



Misunderstandings and Observations about Discipleship / Biblical Counseling

Part 3 of this series highlighted the indivisible linkage between discipleship and biblical counseling (<http://wordtruth.org/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%203.pdf>). This linkage is evident by common terminology and ministries related to both discipleship and biblical counseling. In fact, an overview of the New Testament emphasizes that all believers can and should counsel biblically as part of the discipleship process. If discipleship and biblical counseling go hand in hand, what commonalities do they have?

First, the terms *believer*, *disciple*, and *Christian* are equivalent and refer to anyone who has received salvation through Jesus Christ.

(See *Are You a Christian or a Disciple? Is There a Difference? Why it Matters!* at http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Are_You_a_Christian_or_a_Disciple_page1 and

What is Discipleship and How is it Done? (audio and in print) at <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done>)

Second, all believers/disciples/Christians are uniquely and sovereignly equipped with spiritual gifts for ministry to and with others (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Third, all believers/disciples/Christians are to grow in the Christ-life and encourage fellow believers to do likewise (Hebrews 3:13, 10:23-24).

Hebrews 3:13, But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:23-24, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

As believers grow in Christ, they learn to deal biblically with life’s challenges and, in the process, become more skilled at helping others. In assisting others, faithful disciples of Jesus realize the importance of providing counsel based on biblical truth untainted by worldly wisdom. James 3:15 describes all other counsel as earthly, natural (unspiritual), and demonic.

James 3:15, This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP AND BIBLICAL COUNSELING

#1 . . . Definition of biblical counseling

People often think of counseling as a complex process requiring specialized skills and the use of certain techniques. However, another view of biblical counseling was introduced in **Counseling – What Is It?** (<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%202.pdf>).

Valid biblical counseling occurs when the counselor (a biblically obedient believer dependent on the Holy Spirit) provides help, based on scriptural truth, through purposeful communication that glorifies God by emphasizing salvation through Jesus Christ (evangelism) and faithful growth in the Christ-life (sanctification).

All believers can counsel biblically to the degree they use scriptural truth and rely on the Holy Spirit to help others glorify God in all aspects of life and relationships. God can and will use any number of believers to provide biblical help to someone needing direction and/or comfort. This biblical help typically corresponds with each believer’s understanding of God’s Word that is linked to one’s personal growth in the Christ-life.

Romans 15:14, And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

#2 . . . Separating discipleship from biblical counseling in the Body of Christ

Some churches, colleges, and seminaries separate discipleship training from biblical counseling training. Separating these subjects may help focus instruction, but it can also further the illusion that discipleship is separate from biblical counseling. However, valid biblical counseling and Christ-honoring discipleship are one and the same whenever believers help fellow Christians grow in the Christ-life.

Believers who separate discipleship and biblical counseling often respond to a fellow believer facing difficulties by saying, “You need counseling.” That statement may or may not be appropriate, but it is helpful for believers to remind one another that difficulties always provide opportunities to grow in Christ. For example, speaking kindly with a fellow believer facing difficulties, one could also say, “This is your opportunity to grow even more as a disciple of Christ.” Scripture does not separate on-going growth in Christ from dealing with life's problems. In fact, these two aspects of the Christian life are intertwined.

(See *What Do You Believe? . . . No, Really* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/What%20do%20you%20believe.pdf>)

John 16:33 (spoken by Jesus), These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Romans 5:3-5, And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 8:18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11, But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

James 1:2-4, Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1 Peter 1:6-7, In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:12-13, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

(*The Three Victories in Trials* at <http://wordtruth.net/PDF/Three%20Victories%20in%20Trials.pdf>)

Believers should note that biblical counseling is a focused aspect of the discipleship process.

#3 . . . Separating evangelism from biblical counseling

Christians often classify sharing the Gospel with an unbeliever as an evangelism encounter without recognizing that biblical counseling has also occurred. Evangelism involves counseling at some level because evangelism explains to the non-Christian that one's deepest need is to have right relationships with God and others and presents Christ as the only One through whom that need can be met. Evangelism is one of two primary emphases of biblical counseling (the other emphasis is sanctification, or “growing in the Christ-life”). Of course, evangelism is basic to discipleship as well.

- * Biblical counseling and sharing the Gospel are one and the same when the conversation between a believer and an unbeliever emphasizes the Gospel (evangelism focus).
- * Biblical counseling and discipleship instruction are one and the same when the conversation involves believers and emphasizes growth in Christ (sanctification focus).

#4 . . . Requiring specific training for believers to counsel biblically

Churches often encourage believers with little or no evangelism training to share the Gospel with unbelievers. Likewise, churches often urge believers with little or no discipleship training to disciple fellow believers. Paradoxically, however, these same churches may erroneously assume that only believers with specific biblical counseling training can counsel others effectively.

Evangelism training, discipleship training, and biblical counseling training are all beneficial. Obviously, a new Christian's knowledge and use of the Bible will not have the breadth and depth that a more mature disciple will have. Likewise, Christians having discipleship and/or biblical counseling training usually know more verses and understand more biblical insights regarding growth in Christ than fellow believers who lack training. A lack of specialized training, however, should not inhibit a faithful and biblically obedient student of the Word from impacting others by relying on God's sovereignty, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the biblical truth one knows – even a single verse applied to the need of the moment - to assist others facing life's challenges.

#5 . . . Deferring to “professional counselors”

This misunderstanding occurs when believers and unbelievers associate valid and effective biblical counseling primarily with professional counselors who have advanced degrees, accept clients/patients, schedule on-going office appointments, and charge a fee for services rendered.

(See *Counseling Based on What?* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>)

NOTE: Charging a fee for biblical counseling is a practice birthed in the secular (psychological, psycho-therapeutic) world and, arguably, violates scriptural principles of ministry. For example, what is the biblical basis for charging an unbeliever a fee to hear the Gospel? Correspondingly, charging a fee for biblical ministry to others disregards the mandate of “freely you received, freely give”

Matthew 10:7-9, (stated by Jesus to His disciples) And as you go, preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. ⁹ Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts. (insert added)

Commenting on this perspective, David Guzik states, “Even though the twelve could expect their needs to be met through the people they served, they should never require their needs to be met as payment. The foundational principle was freely you have received, freely give.”

(See *Blue Letter Bible Text Commentaries*, David Guzik study guides . . . refer to Matthew commentary, chapter 10 in https://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/guzik_david/)

The Biblical Counseling Foundation (BCF), one of the few Christian counseling organizations that oppose charging a fee for counseling, states in the BCF Standards of Conduct and Code of Ethics for Biblical Disciples/Counselors that a biblical counselor . . .

. . . provides his time, resources, and energy as a ministering service to the church or faith group as well as to the individual or family in need. Recipients or beneficiaries of his services are not subject to any charge or fee or any financial requirement, actual or implied.

(See <http://www.bcfministries.org/downloads/pub-standardsconduct.pdf>)

Also, see *Charging Fees for Biblical Counseling? . . . Relationship, Responsibility, and Remuneration* at <http://www.christiandiscernment.com/Christian%20Discernment/CD%20PDF/Theology%20pdf/Fees%20Counseling%20Paper.pdf>)

God can use any biblically obedient believer as a catalyst of mercy, wisdom, and grace in another's life. Such biblical help may occur over a few minutes or extend through many interactions over several months. The settings and time commitment for those involved in discipleship/counseling situations are variable.

Remember . . . valid biblical counseling and Christ-honoring discipleship are one and the same whenever believers help fellow Christians to grow in the Christ-life. Every biblically obedient believer can participate at some level with regard to making disciples (counseling others).

MINISTRY OBSERVATIONS TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS AND CHURCHES TO COUNSEL BIBLICALLY

#1 . . . Valid biblical counseling can occur in any church, but its beneficial impact will vary from church to church as well as from believer to believer. Biblical counseling in a church family typically improves when pastors/leaders regularly encourage believers to support one another through prayer and the encouragement of God's Word. Remember, every believer growing in Christ can provide biblical counsel corresponding to his or her personal level of Christ-like development. The same is true regarding believers sharing the Gospel, since most believers can recount how they came to faith in Christ.

(See *Preparing Your Personal Testimony* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Preparing%20Your%20Personal%20Testimony.pdf> and *This is the Gospel . . . the Good News* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/This%20is%20the%20Gospel%20-%20The%20Good%20News.pdf>)

#2 . . . All believers growing in the Christ-life can, in varying degrees, counsel others facing life's challenges. (*NOTE: Some of life's difficulties also require the involvement of medical, legal, and/or law enforcement personnel.*) Biblical counseling can occur in an office or in any number of casual settings – on a walk, over lunch, sitting in the park, in a car or restaurant or home . . . in fact, anywhere a conversation is possible.

Believers qualify to provide effective biblical counsel by faithfully praying, obeying God's Word, submitting to the Holy Spirit, and maturing in the Christ-life. Believers growing in Christ display the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

Galatians 5:22-23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Believers characterized by the fruit of the Spirit are “doers of the Word” who develop habits such as:

- * trusting, reading, studying, memorizing, and applying the truth of God's Word for all situations of life
- * giving God glory for Who He is
- * thanking God for what He has done and what He continues to do
- * praying faithfully while depending on His sovereignty in every situation
- * setting aside times for praise and worship, often with fellow believers
- * changing thoughts, actions, and speech from focusing on self to honoring Christ
- * demonstrating Christ-like love
- * telling others the Good News of Jesus Christ
- * maintaining relationships with fellow believers through cooperative ministries and mutual edification
- * helping restore fellow believers who have sinned
- * forgiving others who have sinned against them
- * confessing personal sins to God and, when applicable, also to others
- * helping others understand God's Word and its application to life and relationships
- * coming alongside those who face difficulties
- * sharing/giving personal resources that help alleviate suffering in others' lives

A believer displaying these characteristics is an obvious disciple of Jesus Christ. Such a believer recognizes he or she is a work in progress and, by God's grace, will faithfully evaluate his or her own life according to God's Word and the person of Jesus Christ.

Through consistent, biblical self-evaluation – disregarding self-oriented ideas/feelings as well as any comparisons with others – a believer can faithfully grow in Christ and, correspondingly, demonstrate love for God and others. Such believers can counsel others biblically in varying degrees, even though others in the Body of Christ may overlook this reality.

#3 . . . The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) encompasses Christ-honoring discipleship and authentic biblical counseling.

Matthew 28:18-20, And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Jesus told His followers to “make disciples . . . teaching them to observe *all* that I commanded you.” Jesus also told His disciples to love God and love one another (Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34, 1 John 3:23).

Matthew 22:36-40, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ³⁸“This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹“The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ ⁴⁰“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

John 13:34, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

1 John 3:23, This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

In His teaching, Jesus showed what love for one another looks like. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples how to love when dealing with persecution, anger, lust, marriage problems, oaths, vengeance, enemies, fear, worry, etc. He did not distinguish counseling topics from discipleship topics. The term “counseling” encompasses every aspect of a person’s life. Yet, Jesus used the term “disciple” when He charged His disciples to teach *all* that He commanded which, like biblical counseling, encompasses every aspect of a person’s life. (*See Professional Counseling versus Body Life Sanctification* at http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/body_life.html)

#4 . . . Challenges of life and relationships remind believers to study and obey God’s Word. Obviously, no believer can recall all verses pertaining to every aspect of life’s challenges. However, God’s Word is without error and is totally sufficient to address all facets of life and relationships. As a result, every Christian can be assured that a prayerful, on-going study and application of the Scriptures will increase one’s understanding of the Bible as well as reveal scriptural responses to life’s challenges for one’s self and for other persons seeking counsel.

God often uses believers’ personal challenges as well as others’ difficulties as an impetus for one to study Scripture and discover/review biblical truths applicable to life’s challenges and on-going growth in Christ.

THE CHARGE TO COUNSEL BIBLICALLY

With such all-encompassing divine resources as God Almighty, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible – coupled with personal prayer, scriptural obedience, and the Christ-honoring assistance of fellow believers – how could followers of Christ choose the wisdom of the world (psychology, psychotherapy, popular perspectives, and/or “common sense”) as authoritative resources for dealing with life’s difficulties instead of relying on divine resources? Have we in the Body of Christ forgotten that the “wisdom of the world is foolishness before God” (1 Corinthians 3:19)?

For further study related to the above paragraph, see . . .

Biblical Counseling – Part 1: Counseling . . . Based on What? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

Divine Sufficiency or Divine Deficiency at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Divine%20Sufficiency%20or%20Divine%20Deficiency.pdf>

Biblical Basics of Dealing with Problems at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Basics%20of%20Dealing%20with%20Problems.pdf>

Counseling Must be Based Solely on the Bible at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Counseling%20Based%20Solely%20on%20the%20Bible.pdf>

God’s Truth is Your Foundation for Life at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Gods%20Truth%20is%20Your%20Foundation%20for%20Life.pdf>

Anchors of Hope for Any Trial at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Anchors%20of%20Hope%20for%20Any%20Trial.pdf>

God of the Bible . . . Divinity of the Trinity at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/God%20of%20the%20Bible%20-%20Divinity%20of%20the%20Trinity.pdf>

Jesus IS Lord at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Jesus%20IS%20Lord.pdf>

Lasting Peace Comes Only Through Jesus at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Lasting%20Peace%20Comes%20Only%20Through%20Jesus.pdf>

Holy Spirit: The Divine Developer at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Holy%20Spirit%20Divine%20Developer.pdf>

Prayerlessness: A Reflection of Self-Centeredness at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Prayerlessness.pdf>

The Apostle Paul’s encouragement to the Galatian believers in the first century is applicable for believers in any century.

Galatians 6:1-2, Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.