

MEN COUNSELING MEN

JOHN D. STREET



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This book contains stories in which the contributors have changed people's names and the details of their situations in order to protect their privacy. There are also fictitious accounts used for illustration purposes only.

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To the thousands of biblical counseling students,
both undergraduate and graduate,
who have studied at The Master's College and Seminary,
and to their counselees—may this book be a blessing!
To Jesus Christ belongs all the glory and honor,
both now and forever.
Amen!

Acknowledgments

I wish to personally thank each of the men who have so faithfully contributed to this labor of love. Twenty-two men, in hopes that the body of Christ will be enriched and blessed, have put hundreds of hours into the writing of this volume. It is our desire to see this book equip men who are earnest in using the Bible to effectively counsel other men who are struggling with serious issues of the soul.

My appreciation goes to Nathan Busenitz, who helped me to “kick-start” this book, and to my son, Jay Street, who assisted in the editing process. Also to all the faculty and staff in the Biblical Counseling office of The Master’s College—both present and in the past. Your investment in the lives of men and women around the world has helped to bring about biblical change in many lives to the glory of God. In addition, it has been a joy to work with Steve Miller at Harvest House Publishers. He has been both gracious and extremely helpful throughout the writing process.

Special thanks goes to my precious wife, Janie Lynn Street, who has spent countless hours editing and formatting this work into a presentable form. Without her, this book would not have made it. Thank you, Sweetie!

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Foreword

The important book you now hold in your hands is written with the strategic intent of being simple and straightforward. The various contributors to this volume have sought to bring basic biblical truths to bear upon the current challenges that professing Christian males face in our world. The book's wide array of authors, coming as they do from various walks of life, humbly desire to communicate solid, scriptural answers for their assigned subject and they do so with genuine care and Christlike compassion. This is what I so appreciate about this book. It is nothing more (but certainly nothing less) than an attempt to practically teach powerful, divine truth within the context of the Christian man's everyday life struggles.

Although some of the issues discussed in this book will be seen by doubters as much too complex to be handled with the Bible alone, each and every writer unequivocally affirms the absolute sufficiency of God's Word. While it is readily acknowledged that the specific issues addressed in these chapters have the potential to bring much hurt and heartache to men's lives (as sinful choices always do), those men who choose to apply the biblical principles that are thus proposed from these pages will find both great hope and profound joy in their obedience to Scripture's infinitely wise cures.

This unified approach in ministering to people is something that has, in general, uniquely marked the biblical counseling movement over the last 40 years. When I became president of The Master's College in 1985, I sought to bring all the students in every academic discipline under this same unswerving commitment to the doctrine of the total sufficiency of God's Word. Now, almost 30 years later, and to use this but one example, the biblical counseling degree programs we offer are now the largest of their kind in the United States.

Over this span of time, we have seen thousands of our students trained to teach and practice biblical counseling all around the world. God sovereignly honors His sufficient Word.

My sincere thanks go to Dr. John Street, the editor of *Men Counseling Men*, who also capably oversees the undergraduate and graduate programs in biblical counseling at The Master's College. It is my earnest prayer that God would continue to honor the efforts of so many as they labor in the ministry of seeing more and more people transformed by God's Word and for His glory.

John MacArthur

Pastor-Teacher

Grace Community Church

Sun Valley, California

President

The Master's College & Seminary

Part 1

A Man and the Word

Understanding Biblical Counseling

Joshua Clutterham

What is biblical counseling?

Whole books have been written to answer this question alone, and it's a good question to ask, for the answer will help shape the way in which we fulfill this crucial ministry task. This chapter will aim at a basic introduction to biblical counseling by surveying its approach to communication and the counseling meeting, its place within the church and society, and its foundations.

But before we answer that question, it is important to pause and note this very crucial point: Biblical counseling is unshakably anchored to the authority and sufficiency of the Bible. That is, biblical counseling is defined by the Bible—not the author who is currently selling the most books or giving the most presentations—and it is exemplified by the God-man, Jesus Christ. “Understanding Biblical Counseling” or “What Is Biblical Counseling?” chapters may rise and fall over the years, but the Word of God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

That which claims to be biblical counseling but fails to be *biblical*—that is, consistent with the Bible rightly interpreted—is a poor witness. Likewise, that which claims to be instruction in biblical counseling but bears no resemblance to Jesus Christ—doesn't speak the way He speaks, or sound the way He sounds, or share His message, or operate with His worldview—will be exposed as counterfeit. Let this chapter, then, and those that follow be examined for biblical integrity. They have been written with the hopes of withstanding the test and challenging us toward knowing the Lord more and His Word more

profoundly. The biblical call to love our neighbor as ourselves as an expression of love to God finds its application in “speaking the truth to others”—what we call counseling.

A Biblical Approach to Communication

Biblical counseling could be defined simply as “a biblical approach to communication”—or, as another has described it, “intentionally helpful conversations.”¹ But how does your communication relate to counseling?

Everyone counsels. That means you—yes, you—are already a counselor, whether you have accepted the title or not. Every time you share an opinion that communicates values or a system of belief, you counsel. Think back to the last time you gave advice, instructed someone, or related a past experience to help another person in a similar predicament. In every case, you were counseling. And the question is not *whether* you counseled, but whether your counsel could be considered *good*.

For the biblical counselor, the evaluation of “good” is marked by two loaded elements: Does your counsel *speak the truth*? And is it *motivated and consistent with love*? (Ephesians 4:15). Good counsel must have both. Neither polls nor personal opinion determine truth and love; God defines truth and love in the pages of the Bible. Take a moment to appreciate the gravity of the following thought: Every word ever spoken by every person who ever lived will be judged by God using these two standards (Matthew 12:36-37; Ephesians 4:25,29). Thus, because every word counsels and because all persons may be labeled as counselors, it is vital to see biblical counseling as an approach to communication.

Speaking a single ordinary word requires a complex system of brain-to-body processes—controlling approximately one hundred different muscles.² “Yes,” “No,” “Maybe”—what a workout! Yet there is something even more extraordinary about speaking than that. You might observe this extraordinary experience on a daily basis with your spouse or a friend at the office. Their approach to life and conversations are so subtly unique. That is where the extraordinary enters in. Biblical counseling is at its root supernatural, involving the actual Spirit of God sending out His counsel through biblical counselors who teach and apply the Word of God to the needs of another person.

As godly communication, biblical counseling is the right message at the right time presented in the right way. Think of the effect a single word can have. In a busy parking lot, a mother cries out “Stop!”—saving her child from a fatal collision. A father slowly speaks his son’s name with that certain gravity of correction, and the boy takes notice. These words counsel, and the Bible speaks of their value: “A word *fitly spoken* is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). The New Testament, likewise, commonly promotes this type of communication: “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, *as fits the occasion*, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

Now, words that build up and give grace are not always soft. It is love that controls the approach. If my mother had softly said, “Stop” in that parking lot, I probably would not be writing this chapter now. Love thundered that message to my young ears. So too the Bible has many words for godly communication: warn, admonish, counsel, speak truth, remind, encourage, exhort, among many others. At times, godly communication proceeds through actions without a word: shedding tears at the side of someone grieving, or jumping for joy with someone who is rejoicing (Romans 12:15). In all cases, the substance of the message is *truth* as defined by the Bible, and the goal and manner is *love*.

Every word sent out from Jesus’ mouth never failed to have both of these elements. Imagine that—never a careless word, nothing said in haste or that He wished He could take back. No other human being can claim to have done the same. We sin so often and easily in our speech and verify the Scripture passage that says, “No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). Temptations in this area arise so quickly. A neighbor in the community accuses you falsely, and in response you quickly formulate every ounce of criticism you ever had about him in slanderous character assassination. Or a friend in a high-pressure situation betrays your trust, and you immediately tear him down, sever the relationship, and consider him your enemy. Frequently such responses are blurted out in an instant, and are accompanied by negative (sinful) emotions or attitudes.

Jesus was both falsely accused and betrayed, and was tempted as we are, but responded in a radically different way than you and I are prone to: “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued

entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:22-23). Understand the contrast: We sin instinctually—from our very nature—but He *never* sinned, never ceased to speak the truth in love. How? The truth—as God defines it—was not only what Jesus spoke, but was also who He was: “I am the way, *and the truth*, and the life” (John 14:6). Biblical love was not just something Jesus did in a series of isolated events; it was His essence and mission:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him (1 John 4:7-9).

The center of the Christian message and the essential core of all biblical counseling is that Jesus, who existed eternally as God, came down from heaven and became a man, lived a life of unceasing and perfect love for God and neighbor, died in the place of sinners (and never sinned Himself) to bear the penalty of righteous wrath for their sins, rose to life to conquer death and give life to those who believe, presently intercedes for His followers, and anticipates a future return when He makes all things new and establishes a never-ending kingdom. (The Bible calls this message “the gospel.”) It is the life of Jesus Christ living in Christians that transforms them into people who also speak the truth in love, equipping them to bring words of hope and life to others in the most complicated and dire situations.

Counseling As We Think of It

Far more weighty matters devastate people than mere words or short statements are capable of resolving: uncontrolled grief over losing a loved one, suicidal depression, marriage crises, the worry and panic over a big decision, employment turmoil, the damage of sexual immorality, and severe financial burdens, to name a few. Biblical counseling is not a well-wishing effort, but an arduous self-sacrifice to extend God’s Word and join another’s burden in order to see that person be transformed from the inside out, begin to worship God, and move in a godly direction with his life toward a greater resemblance to Jesus.³ In the context of these severe problems, the simple definition of biblical counseling must yield to the thorough.

On the complex end of the spectrum, biblical counseling is *the whole counsel of God delivered in a systematic, understandable, relevant, and loving manner*. The whole counsel of God—every last piece, fully known without contradiction, fully distinguished from another and ready to fit an infinite number of scenarios—absolute truth and unending love condensed into words, sentences, pauses, questions, and answers. But be careful not to create an artificial difference between *real* counseling and biblical counseling. For example: Describe the counseling scenarios of every resident of a psychiatric ward; “the whole counsel of God” can make the matter plain with a wisdom that can transform everyone involved. He has made His wisdom known to us in the pages of the Bible (Psalm 19:7), and in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). To all matters of life the Bible speaks, and with an authority surpassing any theorist and practitioner of a modern psychology. Biblical counselors, equipped with a thorough knowledge of the Bible and skilled in presenting it in an understandable, relevant, and loving way, aim to interject that wisdom from above—the counsel of God—into these counseling opportunities. And the Spirit of God, working through the Word of God and using these ministers of the Word, transforms lives.⁴ Every contributor to this book has seen it happen—it is biblical, and it is *real*.

Biblical Counseling in the Church and Society

Over the course of the last century, secular psychological thought has slowly infiltrated the American Protestant church and replaced the biblical foundations for preaching, counseling, and ministry. The biblical counseling movement within the church is an attempt to expose this calamity and return the church to the Bible as the authoritative guide for how Christians ought to think and counsel one another. The term *psychology* represents the “study of the soul.” However, because the soul is immaterial and cannot be examined directly, the field of modern psychology seeks to study the “mental and behavioral characteristics of an individual or group.”⁵ Psychologists seek to understand why people do what they do (psychology), and how change can be achieved when beneficial (psychotherapy). Biblical counseling then, itself, qualifies as a psychology.⁶ Its foundations and methods may not agree with the mainstream positions in the field—though consensus is not really a characteristic of modern

psychology⁷—but it nonetheless presents a perspective on all essential elements of the term so that it qualifies as a contender among the psychologies. And the hero among them is biblical counseling—as we, the contributing authors of this volume, contend.

All psychologies operate from worldviews, and all the sciences—even the most objective—are carried out by scientists who could not deny that they themselves have a system of values, a belief system, a way of looking at the world, and that those elements have at least some small influence on how they approach their work. David Powlison writes, “Christianity is a psychology in that it involves a true knowledge of people and true knowledge of God.”⁸ Biblical counseling, as a psychology, shares this trait—building its philosophy and method of counseling from its worldview.

Edward Welch proposes four striking tenets of the Christian worldview with radical implications for counseling: “(1) The Christian worldview is unique in that it begins with God; (2) the Christian worldview speaks with depth to the observations of modern psychology; (3) the Christian worldview speaks to critical psychological phenomena rarely addressed in secular theories; and (4) the world makes no sense apart from a Christian worldview.”⁹ All people live and speak from individual worldviews. This worldview is formed from what a person thinks (impacted by his culture, parents, traditions, beliefs, etc.) and what this person loves (what rules his heart). When the combination of these two is lived out, the Bible calls it worship. (The object of worship is identified by the focus of each element.)

The following call to worship, by Francis of Assisi, has been a beloved hymn of the church for centuries:

All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia! [Praise the Lord!]
Alleluia! [Praise the Lord!]

The audience here is comprehensive—“*all* creatures.” Its message is directive and clear: “Praise the Lord!” The Christian worldview begins, exists, and ends with God. The apostle Paul wrote it this way: “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever” (Romans 11:36). God created mankind first and foremost as *worshippers*, persons who would see God

as the ultimate worthy object of their worship. His very design and purpose is a function of worship—believing God’s Word concerning all matters, and loving God above all else (Exodus 20).

The Bible calls the immaterial part of mankind the “heart,” and describes how God’s original design was for everything it produces—every thought, intention, affection, action, spoken word, etc.—to serve as an act of worship that glorifies the God of the Bible. Consequently, mankind experiences trouble in this life when he acts contrary to this design and fails to worship God—in a word, sin. Think of an automobile designed to be fueled with regular gasoline. If you fill the gas tank with diesel fuel, it won’t take very long for all the functions of that automobile to shut down. But when that same automobile is filled with the right fuel and maintained properly, it can run for hundreds of thousands of miles. Mankind was designed to function as a worshipper of God for eternity, and the intent was for all aspects of his life to be acts of worship to the living God.¹⁰

A Foundational Theology for Biblical Counseling

A belief system or worldview that revolves around God would accurately be described as a *theology*, since the “study of God” dominates its perspective on everything. “Speaking the truth in love,” our theme phrase for the early part of this chapter, is said to produce the following result: “We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). This latter phrase contains the most basic elements of a theology of biblical counseling: who people are in relation to God, and what God expects of them. (To be clear, a growing understanding of all the Bible’s teachings is vital for building a thorough theological basis for counseling wisdom and skill, and should be pursued.) This phrase says something about people in process. There is a present condition and a destination, but a transformation is needed for people to get from one to the other. Verses 17-24 of the same passage frame this process with three instructions: put off your old self (verse 22), be renewed in the spirit of your mind (verse 23), and put on the new self, which is holy and righteous like God (verse 24).

Put off. How did man get to a place where he now needs fundamental change? In the beginning, God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27),

and placed him in this world as a representation of what He is like. Despite being surrounded by what can only be described as a “very good” environment (Genesis 1:31; 2:7-15), and having unhindered fellowship with God (Genesis 2:16-25), man rebelled against God by breaking the one prohibition given him (Genesis 2:17; 3:6) and received the consequence of his trespass (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23): he began to exist in the status of whole-person corruption and decay (Romans 3:10-18) in a world cursed with corruption and decay (Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 8:20-23), and to have a broken relationship between he and God (Genesis 3:23-24; Romans 3:23). This whole-person decay—rooted in his very heart (Genesis 4:3,5; Romans 1:21)—put him at enmity with God.

Because Adam represented all of mankind, this consequence was subsequently passed down to every generation. Thus every human born thereafter has been adversely impacted by the first man’s trespass (Romans 5:12). Yet God made a way for His enemies to turn from their sin, to be delivered from their decay, to be reconciled as friends and children of God (Romans 5:6-11), to await a final removal of cursed corruption and decay (1 John 3:2), and once again reflect God’s glorious likeness (Romans 5:2; 8:23-25)—though at present we battle to live wisely by God’s Spirit (Romans 8:13-14),¹¹ a life of progressively refined worship (Romans 12:1).

The need for change then exists, first and foremost, because people fail to worship God. Instead, they worship some aspect of the creation (Romans 1:25)—usually themselves—through some cleverly concealed strategy. Now, when people worship something or someone other than God, their actions *always* reflect what they are treasuring. The Bible labels these actions “sin” and identifies them as affronts to God: “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). A theology of biblical counseling clearly identifies these actions as sin, but is even more interested in exposing the system of worship at their root by the light of God’s Word (Hebrews 4:12-13), and by outshining the treasured object of that system with the light of life, Jesus Christ (John 3:19-21).

Put on. As the destination, the standard for change is Jesus (Ephesians

4:20). Why? Jesus, the God-man, perfectly pleased God in every respect (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). He displayed, as a human being, what loving God perfectly and loving one's neighbor perfectly looks like. And it is God's desire that people be conformed to resemble Jesus, so that they too might give God the glory due His name.

Be renewed. Finally, the process of transformation takes a person from what he is presently and grows him up—along with the rest of the church—to correspond to Jesus Christ in resembling His character. Clearly this transformation involves a ceasing of the works of the flesh and a putting on of a new, Christ-like pattern of behavior. This shift involves a radical work of change. As wrong worship is the root of all sin, and right worship is at the core of righteous living, a transfer of worship must take place. The person must transfer his worship from the undeserving object or person who is currently receiving it, and focus it upon Jesus Christ, who infinitely deserves it. And this transfer is a work of God: one must *be* renewed by God—that is, do an about-face away from sin, and walk toward Jesus Christ (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

For this transformation and transfer to take place, a person must see the glory of God as greater than that to which he has been ascribing importance and admiration in his heart. And the most powerful message of the glory of God is represented in the Christian gospel, which concerns both (1) the grand theological picture of God delivering people from His wrath, redeeming His creation from the curse of sin through the death of Jesus on the cross, and preparing for an eternity of restored worshippers rehearsing His glory; and (2) a focused picture of the glory of God in the person of Jesus in every account given to us in the Gospel narratives. For example, have you ever considered the glory of God in the person of Jesus turning water to wine? Have you ever known anyone in your entire life with the power to intrinsically transform as He did with a word? Yet seeing Jesus with this accuracy takes the lens of repentance and faith.

The Christian life begins when this message of the glory of God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, powerfully generates a new life of faith within a person (Romans 1:16-17). The Spirit, using this message and its implications, continues to inspire faith throughout the Christian's life. The Bible describes the one who is not a Christian as dead and unable to respond to spiritual impulse

(Ephesians 2:1-3). The Christian, however, has been made alive to respond to spiritual stimuli (Ephesians 2:4-10). The Holy Spirit convicts the Christian of sin through the use of the Word of God, and energizes the Christian's faith so that he once again comprehends from the heart the glory of God in the face of Jesus. The biblical counselor, then, seeks to display the glory of God through the person of Jesus to inspire a counselee's transfer of worship from that which is undeserving to Him who is the joy of man's desiring, and then the biblical counselor seeks to practically guide the counselee in extensions of that worship through word and deed.

The Bible calls this process of change *sanctification* and presents it as happening progressively (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:12-13). The biblical counselor is called to be faithful to continue coming alongside the counselee to promote repentance, consistently teaching and displaying the glory of God in the person of Jesus, and waiting upon the Holy Spirit of God to bring about right worship in the heart. When repentance and faith occur, right worship resumes, and new successes in following after Jesus in loving God and loving others emerge—in other words, “we grow up...into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Biblical Counseling's Foundational Doctrine

The Bible, as used by God in a person's life, is the foundation for biblical counseling. How can we be so confident to build an approach to counseling from the Bible? Given the weighty task of addressing some of the most difficult issues in human experience, it has a lot of expectations to live up to. The Bible's claims about itself, however, show its sufficiency to meet those challenges. Although all doctrines of the Bible are vital to an understanding of biblical counseling, one specific doctrine has emerged as preeminent: the sufficiency of Scripture. This doctrine is a historical teaching of the church, especially highlighted during the time of the Protestant Reformation¹²—a subset of the Reformation pillar *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). And the biblical counseling movement has demonstrated the need for that same teaching to be reemphasized and clarified for the church today.

Sufficient is that which is “enough to meet the needs of a situation or a proposed end.”¹³ It is important to understand the purpose or goal of the Bible in order to evaluate its sufficiency for counseling. The doctrine of the sufficiency

of Scripture teaches that God has designed a comprehensive resource for man—His inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word—to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work of salvation and to wisely guide through *all matters of life* either by direct command or precept. Thus Scripture prepares a person for salvation through making one wise in the knowledge of God (Psalm 19:7), and also instructs the Christian’s gradual growth in pure worship by training in holy character (2 Timothy 3:14-17). The Holy Spirit brings a biblical man to believe the truth of His sufficient Word and enables him to obey it by faith.

Affirmation for the Doctrine of Sufficiency

The church has historically looked to three primary passages of Scripture to affirm the doctrine of sufficiency; however, every text of Scripture assumes that it be understood in the context of sufficiency without explicitly mentioning the doctrine. Those texts are Psalm 19:7-11, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, and 2 Peter 1:3-4 (see also verses 16-21). These texts stress the Bible as the sufficient guide for knowing God, worshipping God, and obeying Him by faith.

Sufficiency in Psalm 19

Psalm 19:7-11 introduces seven terms and descriptions for describing Scripture, each corresponding to an avenue of effect:

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

This psalm of David speaks to the value of God's revelation to man. Verses 1-6 speak of God's revelation of Himself to all mankind, of which the surrounding creation is a major element. However, Scripture—here referred to as “law,” “testimony,” “precepts,” “commandment,” “fear,” and “rules”—is contrasted as the unique source of revelation needed to change the heart of man and make him wise. Every counseling issue you ever encounter could relate to the need for at least one of these effects to occur in the life of the person you are seeking to help. Scripture was designed with those needs in mind.

Sufficiency in 2 Timothy 3

In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, the apostle Paul alluded to Psalm 19.¹⁴ He wrote,

As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the *sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Several key phrases might highlight the strong support this text proposes for the doctrine of sufficiency. First, the text suggests an extreme dependence on the Word of God by the recipient of Paul's letter—Timothy. Second, “wise for salvation” speaks to the total transformation of a person beginning with initial sanctification, continuing with progressive sanctification, and culminating in final sanctification: a change of the comprehensive nature of a person.¹⁵ It gives a direct link between this passage and all that David wrote about the Scripture in Psalm 19. Third, “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” places the Scripture as the comprehensive guide for human personality and behavior change. And fourth, it describes the person who has come to Scripture for a sufficient guide as being *complete* and *equipped for every good work*, which is the hope of every biblical counselor.

Sufficiency in 2 Peter 1

A third claim in the Bible regarding its sufficiency appears in 2 Peter 1:3-4. It reads,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

This text states explicitly that the knowledge of God given to man suffices for everything that pertains to matters of life and godliness. No issue of counseling falls outside those categories. Moreover, this passage focuses on God's prophetic revelation written down in the pages of Scripture, not just revelation knowledge in general. This observation is confirmed later in the passage when Peter speaks about an extraordinary experience in which God's power revealed Jesus in transcendent glory to himself and two other disciples with him on a mountain in northern Israel (Matthew 17:1-9). There, Jesus was transfigured: His face shone like the sun; His clothes became white; and He spoke with Moses and Elijah about His coming death and resurrection. And Peter and his friends fell to their faces with great terror before Jesus' glory. He related this experience as follows:

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Despite the awesome nature of that experience, and the fact it happened right before his eyes, Peter went on to make this striking statement about Scripture:

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark

place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Peter was more confirmed to know that Scripture was God's very Word, and that it was intended to lead mankind through the darkest experiences of life, than he was comfortable believing his own eyes. Are you kidding us, Peter? We place so much of our confidence in what we see with our natural eyes! Like doubting Thomas, we are reluctant or refuse to believe something until we see it and place our hands on the matter (John 20:25). Over the years I have seen many physically blind men place full confidence in walking by the "light" of a cane or the hand of a trusted friend. Perhaps the fact this amazes me points to my own blindness—that I have trouble believing that depending on the surety and love of another could surpass the trust I have in myself and my own perception. (Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, and the hearts of all of us who counsel biblically!)

Certainty About the Doctrine of Sufficiency

God, who is the ultimate Lover of mankind (John 3:16), provides us with plenty of certainty regarding the sufficiency of His Word:

- the knowledge of God necessary for a life of worship (Psalm 19:8),
- since it is foremost a testimony of God's glory (Psalm 19:8),
- to make the matters of the heart evident (Proverbs 20:5; Hebrews 4:12-13),
- to make man truly wise (Psalm 19:7),
- to guide him through life in a rewarding way and warn him about life's dangers (Psalm 19:11),
- to provide all knowledge needed for repentance and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16),
- so that he is capable of pleasing God by faith in word and deed (2 Timothy 3:17).

The Counselor and the Doctrine of Sufficiency

An immediate implication of this doctrine of sufficiency is that the biblical counselor must thoroughly know the Word of God, and counsel with it as his exclusive authority, sufficient source, and guide. The doctrine assures that the answers for all matters of life lived before God are contained in Scripture, yet those answers must still be plucked from its pages and implanted into the mind of the counselor so that his words truly represent God.

The counselor's approach to counseling would then involve a careful investigation of Scripture for assistance in interpreting the problem at hand. Only the Word of God allows the counselor to see God's diagnosis of the counseling problem. The Bible may not use the same terminology as modern psychology, but it does speak with greater authority.

The counselor would also do a survey of Scripture for assistance in formulating the solution. Only God's Word speaks absolute truth concerning the solutions to all counseling problems and provides comprehensive direction (Psalm 119:105,130).

Last, the biblical counselor will need to know Scripture well so he can discern how to communicate the counsel and its necessary implications (confession, repentance, reconciliation, etc.) in a manner that resembles how Jesus Christ would give counsel (with gentleness, humility, helping the weak, encouraging the fainthearted, admonishing the unruly, patient with all, among many other qualities—Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14). To accomplish all this, the counselor's mastery of the Word must be strong, not superficial.

A New Beginning

Much more could be said, and will be said in the subsequent chapters of this book. This chapter was only an attempt at an introduction. Did biblical counseling make a good impression? Inasmuch as the discipline and practice of biblical counseling seek to model the character of Jesus Christ and the qualities and values of the Bible, its nobility should have ravished you. But if that didn't happen, consider this chapter to have been a muddled veil, and please try to meet biblical counseling on better terms with the help of the chapters to follow

and other introductions. (Some additional resources have been suggested in the “Recommended Resources” list at the end of each chapter.) Do not consider this the end, but rather a new beginning—

- a beginning of refreshment for you who are weary biblical counselors, to reengage in the hard labors of your ministry;
- a beginning of a blessed lifetime of biblical counseling study and ministry for you who are newcomers;
- a beginning of reexamining your foundation for you who have known a different approach to counseling; or
- a beginning of a new relationship with Jesus Christ for you who never heard of His glory before you came to this chapter.

However you may have come, biblical counseling is pleased to have met you.

Recommended Resources

Biblical Counseling as an Approach to Communication and Counseling

Beevers, E. Bradley. “Watch Your Language!” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 12, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 24-30.

Powlison, David. *Speaking Truth in Love*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005.

Biblical Counseling in the Church and Society

MacArthur, John, and the Master’s College Faculty. *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

Piper, John. *Desiring God*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003.

Powlison, David. “A Biblical Counseling View.” In Eric L. Johnson. *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

———. *Seeing with New Eyes*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003.

Welch, Edward T. "A Discussion Among Clergy: Pastoral Counseling Talks with Secular Psychology," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 13, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 23-34.

Biblical Counseling's Foundations

Adams, Jay. *A Theology of Christian Counseling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.

Lambert, Heath. *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Powlison, David. *The Biblical Counseling Movement*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010.

———. "Counseling is the Church." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 2-7.

Tripp, Paul David. *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002.

Biblical Counseling Today

The Biblical Counseling Coalition (BCC)—website:

<http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org>

The Christian Counselor's Education Foundation (CCEF)—website:

<http://ccef.org>

The National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC)—website:

<http://nanc.org>