

THEOLOGY OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

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A group of ministers were having lunch when the subject of counseling came up. During the discussion one of the minister's asked a peer to his right, "What is your theology of counseling?" This launched a discussion about the theology of counseling. Several in the group admitted that they had never thought about the theology of counseling. The consensus from the discussion was a plan to follow up in a future meeting with a discussion of the subject.

The theology of biblical counseling is a consideration of the various disciplines within theology that relate to counseling. The study begins with a working definition of *theology*:

Theology (*the-ol-o-gy*) *noun*: From the Greek *theologia*: *Theos*, meaning "God", and *logia*, meaning "utterances, sayings, words, or oracles." *Theology is the study of God and His relationship to the universe, mankind, divine truth, systematic doctrines from the Bible related to categories, revelation; a branch of study in a seminary, university, or school of divinity, etc.*

The theology of biblical counseling is a study of the various teachings in the Bible that relate to man's beliefs, attitudes, behavior, and how to please God. It is a step beyond only considering the integrity and inspiration of the Scriptures.

The world of theological studies is vast, containing some of these categories: (1) crisis theology, (2) natural theology, (3) liberal theology, (4) orthodox theology, (5) liberation theology, (6) moral theology, (7) dialectical theology, (8) mystical theology, (9) restoration theology, and (10) pastoral theology. And within these broad categories there are numerous subsets. The theology of biblical counseling centers on what God's word reveals about teaching, disciplining, and helping people become more like Christ (cf. Philippians 2:4-9). It is helping people grow into the *fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:11-16).

THEOLOGY FOR THE BIBLICAL COUNSELOR

The theology of biblical counseling is the process by which fellow-members of the Body of Christ helps another member develop into the *mind and fullness of Christ*. It is helping others solve their issues by teaching, learning, and applying the word. Here is how Paul addressed the competence of Christians helping Christians: *I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another*

(Romans 15:14, NIV). Note the three qualities Paul identified in his theology of counseling. The brethren were:

1. **Full of goodness.** An essential quality of every biblical counselor. This advocates a study of what is goodness. Obviously a “bad” person wouldn’t be a biblical counselor.
2. **Competent in knowledge.** This means that their understanding of God’s will was sufficient; even though they didn’t have a degree in counseling they had sufficient knowledge to help others in the church.
3. **Competent to instruct.** They were able to share their knowledge of the truth with others. This was obedience of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). This is why after sufficient time God wants all Christians to be teachers (cf. Hebrews 5:11-14). Thus, biblical counselors.

In his epistle to the church in Colosse, Paul wrote about the application of the theology of counseling: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16)*, Note four qualities Paul identified in encouraging Christians to counsel others:

1. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.** This means knowing more than a few basic truths; it is knowing the truth (John 8:32), as well as experiencing the truth by doing it. Notice he didn’t say let the word of philosophers, etc. dwell in you.
2. **As you teach and admonish.** As a biblical counselor you not only teach facts, you encourage others to obey and apply the teaching to their lives. This is a core of the theology of biblical counseling.
3. **You do so with wisdom in your hearts.** God is the only source of true wisdom: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5)*. It is one thing to know the word and another thing to rightly use it. This is why we need to pray for wisdom.
4. **With gratitude in your hearts to God.** We must never take our relationship with God for granted; neither must we take all His blessings for granted. As we counsel others we remember that we, too, are only saved sinners.

These core qualities of the function and goals of a biblical counselor establish the guidelines for developing a theology of counseling. The biblical counselor must first BE something before he can DO something.

SOME SPECIFICS OF THE THEOLOGY OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

What follows is a brief listing of some of the key planks in the theology of biblical counseling. Take a few minutes on each point and read and reflect on the Scripture given.

1. **God created man in His own image:** (Genesis 1—3). This means that God is the perfect One to give man advice, which He does in His word.
2. **God created man with the freedom of Choice:** (Genesis 1—3). Sadly, from the beginning until now, man has been making wrong choices. God’s counseling manual, the Bible, reveals how man can make the right choices (cf. Joshua 24:15).
3. **God created man as a triune being:** *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless as the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).* Only the word of God effectively addresses the issues related to man’s total being.
4. **Man’s major and eternal problem is sin.** It has separated Him from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Sin has brought forth the wages of spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Only the blood of Christ can atone for man’s sins (Matthew 26:28). Counseling is not biblical unless it presents the solution for man’s sin problem, which is obedience to the Gospel (Romans 1:14-16).
5. **The theology of counseling addresses the core role of thinking.** Thinking is at the catalysis point of all sin that originates within man (Mark 7:21-23). We are what we think (Proverbs 23:7); God give us the fruit of our thoughts (Jeremiah 6:19). Unless man repents—changes his thinking—he will perish (Luke 13:3, 5). Repentance is a core doctrine in Biblical counseling.
6. **The theology of counseling affirms man’s ability and right to change.** This is the heart of the Gospel. On the Day of Pentecost we read about 3000 who made the decision to change and acted upon that decision (cf. Acts 2:37-47). Biblical counseling helps a

person discover the power and means of changing his or her life. This is the hope factor in the theology of counseling.

7. **The theology of biblical counseling advocates the production of the fruit of the Spirit in a Christian's life.** The specific facets of this fruit is presented by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians (Galatians 5:16-26). This involves a program of self-discipline exercises.
8. **The theology of counseling includes stressing the place and need for fervent prayer.** This is following the model of Christ and the example of the early church. God has promised to answer prayers prayed according to His will (James 1:4-7). We must not stop praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The counselee is helped to develop a schedule for prayer and the counselor prays with the person.
9. **The theology of counseling stresses the negative influence of the world and how to avoid it.** *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19).* This is why we must not love the world, as well abstain from all forms of evil. How to run from the Devil is part of biblical counseling.
10. **The theology of counseling works with a person to help him/her develop skills for intentionally applying the word to life's issues.** The issue is identified and then God's solution is presented. *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22-27).* The questions is: How do I apply this portion of God's word to this issue?
11. **The theology of counseling places an emphasis on the church as God's center for counseling.** This is the Body Life model of 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12-14. It is a realization and use of the numerous "one another" passages in helping each other in the church. This eliminates the need of establishing a center outside of the local church.
12. **The theology of biblical counseling has as the goal of all efforts to help others, the glorification of God:** *Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20, 21).* The counseling goal for the counselee is to help him/her glorify God.

These 12 qualities form the core attributes around which many additional biblical qualities are woven to make a sound theology of counseling.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Write a minimum of 50 words about each of the 12 qualities of the theology of counseling.