

What Biblical Counseling Seeks to Address

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One can define biblical counseling as a personal, intentional, gospel-driven, and Spirit-empowered discipling relationship. Biblical counseling affirms that all Christians are “able to admonish one another” (Rom 15:14) and can “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:16) as the Word of God dwells richly within them. When a person is regenerated, committed to prayer, willing to work faithfully, and faithful in completing homework in the Word of God, biblical change can happen. And *that* is what biblical counseling endeavors to do. Biblical counseling takes the Word of God and faithfully applies God’s Word to life’s situations so that the Christian can think and live in a way that is pleasing to God in all things.

1. Who is God, and how can we know Him?

Since God resides at the center of all things, nothing can be rightly understood or properly ascertained apart from its relationship to God. Biblical counseling drives the counselor and the counselee into the Word of God to understand *who* God is and *how* God has revealed Himself. Problems arise when sinners do not know God rightly and do not worship Him appropriately. So biblical counseling will catapult the Christian into the Bible so as to see every situation (whether it be problem, conflict, dilemma, sin, catastrophe, fear, death) through a God-centered worldview. Therefore, a proper understanding of God’s character, His nature, His sovereignty, His providence, and His goodness exists as a foundation for biblical counseling.

2. Where do we find answers, and what is our source of truth for life?

Everyone searches for answers. When death invades and takes a family member’s life, when a life-dominating sin cannot be overcome, when a natural disaster devastates all of one’s possessions, when a person cannot get over how others perceive him, all people search for answers. God has not left His people to wander aimlessly. God has graciously provided His sufficient revelation contained in 66 books — the Bible. The Bible is the very Word of God and it is the only divine, supernatural, and inspired book given to mankind as our ultimate source of truth. The answers for life can be found by searching the Scriptures.

3. How do we understand people biblically?

Biblical counseling involves people. Whether someone has wronged another person, a person is facing a struggle in his own heart, or a person lives a life of secret sin that no one knows about, all counseling relationships involve people. Therefore, the counselor and the counselee must understand people rightly. This is the doctrine of anthropology. In the Bible, God has graciously revealed the truth about mankind in very clear terms. God explicitly states that man is sinful by nature, living in the darkness, and enslaved to the sins of this world. The Bible reveals that man’s actions stem from a source on the inside — the heart. And it is at this very core that all mankind is hopelessly lost and desperately in need of God’s heart-transforming work. Who people are, how people function, how people live, and *why* people do what they do is clearly spelled out in the Bible.

4. What went wrong? What is the condition of fallen human nature?

When Adam, the very first person who ever lived on the earth, sinned, the Bible claims that all people fell into sin in him (Rom 5:12). Sin resides in the heart of every human being from the very moment of conception. All people are dead in sin, corrupt in their hearts, alienated from God, at war with God, and prone to idolatry. Thus, when left to man’s own natural impulse, he will choose to sin every time because he is, by default, a self-worshipping, independent god of his own making. Man’s nature is hopeless, helpless, and completely desperate. By nature, human beings respond sinfully to problems, to life’s unexpected circumstances, and pridefully accuse others for the terrible situations that exist.

5. How do people change? What difference does the gospel make?

The Bible presents such a bleak picture of humanity that one wonders if there could ever be any hope of change. In and of himself, man is entirely doomed and headed for hell. But God, by undeserved mercy and in sovereign grace, can intervene and take a sinner and bring about change. The Bible provides the necessary revelation for understanding how this change comes about. Man cannot produce this change. Man cannot coerce this change. Man cannot preempt or prompt or procure permanent, *biblical* change. Only God has the ability to do this.

And herein lies the glorious heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is where biblical counseling is most gloriously hopeful. Left to himself, man cannot produce real, lasting, *internal*, changes. But God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ and by His rich mercies, can invade the sinner's life, bring regeneration (true salvation) and give a new heart, a new will, a new nature, and new affections that once were not present. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes everything.

When a counselee is seized by, saved by, and secured by the gospel of Jesus Christ, everything changes — everything! The compass of life is different. The core of life is now Jesus Christ. What permeates the Christian's mind is not *self* but rather glorifying *God*. What should dominate the Christian's heart is not what *others* think but rather what *God* thinks. What should captivate the affections of the Christian is not how *bad* the situation is but rather how *God* may be preeminently glorified in his proper response to the situation. So it is stated again, the gospel of Jesus Christ invades, pervades, and remains the central focal point of every aspect of the counseling relationship.

6. What difference does our future destiny make in our present reality?

For the Christian, heaven is a certain reality that will inevitably come to pass. This is called "hope". Biblical hope is not a wishful thought but a certain conviction about reality. Jesus Christ has died, risen, has given His people new birth and a new and living hope. Every Christian longs for heaven. A true believer, saved from the penalty of sin in hell, affirms most joyously that this world is not his home. No matter how dark, how grim, how lonely, how afflicted, how isolated, how forsaken, how bitter life may become for the child of God, he can lift his head confidently in looking to the risen Christ and know that the present suffering is producing an eternal weight of glory. A mindset focused on heaven changes everything. Setting one's thoughts on things above alters the way the Christian responds to present troubles. If heaven is truly a believer's home, and he is merely a pilgrim here passing through, it follows then that the Christian who understands this strives to ready himself *now* for the glorious reunion with Jesus Christ *then*.

7. How do we care like Christ in the body of Christ?

Biblical counseling is not reserved for the certified, the professionals, and for the academically elite. Biblical counseling is part and parcel with the local Church. Every biblical church should be a discipling church; and every discipling church is a biblical counseling church. Biblical counseling should be part of the fabric of the church's culture. A Christian should care enough about one another to rebuke others when they stumble into sin. A brother should willingly help bear the burdens of others who are struggling. A regenerated person should encourage others frequently so as to help prevent the other person from falling into the deceptive traps of sin. The biblical counselors are not professionals. The pastors are not the only biblical counselors. Though there can be training and though the academic rigors of biblical counseling certifications can help immensely, when a Spirit-indwelt Christian goes to another brother with the Word of God open and a determined commitment to prayer, change, and hard work, this is part of the very nature of Christians growing in their Christlikeness. Biblical counseling, then, is when two Christians live life with one another submissive to God's Spirit, obedient to God's sufficient Word, fervent in diligent prayer, steadfast in producing heart-change, and daily bathing in the glories of the gospel of God's grace.