that the biblical counseling community rejects science, medicine or the medical community. But rather, biblical counseling affirms that the Word of God is the ultimate authority in matters of this life and in godly living. So, biblical counseling, at its very core, is one Christian reading and *rightly interpreting* the Word of God so as to help others to walk in a manner pleasing to Christ. This underscores the preeminent need for good hermeneutics (= *bible interpretation*). The Christian needs to know what the Bible says and where to go in the Bible to help others who are struggling. This is something, to be sure, that any Christian can (and should!) do. This does not leave all counseling cases in the lap of the trained and licensed professionals. It shows that the simplest Christian who knows his Bible and who is able to get at the meaning of the text as the author intended it to be understood and who can rightly and appropriately bring God's Word to

bear in pertinent situations is capable to counsel others through circumstances in life. So then, biblical counseling requires that Christians know God's Word well to be able to bring truth to bear in specific times. Again, any Christian can do this. The Spirit-indwelt Christian, armed with the sufficient and powerful Word of God, is massively more competent to help a Christian battling with sin than an unbelieving, licensed professional.

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2. APPLICATION...

Biblical counseling requires good hermeneutics to get at the *meaning* of the text. But then, the counselor needs to know how to go from the *meaning* to the *application* of the text. So how does the Scripture about "giving thanks in all circumstances" relate to a friend's life who is battling with crushing anxiety? How do the texts about fearing God help the struggling Christian who finds himself so often caving in to the sin of man-pleasing? For these questions, the Christian needs to have the Word and the meaning of the text, but he also needs to know *how* the text applies to a fellow believer's specific situation. Far from the accusation that biblical counseling is an overly-simplistic method of helping by saying: 'memorize this verse and pray more,' biblical counseling commits to walking side by side with other believers in the bearing of each other's burdens so that sin is *put off* and godly habits are *put on* in its place. Again, no licenses or degrees are mandatory for this to take place. The Christian who knows his Bible and uses it to diagnose and bring change in his own life is one who can do this to fellow believers in his local church with a committed relationship of godly love -- or, *biblical counseling*.

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3. GOD'S SUFFICIENT WORD...

Every biblical counselor stands upon and glories in the doctrine of the sufficiency of the Word of God. The Bible never claims to be exhaustive in all areas of knowledge. But the Bible does claim to be absolutely sufficient for all that the Christian will need for all areas of *both life and godliness*. The Word is God-breathed and profitable ... so that the man of God will be *adequate, equipped* for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Bible is not just *an* option for help when battling with down and out depression, sexual addictions, self-mutilation, suicidal temptations, alcoholism, or schizophrenic tendencies. The Word of God is *the* ultimate authority because it is sufficient to help the child of God glorify Christ and triumph through this life -- even though the path may be thorny and lonely. It must be stated again that biblical counselors who affirm the sufficiency of the Word do not reject science or the medical profession. Medical exams and care from physicians are so important to look at the physiological elements of a person's makeup. But it is the Word of God that changes the heart and teaches the Christian to endure *whatever* hard trial or physical ailment that may invade one's life by the good and sovereign hand of God. So again, biblical counseling underscores and champions the reality that the Bible repeatedly claims to be adequate and perfect for the converting and changing of the heart so as to make God's people more like Jesus Christ.

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4. TO THE HEARTS...

Another central tenet of biblical counseling is the target of biblical change being the heart. The Word of God does not promote behavioral management or simple external change. Too many examples exist in the Scriptures to show that God is not impressed with outward righteousness if a person is rotten and full of wickedness on the inside. So biblical counselors take God's Word and apply it to the lives of other Christians so that the *heart* is wooed by Christ and gripped by Christ and convicted by the Spirit and empowered by grace to obey the Word -- regardless of the trying life-situation a person may be in. A wife may be in a tragic and abusive marriage to a great deceiver and yet she can glorify Christ as her heart continually is drawn to Christ, to His Word, and to godly living *even enduring the hardships of life*. This is where biblical hope is so profound and beautiful. It reminds the believer that God's promises are yes and amen and that God is working all things together for good for His people so as to conform them more into the image and likeness of God's beloved son, Jesus Christ. So biblical counseling refrains from referring fellow believers to psychologists and psychiatrists because ultimate change occurs in the heart, by the power of the Word, in the context of the local church, for the glory of Jesus Christ, *even if a situation in life or a trial in life or a pain in life remains the same or escalates in intensity*. Sometimes the tendency is to do anything to get "relief." But it just might be that God may allow a specific situation to remain (and thus, to withhold 'relief') so that the child of God will grow stronger in his heart-confidence in Christ, in his fear of God, in his fortification on God's sovereignty, and in his commitment to prayer, Bible reading, and serving in his local church. And if this happens, biblical counselors can come alongside the counselees and say, "to God be the glory!"

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5. GOD'S PEOPLE...

If biblical counseling pursues the heart and conforming the inside of the person more into the image of Jesus Christ, then it only assumes that biblical counseling can only happen in God's people. In other words, if an unbeliever comes to a Christian for counseling, that relationship will be full of help and hope because it will be evangelistic in nature because there is something far more important than simple physical relief from a pain or relief from a circumstance, namely, the sinner's peace with God. So, biblical counselors know and understand that all counseling is pre-counseling until the person is a Christian. For indeed, no person can *understand* the Scripture or *obey Christ* or *live out the precepts of God's Word* if they are lost and dead in sin. Only true Christians have the *ability* to honor God, obey God, please God, and to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, in regard its lusts' (Rom 13:14). This is not to say that biblical counselors turn people in the community away who genuinely need and long for help. Biblical counselors do not angrily or arrogantly shove people off if they're tangled in sin and angry at God. Biblical counselors understand, however, the reality of God's word and systematic theology derived from the Word that the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised (1 Cor 2:14). This is why evangelism takes priority when a biblical counselor meets with a nonbeliever. This includes proclaiming the gospel in love, with patience, with compassionate urgency, and with fidelity in calling the unbeliever to repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. And for

the Christian, he has both the *ability* and the *desire* to obey and honor Christ above all things. Even if something is hard or seemingly impossible to do, the child of God has the indwelling holy Spirit, the power of prayer, his local church, and the counseling relationship to help him on the ongoing and progressive journey of sanctification.