

What is Biblical Counseling?

Recently controversy has developed regarding who should (or is best suited) to counsel Christians. Some say only ordained pastors are capable to provide Biblical counseling. Others say any Christian Brother or Sister with a heart for God is perfectly capable to counsel Christians. While still others proclaim that a Christian with proper training in the skillful use of wisdom is most capable.

This writer holds a Master's Degree in Social Work and trained as a secular counselor. I began to receive phone calls from Christians who were looking for Christian counseling. I protested by saying that I am a Christian and a counselor but I hesitated to call myself a Christian counselor because I did not have the proper training in Christian counseling. They responded with, "You're better than what we have now".

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, spoke directly to this issue: "The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus" (Bonhoeffer, D. (1954). *Life together*). New York: Harper & Row (p. 118). Bonhoeffer further stated that the "greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is" (p. 119). He made a strong case that humans are destroyed by sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. A Christian visiting a psychiatrist is only a sick person, whereas in the presence of a Christian brother he or she is a sinner in need of forgiveness. Bonhoeffer stated that worldly wisdom knows what distress, weakness, and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of humans. Only a Christian can understand this problem. The

secular psychiatrist may hold the view that there is no god, while the Christian brethren have the view that there is a merciful God (Deut. 4:31).

Biblical counseling is more than using the Bible to counsel. I have encountered many Christians who happen to be educated in counseling and who consider themselves to be Christian counselors. Jay Adams wrote in *Competent to Counsel* that there are three elements to a proper biblical counselor. First, the counselor must possess “goodness”; second, “knowledge”; and third, “wisdom” (p. 62). Adams explained that learning and knowledge applied with the “skillful use of divine truth” (wisdom) are the requirements for proper biblical counseling.

“Skillful use of divine truth” can be developed only through proper hermeneutical and theological training. The Christian counselor who is educated only by secular methods cannot possibly possess the wisdom Adams referred to. Wayne Mack wrote about this in Totally Sufficient. Mack stated that biblical counselors believe in a one-book theory in which the Bible is the only truth, whereas others believe in the blending (two-book theory) of Scripture and man’s wisdom, while still others believe that neither (no-book theory) is adequate to counsel the hurting. Chapter 2, (Hindson & Eyrich, Gen. Editors, 1997, 57-58). Mack stated that “God’s Word being both truthful (John 17:17) and authoritative calls us to humble and faithful obedience in every area on which it speaks” (pp. 25–26). Mack made a strong argument that the Christian (biblical) counselor must be in submission to the one true God and His Word which is holy, able, inspired by God and profitable to equip every man for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

For Christian counseling to take place, the people doing the counseling must be individuals who are “conscientiously and comprehensively Christian,” meaning that the counselor must experienced the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, come to Christ in repentance and Faith, acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior of their lives, and want to live in obedience to Him. (p. 29)

Therefore, Bonhoeffer is correct when he says that a Christian brother or sister possesses more counseling knowledge for a fellow Christian than the non Christian counselor (no matter how well educated). Additionally, Adams’ position that the Devine use of wisdom can only be implemented with proper hermeneutical and theological training and is a must for those who hold themselves out as Christian or Biblical counselors.

For these reasons I enrolled in the PhD in Biblical Counseling Program at Trinity Theological Seminary in Newburg, IN.