Introduction To Biblical Counseling

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THE MYTH OF COMPLEXITY

The world today is greatly influenced by the teachings of a Bible-Plus-Something-Else Theology that tells us that the Word of God is no longer sufficient in, and of, itself. Instead there is a need to add something more; another idea; another reference; that makes it better and more applicable to “contemporary issues.” One of the most destructive “additions” is Humanistic Psychology, a philosophy of life, relationships, and spirituality that is oppositional and even contradictory to Scripture.

Psychology has infiltrated the Body of Christ at multiple levels from the pulpit to the counseling room. As disciples of Christ, and ministers of His Kingdom, we must be extremely cautious concerning our vulnerability to false teachings that lead the unbeliever astray and the believer into rebellion.

Psychology, as a philosophy, believes:
- God is irrelevant or non-existent.
- Human problems are based in our biology, environment, relationships, and experience.
- Humans are basically good and deserve to be happy.
- The situations and people around one should change in order for him/her to be fulfilled.
- Sin is an outdated concept that only produces guilt and shame.

Psychology, as a profession, relies upon:
- Man’s wisdom and intellect.
- Individual drives and desires over responsibility to others.
- The Human definition of morality.
- A system void of God; lacking in the truth of Jesus Christ; and empty of the power and workings of the Holy Spirit.

Psychology, as a treatment approach, teaches:
- “No deity can save us. We must save ourselves” (Brandt and Skinner, 1997, p. 5).
- We are not to blame for our circumstance. It is the fault of parents, spouses, experiences, etc.
- An individual must change him/herself by adjusting his/her surroundings (get a divorce, move to another city, change jobs, etc.).
- Dependency reflects weakness. We are to be independent and fully self-sufficient.
- Peace comes by way of our personal strength, psychological and emotional growth, and the pursuit of remedies that are first and primarily, for the self.
- Christian principles of life are superstitious and counter-productive.
The Bible teaches, however, that human behavior, error, and pain does not flow out of social and cultural factors. Instead, God’s Word places human dysfunction under one specific heading—Sin (Brandt and Skinner, 1997).

According to Scripture, sin and its consequences, flow from the heart and flesh of man. Jesus said:

“What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:20-23).

The apostle Paul described man’s sinful nature in this way:

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

The biblical truth is this as follows (Brandt and Skinner, 1997):

• “We were born with sinful hearts” (p. 6).
• Society, family, and experience only “brings out of our hearts what is already there” (p.6).

But there is good news for the one in rebellion (Brandt and Skinner, 1997):

• If the problem is sin, it is the “simplest thing in the world to deal with” (p.7).
• “Jesus died to cleanse us from our sin” (p. 7).

Still, Humanistic Psychology tells us this approach is “too simple.” The human condition is complex, complicated, and requires “professional attention” by highly trained, mental health experts. Again, they stand on the theology that the Bible is insufficient and in need of augmentation. Training must include the a new theoretical expansion: a revised application.

We agree that training is essential. We, as the Body of Christ, need in depth training and immersion in scriptural principles, memorization, and application of God’s Word. In training Timothy for the ministry, Paul wrote:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

As an “approved worker” we have access to:

• An intimate relationship with Christ as we come to understand His nature, standards, promises, and provision.
• An expanded understanding of His moral guidelines and perfect will for our lives.
• An increased awareness of what constitutes sin; how to recognize it in our lives; and what God requires us to do about it.
• Empowerment of the Holy Spirit as He stirs our conviction and sensitivity to sin (John 16:8) while teaching us “all things” (John 14:26).

As God’s Word takes root in our hearts, we are led to confront those aspects of life that oppose His precepts. Within our sinful hearts, a battle is waged between truth and sin, leading to the eviction of unwanted emotion, hostility, unforgiveness, and pride. The Scriptures, fueled by His Spirit will clean the sinful residue that, untended, grows into undesirable behavior, broken marriages, untrained, disobedient children, and physical and spiritual loss.

In the midst of his sin, as he suffered the discipline of God, King David knew where to turn for cleansing and restoration:

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:7-10).

Always remember that the problem is not complex and the solution is not far away. It is rebellion and selfishness that is complicated and time consuming. Rebellion leads us into struggle, bondage, and frustration that, if left to its logical end, will produce our surrender to a willful, repetitive lifestyle of sin and disobedience. The writer of Hebrews leveled this warning:

“Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:28-31).

Repentance, leading to cleansing and obedience, is a very short-term process. As we choose to study and hear God’s Word; as we follow its directives; and as we repent and turn away from the harbored emotion and resulting behavior, deliverance comes swiftly. To state otherwise is to deny the power and authority Christ. Jesus said clearly that our proximity to Him and the taking of His nourishment, bears life-giving fruit:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

When we draw our sustenance from Christ; when we abide (reside) with Him; we bear “much fruit.” When we do otherwise, we “can do nothing.” As counselors we must never forget the source of our own nourishment, nor can we stand in the way of our clients being fed from the True Vine. When we offer psychology in place of, or in addition to,
Jesus and His Word, we are giving a food that is not only inadequate, but may indeed be toxic to the Christian spirit and mind.

Additions to, and subtractions from, the Bible, take the Christian farther and farther from the source of “truth and life” (John 14:6), and closer to the world’s order devised by the devil for our personal decimation (1 Peter 5:8). These false remedies feed the believer temporal, worldly solutions that will produce either an allergic reaction that could be fatal, or a slow immunization to sin that undermines his/her alarm system and threatens the integrity of his/her Christian walk. Christians need the “pure milk” of Scripture that sustains and builds maturity (1 Peter 2:2). The taste of sin is intoxicating, but the food of God is eternal. Jesus told His disciples:

"I have food to eat of which you do not know" (John 4:32).

The false, humanistic gospel leaves the unsaved individual empty and without hope. It feeds his/her appetite for the corrupt food of the world and leads them directly away from salvation in Christ Jesus. His body was broken and His blood shed, so that we could take Him into ourselves, making us free indeed (John 8:32) from earthly sorrow and eternal damnation. Jesus said:

“For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:55-57).

Whether restoring the believer, or saving the lost, the answer is Jesus Christ. His answer is conveyed through Scripture, and given life by the Holy Spirit. We must learn to know the source of the problem, the nature of the battle, and the remedy that heals. As helpers and ministers, we must know these facts intimately, through our abiding faith and our association with the Savior:

- The problem is the heart. 
  "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)."
- The battle is spiritual
  “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).
- The solution is Jesus
  “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

FINDING PEACE

Before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples:

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).
Why, for the Christian, is peace so hard to come by? Where is our joy, unity, service, and faith? Why are we so miserable? Christians, like the rest of the world, now express their failings and difficulties boldly and often, without remorse. Many have even become prideful about our misery and struggle, relating it incorrectly, to the demands of a Christian walk. We proclaim:

- “I am under stress…”
- “I am depressed and anxious…”
- “I am angry and hurt…”
- “I can’t get along with him/her…”
- “I am afraid…”


More and more, Christians equate our self-induced unhappiness, with spiritual struggle and/or spiritual attack. Often we claim we are suffering persecution for Christ, when in reality, we are suffering in the flesh, not the spirit. Frequently, we are less a target of Satan’s attention than we realize. In a state of disobedience, we are of no threat to the evil one and his plans to undermine our testimony. More often, we are experiencing the consequence of sin and the discipline of the Lord.

It is true, that as we walk this earth as aliens, we will be subject to earthly challenge and even spiritual assault. But to be recognized as a foreigner, drawing the wrath and persecution of the world, we first have to look less like the carnal majority and more like Jesus. Our Savior said:

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19).

But in spite of the potential attack of the world, Jesus desires for us to move through this time on earth peacefully and cheerfully; untroubled and unafraid; as long as we look to Him to enable us. Jesus said:

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

When the apostle Peter wrote to believers suffering under the hand of Nero’s cruel persecution in Rome, he encouraged them to live lives of joy and holiness, even in the face of pain and physical death.

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Peter also wrote of “holy conduct” in a hostile situation:

“...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15).
Some theologians believe Peter wrote these exhortations from a Roman prison, in his seventies, while he awaited the crucifixion of his wife and himself. He served to remind his brethren of the truth while encouraging their faithfulness, even as his own obedience and faith are tried to the fullest extent:

“Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (2 Peter 1:13-14).

This was Peter, God’s transformed servant: teaching, exhorting, and joyously tending to the work of the Kingdom, no matter his environment or his imminent demise.

But in our devotion to the world’s model of psychological solutions, we believe we cannot be at peace unless all surrounding features of life are in the order we desire them to be. We also postpone our efforts of obedience and holy pursuit until we work our the earthly elements of our discomfort. Clearly this approach is in reverse order to the prescription God provides. We sometimes believe we will come to Jesus when we have controlled our life and we really think we have the power to do so! We say we will be happy, fulfilled Christians when we:

• “…get our husband’s to talk more.”
• “…get on the right medication.”
• “…can confront our abuser.”
• “…move to a better church.”
• “…resolve the pain of our past.”

THEN—we will have the order we demand in our world.
THEN—we will be happy and in control.
THEN—we will have peace and serenity.
THEN—we will have more time for our Lord; for prayer; for Bible study; for church; and for service to others.

This external orientation—this fixation on control—this refusal to function in a godly, fruitful manner until life is as we want it to be—is sinful disobedience and leads only to more misery and discontentment.

There is no process or activity in life that, once completed, fills and satisfies the mind, body and soul. In fact, the completion of a task; the achievement of a goal; the acquisition of a person or possession; usually falls well short of what we expected it to be.

This is not to say that activities, goals, and relationships have no value. Actually, they are opportunities, when conducted in concert with god’s will, can be indeed pleasurable, uplifting, and purposeful. But when we place degrees, money, ambition, and even people ahead of God, we undermine His order (Mark 12:30). When we chase after points of happiness without prayer and scriptural guidance, then our pursuit is worldly and self-serving. Jesus laid out the structure of His Kingdom:
“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mark 6:33).

When we find that our career, finances, parenting, marriage, education, travel, service, and friendships are in concert with the Lord, then they are blessed with His endorsement and infused with his power. If activities and relationships are enacted with a Kingdom perspective, they have life, meaning, and purpose and they bring godly peace (Brandt and Skinner, 1997, p. 28).

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:5-7).

The world, through God’s provision, has a great many things to offer the believer that are useful in this earthly passage. But we must discern what is of god and what is not. We should detect the workings of His will through His Spirit, versus the workings of the flesh. James wrote:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

As we examine human behavior, it is crucial to examine one’s capacity to operate within the world with discernment and proper self-control. The people and possessions of this life are not, in and of themselves, “illegal” for the Christian, but nothing and no one should become our point of excessive reliance and worship. Paul wrote:

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Dependency on anything or anyone takes control of our lives. As we continue to return, time and again, to the alcohol, the angry fighting, the excessive hours at work, the deceitful dealings in business, or other temporal expressions of spiritual need, we find only a brief, sinful remedy to our tension and angst.

But, not only are these activities lacking in power, they are painfully lacking in the Truth: Christ Jesus. His truth is found in His presence, His Word, and His workings in our lives. In Him there is freedom:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

WE ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE
While the human being often looks to, and pursues peace from the wrong sources, we also blame and excuse our circumstance on experiences and disappointments in life. “The origin of our dysfunction,” we claim, “is found in our environment” (Brandt and Skinner, 1997, pp. 37-38).

Thanks largely to the insidious invasion of Freudian thought, we as a nation, now believe that our childhood—our background defines us. Our focus is upon:

- The quality of our childhood.
- The quality of our parents.
- The absence or presence of trauma, disappointment, and loss.
- Experiences that were beyond our control.
- Supposed genetic and biochemical “reasons” for our issues in life.

All of these excuses, and others as well, now form the central excuse that we are no longer responsible for our choices, feelings, conduct, relationships, etc. The “experts” tell us that our “poor preparation” for life—a result of a flawed upbringing, produces unwanted responses such as:

- Hostility, anger, resentment, and rage.
- Anxiety, fear, phobic responses, and chronic worry.
- Depression, suicidal thought, and self-defeating patterns.
- Confusion, conflict, doubt, and stress.
- Chronic relationship problems and failures.
  (Brandt and Skinner, 1997, p. 38).

According to the humanists, these emotions, attitudes, and behaviors lead to a maladjusted adult life. They are the result, they say, of a “destructive homelife.” Through this type of thinking, we have given the world reason to never feel good; never function at full potential; and never grow up.

And as ridiculous as all this sounds, take it one step further—Even though ALL of our problems supposedly come through our environment, we teach people to seek a solution or cure through the same external resources that messed them up to begin with! In other words: “You were made sick by drinking from this well; now go and keep drinking out of the same supply until you get better!” Jesus spoke of the futility of such a pattern when He addressed the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well:

“Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14).

As evident as this truth is, society has fostered the notion that changes and reorganization of the external environment will ease the discomfort within and bring lasting satisfaction. But a life focused on correcting and responding to others will always prove futile.

It is true that people and experiences do affect us. Many individuals have been subjected to unimaginable physical and/or sexual abuse; economic deprivation; significant loss; or verbal criticism and berating. Some have grown up with absent, alcoholic, impaired, or abusive mothers and fathers. These circumstances ARE painful
and they often leave an imprint of emotion and behavior that requires healing (Brandt and Skinner, 1997, p. 39).

No counselor or pastor could ever deny the pain that is wrought by the forces of evil in this world. Yet, we submit, that the issue for the helper is not how someone is hurt, but rather, how someone is healed and restored.

Restoration and healing do not come through blame and avoidance of current responsibility. In fact, blame and unforgiveness deepens a person’s agony—prolongs his/her suffering—and generates sinful behavior that creates a repetitive, injurious adaptation to the past. Yes the injury was perhaps due to the sin and failings of another, but the perpetuation of the emotion and maladaptive conduct is very often a product of our reliance upon sinful adaptations that bring brief, unproductive relief.

For example, fear and anxiety that grows out of childhood abuse and stays in one’s heart for 20 years, can find temporary relief in:
- Alcohol or substance abuse.
- Overeating.
- Sexual acting-out (promiscuity).
- Phobic responses that restrict one’s exposure to the world.

Anger and unforgiveness that is grounded in the loss of a parent during childhood, along with the weight of unresolved grief, can find short-term expression and a brief reprieve through:
- Angry, aggressive outbursts.
- Pornography.
- Excessive spending.
- Chronic relationship problems.
- Crime.

As these choices and expressions are repeated, they yield unfruitful, self-defeating patterns that also can be injurious to others. Because the patterns temporarily bring comfort, our reliance upon them grows. Like any world-based dependency, we come to require more of the same in order to achieve the same result. In summary, we never get full and this “false peace” fails to sustain.

But dependency in Christ, reliance on His Word, and submission to His Spirit, yields the absolute opposite. Here the dependency is well-placed, fulfilling, sustaining, and complete in every way. Emotional expression, substance use, dependency on people, and devotion to any earthly device above the sufficiency of Christ is idolatry. It is God alone who fills us with all the abundance of His Kingdom. The Psalmist wrote of the Lord’s provision:

"Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!  
O Israel, if you will listen to Me!  
There shall be no foreign god among you;  
Nor shall you worship any foreign god.  
I am the Lord your God,  
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt;  
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psalm 81:8-10).
We, as the Body of Christ, must indeed open our “mouth wide” and receive His provision. Continuing in a rebellious pursuit of “other gods” will bring a different response from our Lord:

"But My people would not heed My voice,
And Israel would have none of Me.
So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart,
To walk in their own counsels.
Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever.
He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.”

Clearly, refusal to accept the Lord’s hand and the continuance of sin is product of our “stubborn heart.” We like our “own counsel.” We don’t want to listen. We refuse to walk in His ways. God is telling us that by adopting this resistant position, we are forfeiting His protection against our enemies, and the “finest of wheat” and “honey from the rock.” As helpers and ministers of the Word, we must lead our clients back to the source of life and satisfaction—back to the one true God.

RELIEF VERSUS HEALING

The answers of life, sought through people, medicine, substances, and environmental change bring relief. Christ Jesus, the great Physician, brings healing. He came to heal of sin through His sacrifice and as a bondage breaker, freeing us from the temptations and injuries of this life. When Jesus first spoke in the Temple, he proclaimed His mission:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

What a wonderful scripture! He brings “the gospel” (good news) to “the poor” (spiritually lacking). God sent Him to “bring healing to “the brokenhearted” and restoration (recovery) from physical loss (blindness). Finally, He brings “liberty to the captives” and to the “oppressed.” That about covers it! There is nothing Christ cannot and will not do for those who seek the enactment of His will and purpose.

Whenever Jesus intervened someone’s life, they were cleansed, healed, restored and set free the very moment He released His power. There was no struggle too great, no illness to dire, no bondage too strong. The healing of Jesus is immediate:

And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:2-3).
When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:16-17).

And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains (vv. 2-3)—For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" (v.8)—Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid (Mark 5).

To accept and follow another way is to deny our access to His power and blessings for our lives. This rejection of His structure and His solution divides us from God and maintains our isolated reliance upon sin as our remedy. The Lord awaits our submitted return that will remove the gulf we have created:

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

The Scriptures are straightforward; we cannot “draw near to God” without Christ as our intercessor; we cannot come before Him with sin and divided devotion. When we are truly ready to be singular in our purpose, committed to the Lord’s sufficiency, He is available and willing to “clean us up.”

Brandt and Skinner (1997) wrote: “Finding relief from sin instead of obtaining cleansing is a cruel trap” (p. 41). Sin is self-perpetuating and it begins to distort and quench our relationship to the Holy Spirit. Paul warned:

“Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Brandt and Skinner (1997) also propose: “There is a cure for sin” (p. 42). The “cure” requires the correct diagnosis and the employment of proper treatment. When this is done, recovery is “swift and sure” (p.42).

To make the diagnosis, the counselor does not look to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (1994); he/she does not draw from Freud’s ideas on developmental fixation and regression (1901); he/she avoids Mahler’s viewpoint that adult dysfunction is defined by developmental failures between mother and child (1975). Instead he/she looks into God’s Word that provides everything needed to learn how to categorize and define the problem. Scripture offers:

- The nature of man (Romans 7:18).
- The nature of sin (Romans 5:12).
- God’s moral standards of holy, righteous conduct (Exodus 20).
- Examples of man’s rebellion (Genesis 3, 2 Samuel 12, Luke 22:61).
- Examples of man’s obedience (Genesis 6 and 7, Genesis 22, 2 Kings 22).
- The consequences of sin (Romans 6:23, Isaiah 59:1-2).
In treatment planning, the biblical counselor does not look to the opinions of the behaviorists, the psychoanalysts, the humanists, or the biologists. Rather we look to the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2) who abundantly provides above and beyond anything we can create or imagine on our own (Ephesians 3:20). Scripture shows us the path of healing by providing:

- The remedy for sin—Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- The capacity for discernment of sin (1 John 4:6, John 16:8).
- The power of confession and repentance (1 John 1:9, James 5:16).
- Knowledge of spiritual fruit that reflects a changed life (Galatians 5:22-23).
- The goodness of His fellowship (1 John 1:3, Exodus 33:11).

We are called to “put away” the toxic ore of our emotional existence and stop blaming others for our dilemmas. No matter what has come in our lives, we are required to bear fruit of Kingdom in forgiveness and peace (Brandt and Skinner 1997):

“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:8).

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22-24).

As Christians we must examine ourselves. Do we turn to God for healing or to our environment for relief? If we seek God with “all our heart” we will find Him—along with all He has promised to provide (Brandt and Skinner, 1997):

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord, “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

**God’s Sharpest Tools**

As counselors and lay leaders, we will be consulted by two distinct groups of clients:

- Believers
- Non-believers

However, since both groups are seeking consultation from a Christian resource, the individuals we counsel may not necessarily know, to which group they belong. Many have confused baptism, church membership, confirmation classes, and self-defined good works with Christianity and true salvation. As a result, many who are professed believers have little more than an intellectual understanding of Christ and the tenets of the Christian faith. In short, they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, and as a result, demonstrate no true conversion.
While we, as ministers of the Word, have no absolute method for determining one’s true spiritual status, we must be attuned to the evidence in his/her life and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, as He reveals truth to us.

Jesus spoke of the evidence we should see:

“Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:20).

The apostle John reminds us that our “anointing from the Holy One” will divide truth from lies:

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:20-24).

We must never assume that we, as helpers, can provide beneficial counsel regarding our client’s lives while ignoring this key spiritual factor. To offer advice on communication, conflict resolution, emotional expression, or some other psychological resource, without offering the saving and healing power of Christ Jesus, is futile.

There are no accidents in God’s Kingdom. As the Lord’s servants, we must address the spiritual needs placed before us, knowing that God has ordained and appointed this time. Counseling can be as much about evangelism as it is about restoration, discipleship and teaching. We must never forget that:

• Jesus is Truth—not psychology, earthly wisdom, or human intellect.
• Christ saves—not the counselor, not religion, not the church.
• Christ heals—not counseling, techniques, or books.

God’s tools are His Word (Hebrews 4:12) and His Holy Spirit (John 16:8). Human counselors, lay leaders, and others serving in a counseling and discipleship ministry, are vessels (2 Timothy 2:20-21) through which He intervenes. We are tools in God’s hand; but we are useless without His presence and purpose, and power. His tools are exacting and precise, and when accessed submissively, they will infuse our ministry with a strength we can never know on our own.

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:6-7).
These facts point to the conclusion that real change (spiritual and physical) begins and ends with Jesus. Thus, if our client does not, or may not, have a relationship with Christ, this is where biblical counseling begins. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v. 3).

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (vv. 5-6).

Jesus is unambiguous—salvation is the starting point of “life abundant” (John 10:10). Without this conversion from flesh to spirit, there is no eternity and there is no capacity for authority in our earthly walk. Once “born-again” we remain on earth but we also are members of the Kingdom. Kingdom authority then is granted those who hear and obey the Word of God. But Jesus is clear; we cannot know or obey the Lord without rebirth in the Spirit. With the Holy Spirit we are empowered to do things we could not do before salvation; including our submission to His ownership and will for our lives. Paul wrote of the transition that is required of a “new man” and of the power to live a changed life in Romans 6:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (vv. 1-4).

“...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin” (vv. 6-7).

Herein lies an important foundational truth that should be the underpinning of all biblical counseling: We, as believers, are called to do what we cannot do; live in the “newness of life,” dead to the world and “freed from sin.” Yet Paul points us to the completed work of Christ on the cross as our source of power. In Him, and through Him, we now can be in His likeness so that the “body of sin might be done away with…”

Too often our clients believe they are “destined” to sin because of their nature as human beings. As counselors we become complicit agents in the advancement of this idea, encouraging fellow Christians that sin is an “expected” part of Christian life and that “struggle” to overcome sin is part-and-parcel of our daily walk. This line of thought creates complexity and falsehood and invites our clients to continue in their suffering and misery.

The message of Christ to the unsaved is one of hope, eternal life, forgiveness, and grace. It is a message of new beginning and the opportunity for a transformed life. The message to the believer is the call of Christ to obedience and service that is empowered and possible through His Word and Spirit. There is no need to remain as we were
before Christ—He requires more, and provides a means of having more, because we are His children.

As counselors, we must direct ourselves first, to this reality. In order to serve others in the ministry, we need to know the power of Christ working in our own hearts. We cannot become complacent about our own sinful condition, yielding to its control day-by-day. To have access to God's tools of transformation in the lives of those we counsel, we have to allow Him to work and transform us, as He pleases.

If sin stands between the counselor and God, then the counselor will operate alone in the consulting room, divided from the power and impact of the Holy Spirit. But a counselor who submits him/herself to the cleansing resource of the Word will stand repentant before God, seeking His purification and strength. As a cleansed, vacant vessel, we become a highly tuned instrument, able to hear and respond to the teachings, remembrances, and directives of the Holy Spirit working in us, and through us, to the good of our clients. Like John the Baptist, we must know our mission and our message:

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

As Christ is elevated in the life of the minister, he/she becomes smaller, submitted, humble, and open to the leading of the Spirit. As a result, the servant of God develops a deeper understanding of all things spiritual, including the nature of sin and the power of repentance.

THE NATURE OF SIN

Understanding the nature of sin is key to understanding human behavior and the discomfort and displeasure it can generate. Knowledge of sin and the ways it manifests itself in our hearts, families, careers, and communities, is a critical beginning for all counselors. Based upon Mark 7:21-23, Romans 1:28-31, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:25-31, and 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Brandt and Skinner (1997) have identified four categories of sin, found in the Scriptures (p. 59):

- Sins of the Mind—such as lust, greed, covetousness, deceitfulness, pride, selfish ambition, ingratitude, and evil thoughts.
- Sinful Emotions—including jealousy, anger, malice, envy, bad temper, unloving attitude, hatred, rebellion, and bitterness.
- Sins of the Mouth—which are lying, backbiting, complaining, contentiousness, disputing, blasphemy, slandering, yelling, boasting, and quarrelsomeness.
- Sins of Behavior—as in disobedience to parents, brutality, without self-control, stealing, adultery, murder, fornication, violence, drunkenness, and revelry.

(See Chart on Page 59, The Heart of the Problem).

That is a rather daunting list, yet it is straight from God’s Word. Brandt and Skinner (1997) stress the importance of taking this list of sinful expressions and using it as a “mirror” (p. 60). Standing in front of God’s Word, what is reflected in you? Jesus taught:

“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).
Just as this list of sin conveys; the Word “will judge…” We are not in need of man’s definition of sin because man will not judge us “in the last day.” Whether we are yet to seek salvation or whether we are rebellious Christians, the Word will define our sin and direct our remedy. Counselors must know what Scripture has to say about sin, lest we are tempted to avoid, distort, and weaken God’s standards. And again, the counselor must constantly address his/her standing in relation to God’s code, if we are to interpret it for others. King Solomon wrote:

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

If we refer to the items in this list as anything other than sin, we are hiding from the truth and we “will not prosper” nor will we receive “mercy.” If we critique the list, drawing distinction between our conduct and the “serious sins” listed here, we “deceive ourselves.” John wrote:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

If we “normalize” the list and rename the sin as oppression, error, mistake, struggle, or bondage then we give permission for its continuance in our lives and fail to fall under the conviction to repent and change. We also deny the power of Christ to totally eradicate our sin and “and totally “cleanse” us:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

WHY NOT FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE?

By now you may ask:

• “Why is there so much emphasis on the ‘negative’ issue of sin?”
• “Shouldn’t we encourage and uplift those we counsel?”
• “Who am I to judge others?”

But if you had chest pain, you would have a different set of questions indeed:

• You would want your cardiologist “focused” on your pain and on locating the reason for it. No matter how negative, you would require his/her full attention to the blockage in the artery that is affecting blood flow and function in the heart. You would want him/her to know exactly how to find the blockage, identify it, and clean it out.
• Encouragement would be a great “addition,” but alone, it would not clear that artery or restore your life. Once the artery is open and blood flow is reestablished, then seek support with diet, exercise, and other lifestyle changes so that you take better care of yourself and not allow this to happen again. But first—save your life!
• Judgment, in this case, is actually “correct diagnosis.” You want a doctor who has been to medical school, who studied long hours, who knows where to look and what to do. You want the very best “judge” of your condition and your treatment that you can find.
It is no different in biblical counseling. Our clients need caring ministers who will speak “truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), thereby giving the spiritual problem their full and direct attention. Love without truth can have devastating affects. Clearly we are not to condemn or criticize our clients for their error, but neither are we to grant passive permission to continue unabated so that they never have to confront the “negative” truth of their condition.

Because of this, encouragement and exhortation will not suffice in the counseling room. Encouragement comes after the surgery of the Word (Hebrews 4:12) and the inspired power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Discipleship follows corrective action of repentance and submission to the workings of God. Our clients grow only when rejoined with Christ through the eviction of sin (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Judgment in the counseling room is not from the position of superiority, but it should be from a position of Kingdom authority. Our authority in the Kingdom relates directly to our spiritual holiness and our preparation through the Word. If we are diligent in dealing with our own breaches and rebellion, God will grant His sanction and power on our work:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

With this preparation comes directed focus on the need God reveals. In light of that, the Lord encourages His followers to not only identify our sins and repent, but to walk in a manner that is pleasing to Him. Gratefully, He does not leave us questioning this path either. God is just as specific about the nature of the spiritual person as He is about sin.

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness” (Romans 6:19).

Brandt and Skinner (1997) have created a diagram that outlines a contrast between Sin-Controlled and Spirit-Controlled Living (p. 67). Spirit-Controlled Living is described in this manner:

- The Spirit-Filled Mind—is demonstrated through forgiveness, hope, appreciation, willingness, impartiality, self-control, mercy, humility, thankfulness, confidence, wisdom, faithfulness, and gratitude.
- Spirit-Controlled Emotions—include love, joy, peace, long-suffering (patience), a gentle spirit, a kindly spirit, gladness, and compassion.
- A Spirit-Filled Mouth—speaks truthfulness, praise, thankfulness, and pleasant words. It is timely, encouraging, tactful, soothing, and provides a gentle answer.
- Spirit-Filled Behavior—is seen in kindness, gentleness, righteousness, self-control, obedience, cooperation, goodness, sincerity, courage, service, endurance, submission, consideration, and impartiality. (See Chart on Page 67, The Heart of the Problem).

Contrasted with the Sins of the Mind, Emotions, Mouth, and Behavior (p. 15 of this text) and we quickly see that only the Spirit of God can evoke such transformations. Biblical Counseling identifies and defines sin, as it is defined in the Word, helping the client to understand sin from God’s perspective. When we realize that all sin is a sin against God
and He is grieved by our disobedience, then we can have true godly sorrow and conviction to change. But while this understanding is key, we must also know how to please our Heavenly Father. The Spirit-Controlled life yields blessings, peace, and unity. It grows and shapes us toward His will and plan for our lives. In the end, it gives evidence of our love and reverence for the God who saved us and who granted mercy when death was our due.

“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

We cannot be “spiritually minded” and continue to feed on the food of the flesh. We must yield our diet and care to the Lord and let Him direct our heart and attention to Him. It is amazing how many Christians will trust Christ with their salvation, but refuse to trust Him with their marriages, children, careers, and money. Most often, our control is “carnal” not spiritual. As counselors and lay leaders, we must help those entrusted to our care to see the road map God has provided. It is a map that clearly identifies the hazards of going it alone versus the blessing of following His course.

**HEADED IN THE WRONG DIRECTION**

When we are “in control” of our lives, we are typically “in the flesh.” Our reasoning, conclusions, and actions in this state are, by-and-large, self-serving and thereby, lacking in credibility. The deeds and lust of the flesh are sinful and take us in the “wrong direction—away from God; outside the boundaries of His structure; and beyond our ability to sustain godly character.

Having a submitted, spirit-filled life, yields control to Christ. When He directs our lives we are:

- Sensitive to sin and error (James 4:17).
- Responsive to His prompting for change and redirection (Hebrews 3:7-8).
- Seeking and submitted to His will (Romans 12:1-2).
- Seeking His nature rather than relying on our character (2 Peter 1:2-4).
- Under His cover and protection (Psalm 3:3; 33:20).
- Serving the purposes of the Kingdom instead of our own self-interests (Colossians 3:2). And remember, the purposes of the Kingdom include God’s will for our marriages, children, work, health, and ministry.

Paul made it clear that there can be no merger between the spiritual and physical walk:

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

Paul is conveying that it is an “either—or” walk. When he says that by walking in the Spirit we “shall not” fulfill the lust of the flesh, he is saying it is “impossible” to do. If we are in the Spirit, we are “unable” to be in the flesh. Conversely, if we are in the flesh, it is impossible to be in the Spirit.

But as we proceed head-long into sin in a repetitive, willful manner, we can become hardened and resistant. We avoid the prompting of the Spirit, lock our jaws, and
proceed stubbornly down a rebellious path. The deeper we journey into rebellious sin, the harder it is to “turn around.”

Yet turning around is precisely what we are Scripturally called to do. Jesus started and ended His earthly ministry with the same message:

**Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).**

Then He said to them, **"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-48).**

Through and exhaustive study of the Scriptures, Brandt and Skinner (1997, p. 73) have outlined the process of repentance, central to the establishment of a new direction. Repentance occurs between God and us because our sins are first and foremost, against Him. To end our separation with God and reestablish His powerful working in our lives and relationships, we must come into His presence and complete the following steps:

- **Confess**—“I am wrong; I have sinned.”
- **Convey**—“I am sorry.”
- **Ask**—“Forgive me.”
- **Petition**—“Cleanse me.”
- **Yield**—“Empower me.”

Expanding upon Brandt and Skinner’s (1997, pp.) application, we will examine the five-step process of repentance in more detail. In the presence of God:

1. **We must confess:** “I am wrong. I have sinned.” The Bible is straightforward:

   “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

This seems simple enough—in fact it is very clear indeed. Yet we, as humans, struggle mightily with this first step, often maintaining our rebellion even as we, and our families, suffer needlessly. We resist this step of beginning out of:

- Pride (Proverbs 29:23).
- Devotion to self over God and others (Romans 1:25).
- Refusal to call sin what it is (1 John 1:8).
- A sense of mis-defined “righteous indignation” (Psalm 53:3). In other words we believe our anger and distain are reasonable and justified because our godly discernment is correct and can rightly see, the error of another.
- Unforgiveness (Mark 11:26).

Jesus points to the dilemma we face in exposing our sins by bringing them into God’s light:
“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:19-21).

In spite of these resistances, we have to come into the light, illuminate and confess our sins, if the problems of life and family are to find remedy. There is no other starting point that is endorsed by the Word of God.

2. We must convey: “I am sorry for my sin.” The only thing that is may be more difficult than the acknowledgment of sin, is to feel and express sorrow for our actions. Often we try to maintain our focus on the “bigger picture,” the environmental elements that we believe “justify” our conduct. We, like children, try to explain our “bad behavior” by pointing to:
   - Our injuries and disappointments (Genesis 27).
   - Our biology and genetics (Luke 7:22).

Jesus made no exceptions that promoted the continuance of guilt and the blaming of others:

And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

Confession without sorrow does nothing to change our hearts or our behavior. In fact, we can verbally confess without feeling sorry at all. Instead of true godly sorrow, we may feel remorse, regret, or even anger for the exposure of sin and/or the consequences it brings. But this is very different than the grief we should feel for violating the holy standards of the Lord (Brandt and Skinner, 1997).

Paul wrote of the distinction between “godly sorrow” and the “sorrow of the world”:

“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

When we can truly come before God without excuse, explanation, or justification we are “clearing ourselves.” Answering to God alone, without focus on the people and situations that have affected our lives, is powerful and transforming. This step is absolutely necessary for us to continue along a path of recovery.
3. We must ask: “God forgive me of my sins.” Forgiveness is powerful and freeing. The completed work of Jesus on the cross covers all of our sins, making forgiveness and restoration sure. Brandt and Skinner (1997) point out that forgiveness is “freely given” and available to all believers. But rather than seeking forgiveness we often want to do “penance” for our sins (p. 80).

Tears, depression, guilt, and self-condemnation are “acts” of penance that can be painful and even punishing, but do nothing to free us from our sinful pattern. In fact, the toxin of this emotional battering may only serve to advance our continued disobedience. Negative and punitive feelings are great fodder for the devil, giving him opportunity to redirect our emotional angst into sinful conduct. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:

“Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (vv. 26-27).

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” (v. 31-32).

If we have honestly acknowledged our sin; if we have felt true godly sorrow that is stated in the presence of the Lord; then our request for forgiveness is sincere and it will be answered immediately. There is no process of self-retribution needed.

4. We must place the petition: “God cleanse me of my sin.” Cleansing and purification are acts of God—not humans. As a parent bathes a child, God washes those areas we cannot reach, see, or recognize as important.

Most little boys, hate and avoid, mother’s question: “Did you wash behind your ears?” They will do anything to side-step the issue of what, to them, seems an uncomfortable and unnecessary requirement. They just don’t see the point!

We are much the same when the issue of cleansing and purging come to light in our Christian walk. But the process of confession, sorrow, and forgiveness, leading to this forth step of repentance, requires the remains of sin to be removed. Swimming pool maintenance provides a good example:

When a swimming pool is defiled with algae, it is green, slick, slimy, and uninhabitable. Swimming in live algae is not a good idea. When the water is tested and the diagnosis made, certain steps of treatment and filtration are required to “kill” the algae. When this is done properly, the water begins to clear, the chemistry is balanced, and the pool is safe again. But one interesting thing happens: the dead algae drops to the floor of the pool leaving a thin layer of residue that now has to be vacuumed away. If the dead algae is left on the bottom of the pool, it will eventually pollute the water again.

As vessels of God’s Spirit, our sins are dead and no longer determine our eternity—but holiness, purity, and obedient living require the extraction of the dead, sinful deposits in the core or our hearts. Otherwise we, like the pool, are subject to a later contamination. Paul wrote to Timothy:

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ
depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work (2 Timothy 2:19-21).

5. Yield and ask: “God empower me.” This is perhaps the most ignored principle of repentance. Even after a genuine completion of the first four steps, many Christians will return to their default setting, and start controlling and running their own. And why wouldn’t we? We are intelligent, educated, experienced, wise, and successful. We also are determined, disciplined, and strong. But we are also foolish according to Paul:

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Corinthians 3:19).

Brandt and Skinner (1997) write: “Our human nature causes us to resist the necessity for a lifetime dependence on God to correct our tendency to sin. And if it’s sin, there is no human remedy” (p. 82).

The working of the Holy Spirit in every believer’s life is an essential element of God’s plan. Our emotion, conduct, relationships, work life, service, and testimony depend upon God’s capacity to do what we cannot do on our own. Paul wrote:

“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15).

The empowered life of a Christian is distinct and separate from the world. We have been provided a resource that only we, as believers, can access. The disciples asked Jesus about their connection to the Lord following His departure in John 14:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (vv. 15-17).

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (vv. 22-23).

These are powerful and power-filled promises that give us hope for dealing with post-salvation struggles in a victorious manner. Because of the indwelling of the Helper, it is not longer advisable or necessary to count on our own abilities. Instead we are infused in a new and unique way with the “divine power” (2 Peter 1:3) of Christ Himself.

As Christians, we must discern when we are operating under the control of Christ, drawing from His Word, submitting to His Spirit, versus our own methods and missions. One clue lies in the outcomes we observe: When we are getting the same self-centered, dysfunctional results over and over again, that is not God. Instead it is evidence that we singing that old Sinatra hit: I Did It My Way. Remember Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians:
“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

There is no refuge to be found in the claim that God is “testing” us. James wrote:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

We can’t hide our error under the category of “spiritual attack.” Satan is not omnipresent; he can’t be everywhere. Instead he has devised a world system that lures, calls, and tempts our cravings for power, wealth, excitement, and gratification. But the Word of God is sufficient for defeating the enticement of the system and the lie of the evil one. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, He defeated the demonic distortions with a simple, true, and powerful phrase; “For it is written…”:

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’ " (Matthew 4:10).

Christ is source of healing (Mark 1:41); salvation (John 3:16); truth (John 6:14) and grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). God’s Word is a powerful, living document (Hebrews 4:12); a sword of protection (Ephesians 6:17); and a sufficient resource for all aspects of life (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit is our moral guide (John 16:8), our Helper (John 14:16); our resource of biblical remembrance (John 14:26, Hebrews 10:14-16) and the power from God (Acts 1:8).

Jesus, by His provision; given life and documentation through His Word; empowered by the perpetual presence of His Holy Spirit; is our source of all we will ever require. The greater our capacity to vacate ourselves and allow Him to work, the greater the move of power from on High:

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

SUMMARY

Throughout this initial discussion of Biblical Counseling and Laity Care one can clearly distinguish between the methods that flow out of God’s Word and the methods of secular psychology. As God's workers, we must maintain our focus and never allow our orientation to be shaken by the approach of humanism.

The world has always attempted to “redefine” God’s intent; His order; and His sovereignty. The Biblical Counselor will always return to the source and foundation of truth. When obeyed, God’s moral standards yield physical health, emotional stability, productive relationships, and proper spiritual alignment. We must remember that His guidelines never change, no matter what changes occur in society, medicine, psychotherapy, etc. The author of Hebrews wrote:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).
Human nature is distractible and tempted by the “new, improved, and contemporary theology” that adds to, and takes from, the Bible. We as counselors must never be seduced by this notion. Any idea that falls outside the boundary of Scripture is false and will not bear fruit for any individual or family we are called to help.

God does indeed speak to us; He stirs our hearts; He convicts and prompts us to action; He opens key passages of Scripture for our understanding. But God cannot contradict Himself. If the conviction and prompting provoke action that is not verified in the Bible, then it is not of God.

As we remain loyal to these principles we will be faithful to the calling we have received for counseling and laity care. Yet to be useful and skilled in our work, there is one additional order of business, central to the counseling process:

**PREPARATION OF THE BIBLICAL COUNSELOR**

The key point we must remember as we prepare for the counseling or laity care ministry, is that all of the principles discussed thus far apply first to the counselor; second to the counselee. It is not possible to provide godly counsel (Psalm 1:1) without spiritual self-awareness and an obedient lifestyle. Work in the counseling ministry requires an intimate knowledge of God’s Word; sensitivity to the Holy Spirit; a submitted obedience to His prompting; and love for those we are called to serve. To access the supernatural power that we need to be effective, we must be diligent regarding our own conduct; clearing barriers between God and ourselves; and addressing always, the sin in our own lives.

If we are truly called to this area of ministry, then God is already addressing our hearts. He is already at work to prepare us and sanctify us for His purposes. In that process, we will become consciously aware of sin, disobedience, and weakness that interfere with our capacity to give quality care to others. As we study the Scriptures, attend classes, practice our approach to counseling, we must evaluate our spiritual needs first, and continue to monitor them throughout each counseling assignment. In fact, our areas of difficulty can become the greatest roadblock to helping others by distorting our perception, our discernment, and our intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

Brandt and Skinner (1999) have described the four character qualities of the biblical counselor, taken from Paul’s writings to Timothy:

> “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

1. **The Lord’s Servant Does Not Quarrel**—The Body of Christ is called to peace and unity. As we minister to others, it is essential that we gauge our own emotion, impulses, and intent, making certain that our actions are Scriptural and timely. Paul wrote:

> “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).
Remember however, that peace and unity can only be genuine and productive if it is grounded in truth. We are indeed ordered to love, encourage, and edify, but we are called to share this affection within a godly context of Scriptural truth. John addressed this point in his writings:

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

Our clients should see something different in our spirit that attracts them to the truth. When boundaries and biblical parameters are maintained with a countenance of love and peace, we convey a potential that the world, and the fallen believer, may not see very often. We become a model for the client to follow; not because we are “perfect” but because we diligently pursue and reveal “truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

Brandt and Skinner (1999) remind us that the comfort we convey is a product of the comfort we have received in our own walk with the Lord. They quote from Paul’s writings to the church at Corinth (p. 3):

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

2. The Lord’s Servant Is Gentle To Everyone—We, as counselors and lay leaders, are assigned to the service of fragile, broken people. We are called to serve them in a gentle and respectful way that can only flow from a spirit within us that is fruitful and at peace. If our spirit is angry, hostile, unforgiving, judgmental, self-centered, or burdened, we will not provide a gentle presentation of truth that is so badly needed. Again, we must tend to our own sin and standing before God if we are to represent His methods and standards to others. Brandt and Skinner (1999) point us to the Scriptural steps for developing godly character (p. 4):

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:1-5).

Notice as Paul builds, step-upon-step, the process of creating a fruitful character. We are to be evidence of God’s peace, grace, joy, perseverance, character, and hope. Our tribulations are part of our shaping for Kingdom work and are to be incorporated into our life as experience and opportunity for faith and endurance. This self-knowledge and the developing dependency on the Lord will be represented in our spiritual presentation, giving hope to those we counsel.

Brandt and Skinner (1999) wrote: “A sense of personal control, quietness underneath your skin, and joyful and hopeful perseverance is evidence of good spiritual health” (p.3). Our testimony, verbally and behaviorally, to our clients should convey these qualities.
3. The Lord’s Servant Is Able To Teach—Jesus was often called “Teacher” by His disciples (John 13:13), His followers (John 3:2), and even His enemies seeking to undermine His authority (Luke 10:25). For our Lord, teaching was demonstrated as much as it was spoken (John 13:14). As teachers of His Word, we too must reveal truth in deed and word, not in word only. This fact points us again to the manifestation of our character; the revelation of our obedience; and the submission of our will to His perfect plan. We cannot teach anything of value from our own fleshly resources; nor can we teach reliably if our words do not match up consistently with our spirit and our behavior. James wrote:

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

Just as the Word of God is alive (Hebrews 4:12), and Christ our Savior lives (Matthew 16:6), we must be living and moving with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), demonstrating our faith and devotion to the Lord in everything we say and do. In the fruit of the Spirit we are bonded with Christ (John 15:5) and available for proper godly instruction that comes from the Lord, through us as His instrument of delivery. Remember we have no “godly knowledge” within ourselves: it must come from God. Jesus admonished the Pharisees for the pride and privilege they exercised over others as “teachers”:

“And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:10-12).

As teachers, we must be humble and submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit so that God is glorified, not the counselor or the process of counseling. But we must also be prepared, knowledgeable concerning Scripture, and confident in the absence of barriers between God and ourselves. Prayerful, dedicated study of the Bible, Scripture memorization, and a tender pure heart, are the basic prerequisites:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

“I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways” (Psalm 119:15).

“The Lord God has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned” (Isaiah 50:4).

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (Psalm 119:9).

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).
4. The Lord’s Servant Gently Instructs Opponents—Instructing those who are in opposition with God is a challenging requirement of the counselor and minister. We should be well qualified to complete this daunting task because of our own struggles with rebellion and refusal to submit to God’s commands. As we remember our personal challenge of coming to salvation; our periods of disobedience; our willful refusal to submit at times, we develop empathy for the position many of our clients are in.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

Many who consult us do not know Jesus in a personal, life-changing way. They lack salvation and, as a result, are flying independent of the Lord’s truth and disqualified to receive His promises. The Word of God will not resonate with the unbeliever as it does with His children. Jesus said:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

The believer my resist, rebel, and refuse to obey the Lord. But clearly, he/she knows the voice of the Savior and adopts this defiant stance fully informed. But for the unsaved, Scripture is void of meaning. Paul wrote:

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The unbeliever is in opposition out of ignorance. The Word of God must first convict him/her unto salvation:

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Now, with faith and belief, the Scriptures take on a power that was previously inaccessible:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Thus, in our humility, remembering the grace and mercy afforded us as the elect, we are to:

• Evangelize the lost with the presentation of the truth, using Scripture that conveys the Gospel and the process of repentance and salvation (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-11; John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Revelation 3:20).

• Restore those who believe yet have fallen into sin and disobedience:

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).
In either circumstance, we are helping the individual “escape the snare of the devil.” For the believer the snare drowns our testimony, destroys our fruit, and undermines our families. For the unbeliever, the snare is an entrapment that binds them to eternal death.

We must be loyal messengers of the truth even if some will refuse to hear it. As God said to His servant Ezekiel:

Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse" (Ezekiel 3:10-11).

CLOSING

In closing we must take to heart the key points of this Introduction to Laity Care and Discipleship:

- The Word of God is sufficient for the work of evangelism and for the restoration of the Body. Whether a dilemma of faith and eternal life, or a matter of day-to-day functioning and healthy living, Scripture is our complete resource.
- Methods and theories that attempt to “add to” or “subtract from” the integrity and sufficiency of Scripture are not compatible with the approach of biblical counseling and must be avoided.
- If sin is the problem, there is no human remedy. The remedy for sin is Jesus Christ (Brandt and Skinner, 1997).
- Complexity is a myth. Jesus is able to deliver us from any point of bondage or disobedience as quickly as we are willing to submit to His Word and His will.
- Rebellion lasts a long time, yielding much pain and destruction. Repentance and delivery from sin is instantaneous.
- As believers we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and we are capable of change, obedience, and blameless living in a way the world cannot know.
- Peace comes through Christ Jesus, not through the world.
- The biblical counselor must seek after spiritual awareness asking God to illuminate his/her sin, areas of vulnerability, and points of division with the Lord. When we are accountable and generating fruit in our own lives, we are truly available for God’s work to be realized through us.
- The biblical counselor must develop a godly character that radiates a spirit and a hope that is not seen elsewhere in the world. We are to be imitators of Christ, and as such, reveal His love and truth in everything we do in the counseling room.

The tenets of this book will be revisited many times in subsequent writings. The need for ongoing self-evaluation, attention to God’s order and plans, and reliance on the Spirit empowered Scriptures will be our key for correct and godly service.

REFERENCES


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