

Biblical Counseling: Presuppositions and Parameters

I. Generic, Secular Definitions of ‘Counseling’

- A. “Opinions, directions, advice, etc. given after consultation and/or testing to an individual in order to guide him or her in understanding himself or herself. Used primarily in psychology, psychiatry, education, and social work.”
- B. “Providing advice, support, and consultation”
- C. “The professional guidance of an individual in a specific area.”
- D. “Form of guidance in which a trained person offers advice or education about specific problems in living”
- E. “Professional guidance of the individual by use of standard psychological methods such as collecting case-history data, using various techniques of the personal interview, and testing interests and aptitudes. The counselor's goal is generally to orient the individual toward opportunities that can best guarantee fulfillment of his personal needs and aspirations. The counselor usually attempts to clarify the client's own thinking rather than to solve his problems.”

II. What’s Out There—A Typical Secular Psychologist

I am a licensed psychologist specializing in the treatment of anxiety, depression, health-related stress, and relationship difficulties. I work from a cognitive-behavioral perspective, incorporating interpersonal treatments, family-focused therapy, exposure therapy, stress management, and mindfulness, depending on the specific problem and the needs of the client. My approach is active and present-oriented, focusing on treatments supported by research.

In addition to helping clients find relief from depression and anxiety, I have a special interest in positive psychology that I incorporate into my practice. Drawing on research in optimism, happiness, and positive emotion, I work with clients to recognize and build upon personal strengths, cultivate resilience, and enhance optimal functioning.

III. A Biblical Definition of [Nouthetic] Counseling

A. key words-

- 1) **noutheteo**—(νουθετεω, nous/mind + tithemi/to place into... “to place into the mind”); it means ‘to admonish, warn or instruct’

“you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish [*nouthetein*] one another” (Romans 15:14)

“We proclaim Him, admonishing [*nouthetountes*] every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28)

“And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction [*nouthesia*] of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4)

“I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish [*nouthetwn*] you as my beloved children” (1Corinthians 4:14)

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction [*nouthetountas*]” (1 Thessalonians 5:12)

“And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

“It is the appeal to the mind where opposition is present. The person is led away from a false way through warning, instruction, reminder, teaching, and encouragement so his conduct is corrected” [*The New Linguistic & Exegetical Key to the Greek NT*]

2) **parakaleo**—(παρακαλεω, para/alongside + kaleo/call, “to call alongside of”; it means ‘to urge, exhort, appeal to, encourage, request, implore, entreat, comfort, cheer up, console’)

“we were exhorting [*parakalountes*] and encouraging and imploring each of you...that you may walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12)

“Encourage [*parakaleite*] one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

“Likewise urge [*parakalei*] the young men to be sensible” (Titus 2:6)

“And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged [*parekalesan*] them and departed” (Acts 16:40)

“But the Helper [*parakletos*], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you” (John 14:26) [NIV says ‘Counselor’; KJV says ‘Comforter’]

In Romans 12:8, “exhortation” is listed as a specific spiritual gift

B. a working definition-

These two words, in addition to other NT synonyms, incorporate three main ideas with respect to a definition for counseling from a biblical perspective and are as follows:

- 1) There is something wrong in the counselee (sin) that God says must be changed.

- 2) The counselor seeks to effect that change by biblically appropriate verbal Confrontation.
- 3) The change is attempted for the benefit of the counselee.

Taken together, biblical counseling is “*change through verbal confrontation with Scripture out of concern*” (Adams, *Shepherding the Flock of God*)

C. definitional presuppositions-

In our last study we exposed the humanistic presuppositions of secular Psychology; they are antithetical to basic biblical presuppositions regarding counseling; they are as follows:

Secular Psychology	Biblical Counseling
1. man is not responsible for what he does	1. man is a responsible sinner who needs to be changed
2. man has all the resources within himself	2. to change, man must be confronted by God’s Word in the power of God’s Spirit
3. man is but an animal—a by-product of evolution—whose only value is his contribution to the survival of the human herd	3. every person was created in God’s image and must be confronted, persuaded and changed for his individual benefit
4. man is not primarily a spiritual being, so problems that arise are not spiritual in nature but rather medical, physiological or psychological	4. man is primarily a spiritual being and all nonorganic problems result from the spiritual plight of sin and require a spiritual solution

IV. God’s Role in Counseling

A. God the Father is the Great Counselor

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?’ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:33-36)

B. Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor

“For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor (Isa 9:6)

C. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Counselor

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you...” (John 14:26)

V. The Role of God’s Word in Counseling

- A. Psalm 19:7-14
- B. Psalm 119:9, 11
- C. Psalm 119:25, 28
- D. Joshua 1:7-8
- E. 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- F. Hebrews 4:12
- G. Romans 1:16
- H. 1 Peter 2:1-2
- I. John 17:17

VI. The Sin Factor in Counseling

- A. you were born a sinner
- B. sin lives in you
- C. sin is the root of your problems
- D. you can’t get rid of your sins

VII. The Priority of Salvation in Counseling

- A. salvation is the first order of business
- B. apart from salvation you remain an enemy of God

VIII. The By-Product of Salvation with Respect to Counseling

- A. at salvation you become a new person
- B. at salvation you receive the indwelling Holy Spirit
- C. through salvation you have access to the ‘fruits of the Spirit’
- D. eternal security
- E. the gift of prayer
- F. forgiveness of sin
- G. sanctification
- H. a member of a universal spiritual family
- I. eternal destiny with God and eternal riches

IX. The Role of Obedience in Counseling

- A. obedience breeds assurance
- B. obedience is ‘walking in the Spirit’

X. The Role of Prayer in Counseling

- A. confession
- B. adoration
- C. intercession
- D. thanksgiving
- E. petition