

Arbor Foundations

19 – Biblical Counseling and Idols of the Heart

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Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

Biblical Counseling

What is Biblical counseling?

One Definition: Biblical counseling is private and personal ministry of the Word, with the goal of coming alongside a person who is struggling and seeking to apply the principles in God’s Word in such a way that the person responds in an obedient and godly manner to the problems they are facing to the glory of God and the person’s own good. (Combination of Woodman and Bigney)

It can be done in different settings:

- Formal counseling ministry
- Pastors interacting with church members
- Informal interactions between believers

What is the difference between Biblical counseling and Bible study?

- Biblical counseling seeks to apply what the Bible says to specific sin-related issues a person is facing.
- Bible study is more general and less specifically focused on one individual’s current issues.

How does Biblical counseling relate to secular counseling / psychology?

<i>Biblical Counseling</i>	<i>Secular Counseling / Psychology</i>
Presumes that God, as our creator, knows us best, and that He has revealed everything that we need to know for life and Godliness in the Scriptures.	Does not look to God’s revelation for understand about who we are in relation to God.
Recognizes that man’s primary problem is sin and that the only real solution to this problem lies in the gospel of Jesus Christ.	Does not focus on the gospel.
Recognizes that we need the Holy Spirit to work in our lives through God’s word, and that we don’t have sufficient resources on our own, apart from God, to solve our deepest problems.	Asserts that we have sufficient resources to solve our deepest problems.

Is everything about secular counseling evil or useless?

- There are things that we can learn from secular science and study of humans.
- Some secular ideas may be similar to Biblical ideas
- Secular approaches can provide some help, but they cannot, however, address our deepest need, which is a restored relationship with our Creator.

Can Biblical counseling fix every problem?

- Biblical counseling is focused on our thinking and our heart, which is at the core of many, but not all of our problems.
- There can be physical/medical issues which can very much affect us as well, and people can be helped by medical treatment.
- There is sometimes a combination of physical / heart issues at play, and when this is the case, the most help can be found by addressing both the physical and heart issues by people trained in each area.

What does a Biblical counselor “do” when they are working with someone?

- Develop a relationship
- Encourage
- Gather information (listen)
- Teach
- Give counsel

What is needed to become a “Biblical counselor”?

- Study of God’s word, and in particular, learning how to apply Biblical principles practically and properly in a variety of real-life situations.
- It is a skill that gets better with effort and practice.
- There are many good books.
- Training is available for those interested in sharpening their skill in this area.

Idols of the Heart

One recurring theme in Biblical counseling (and in Scripture) is the concept of “idols of the heart”.

Where does this idea come from in Scripture?

- Summaries of the Law
 - o First commandment: You shall have no other gods before me. (Ex 20:3)
 - o Jesus’ summary of the Law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...” (Matt 22:37)
- Scripture uses the terminology “idols in the heart”

- Ezek 14:3: Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces...
- Scripture uses the concept
 - Habakkuk 1:11: Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!
 - 1 Cor 10:14: Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.
 - James 4:1: What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?
 - Eph 5:5: or you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
 - Rom 1:25: because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...
 - Note that we are believing a lie—that we will be more satisfied by our sin than by obeying God—when we worship something else in place of God.

An “idol of the heart” is anything that functions in the life of a person in place of God

- Whatever the heart turns to for ultimate satisfaction or security
- Worship is misplaced when *anything* is loved, trusted, or feared more than God and his word
- People can love or trust things such as money (or fear not having it) in a way that should be reserved only for God. Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13; Col 3:5
- Any source of a person’s primary identity, worth, or righteousness other than Christ. Phil 3:7, 8
- Examples of common idols of the heart seen in counseling are a quest for money, security, romance or sexual pleasure, an ideal/godly spouse or children, respect, control, performance, and approval of others. (Note: Some of these are good things that become more than they should be.)

So What?

How much is the Bible speaking into your own life?

How much are you speaking the Bible into the lives of others?

What is missing if there is not any Biblical counseling (as described above) in the life of a church?

What is the value of recognizing “idols of the heart” in our own lives?

For Further Study

Outline on idols of the heart (from which some of the information above was abstracted): <https://ibcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/maxham.drawing-out-idols-of-the-heart-outline.pdf>

Some helpful books that take a Biblical counseling perspective:

Addictions—a Banquet in the Grave by Ed Welch
Age of Opportunity by Paul Tripp
Blame It on the Brain by Ed Welch
Competent to Counsel by Jay Adams
Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically by John MacArthur
Cross Talk by Michael Emlet
The Exemplary Husband by Stuart Scott
The Excellent Wife by Martha Peace
How People Change by Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp
Instructing a Child's Heart by Tedd Tripp
Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands by Paul Tripp
Peacemaking for Families by Ken Sande
Trusting God Even When Life Hurts by Jerry Bridges
War of Words by Paul Tripp
Women Counseling Women by Elyse Fitzpatrick
Women Helping Women by Elyse Fitzpatrick