I. Understanding What Biblical Counseling Is

The English word “counsel” simply denotes the process of giving advice to someone.

One very succinct definition: “wise love”

A fuller definition:
“Christ-centered biblical counseling is part of a loving discipleship relationship where a Christian points others to the Savior and His wisdom as revealed in the Scriptures with the hope that the Holy Spirit might draw those people to Christ, sanctifying them so that their lives would be more holy and pleasing to Him.”

A. Biblical counseling is necessary because people have problems (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)

B. Biblical counseling involves a loving relationship (Acts 20:31-38; 1 Thess. 2:7-11; 1 Cor. 13:1-8)
C. Biblical counseling functions best within the context of a disciple-making local church ministry (2 Cor. 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 3:16 – 4:5; Eph. 4:11-16)

1. Only true disciples could respond to biblical counsel in a God-pleasing way.

2. Discipleship is a lifelong process that must occur within the context of a local church ministry.

3. Biblical counseling seeks to strengthen the hurting member of the body so they can be restored to a place of usefulness and participation in the body life.

4. Biblical counseling within a local church has the benefit of being subject to the wise guidance and loving leadership of God-appointed shepherds.

D. Biblical counseling is the responsibility of every believer

“Unfortunately, such thinking dominates most of the counseling theories that have pervaded contemporary evangelicalism. The distressing result is that pastors, biblical scholars, teachers of Scripture, and caring believers using the Word of God have been made to feel they are not qualified to counsel people. ‘That very opinion is often at the heart of the message conveyed in some of the most widely read textbooks on Christian counseling. One bestseller claims that Christian counselors who believe the Bible is a sufficient guide for counseling are frequently guilty of ‘a nonthinking and simplistic understanding of life and its problems.’ Thus those who attempt to limit their counsel to the questions Scripture answers are disdained as naive, superficial, and altogether inadequate counselors.”

Lesson 1—Understanding what Biblical Counseling Is

E. Biblical counseling acknowledges that people cannot be made complete apart from Christ (Col. 1:28)

F. Biblical counseling directs people to the Savior and His wisdom as revealed in the Scriptures with the help of God’s Spirit (Rom. 15:14; Col. 1:28; 3:16-17)

1. We must direct people to the Savior whenever we open the Scriptures for counseling

2. We must understand Christ’s revealed wisdom for dealing with sin

3. We must interpret the Scriptures correctly if we want to direct people to the Savior’s wisdom

4. We must believe that the Scriptures are a sufficient resource for dealing with man’s sin issues

5. We must depend on the Spirit to work in both the speaker and hearer of Christ’s wisdom

6. We must be growing in our own personal walks with Christ if we want to grow as biblical counselors

G. Biblical counseling hopes to change people for their good and God’s glory (Eph. 4:11-16; Acts 20:31-35; Col. 3:16-17)
II. Understanding Some of the Errors that Stand Against a Biblical Approach to Counseling

A. Beware of the unbiblical attempts to integrate Scripture with psychology

“We can and must draw from other nonbiblical sources if we want to understand human beings more completely and intervene to bring about maximum change through counseling.”

“The Bible’s own claims to sufficiency (for example, 2 Tim. 3:16-17) are sometimes interpreted to mean that reliance on wisdom from extrabiblical sources is forbidden. Yet few if any Christians live consistently with this interpretation. All of us use the products of science and technology, take advantage of the discoveries of medical research, consult lawyers and accountants for advice, and watch news broadcasts on television. Do these activities run counter to the thrust of scriptural teaching? Not really. Rather than avoiding the use of extra-biblical sources of insights, we need to evaluate the information they provide within the framework of a Christian understanding of truth and life.”

1. All spiritual truth must be judged by the trustworthy and authoritative word of God

2. The “truths” discerned apart from divine revelation provide limited and insufficient help towards the cure of souls

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Lesson 1—Understanding what Biblical Counseling Is

B. Beware of unbalanced attempts to attach too much blame to things other than sin

1. Social determinism

2. Genetic determinism

“Today, we are hearing more about genetic ‘roots’ to a wide variety of behaviors and personality traits. Such traits provoke a concern, especially among Christians, about genetic determinism—the idea that our genes inevitably produce certain behaviors and personality traits apart from our active choices. Even beyond the consideration of genetic influences on behavior and personality, there are also questions about the roles played by the nervous system and the hormonal system—both in terms of their normal functioning and their dysfunction due to injury or illness.”

C. Beware of overvaluing the “success” of psychology

“There are those Christians who laud Alcoholics Anonymous because ‘their method works’ or because ‘they are doing so much good.’ Little do they realize that AA insults the true God in its 12 steps by allowing participants to acknowledge any ‘power greater than myself’ as god. Nor is there any discernment of the fact that AA’s help is far different from the help offered to drunkards in the Bible. It takes spiritual discernment to understand the great difference between AA telling members that they will always be alcoholics who must fight against drunkenness every day the rest of their lives and the apostle Paul writing of those who in Christ have put off drunkenness once and for all (1 Corinthians 6:9ff.). Moreover, it takes spiritual discernment to realize that a person may enter AA as a drunkard who is heading for hell and may leave sober but still headed for hell. True discernment acknowledges as biblical only the help that meets the needs of the whole person—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Further, even sharper discernment is required to recognize the fact that a ‘reformed’ drunkard who has not come to know Christ as his Savior is probably farther from the kingdom than he was before. The propaganda incessantly spouted forth from radio and television tells us that drunkenness is only a disease. It shouldn’t take even spiritual discernment to understand that this is little more than euphemistic language designed to take in the culpable. If drunkenness is a disease, so is cocaine abuse. The Bible clearly calls it sin, but in spite of that fact any number of Christians are confused.”