

MBC Equipping Hour 2019 Biblical Counselling

In the final two weeks of class we are going to get into the *how to* of Biblical counseling with regards to specific goals and content. Last week was about our motivations and distractions in our own hearts, but now it is time to get into some actual conversations. What does Biblical counseling look like on the ground level? What are some of the goals that we should be aiming for when counseling one another? What is the best way to accomplish the goals that we set forth?

Week 5: The Goal and Content of Biblical Counseling

- Like anything else, we should have some goals before we start to counsel anyone, whether formally or informally.
- This is not to say that we counsel everyone the same way, but that we set forth some guidelines and specific areas that we intend to talk about.
- ***In Biblical counseling, the top priority is the sanctification of the believer.***¹
 - What is sanctification?
 - *It is a continuing change worked by God in us, freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues. It does not mean that sin is instantly eradicated, but it is also more than a counteraction, in which sin is merely restrained or repressed without being progressively destroyed. Sanctification is a real transformation, not just the appearance of one.*²
 - We should hope and expect to see real change in the life of the believer that we are counseling.
 - There should be a progressive movement from sinful habits and desires to a life which is characterized by Christ.
 - The Christian life is all about change. When you are born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, you are changed. When this happens, your thoughts, desires, likes, dislikes, etc. all change. Though your justification is a once off change from death to life, your sanctification is a life long process of change from the old man into the man of God.
 - This is why it is so important when we are looking for counsel or giving counsel to others that we stick with the Scriptures. Godly change can only happen by God's means.
 - Paul says in **Romans 8:29** ***“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.”***

¹ For counseling the nonbeliever, it is paramount to start with (and stay with) the gospel until they are born again. Biblical principles will simply not make sense to the unsaved person.

² <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-sanctification/>

- As a child of God, you and I are called to a life of holiness. This is the ever-pressing issue in the life of the believer, to continue on in this life while saying no to sin.
 - Just as you were known by God before you were born and chosen for salvation, you were also chosen for sanctification.
 - This is why sanctification is so important in the life of the professing Christian. It is a marker in their life that they really are born again and progressing through this life.
 - Paul says in **Philippians 3:12** “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”
 - Paul understood that in this life we will never fully accomplish the mission of being perfect, but that does not mean we do not try.
 - Sin will always, always be a struggle in your life until God calls us home. This is why it is vital that we do not sugar coat or try and rename sin in people’s lives. Sin offends God and when we make it less than what it really is, we soften (or take away) the blow.
- Paul says in **Romans 6:22** “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”
 - When we are a slave to God and not sin, we are being sanctified with the expected result to be eternal life. We are all slaves to something, either sin leading to eternal death or God leading to eternal life.
 - You remind your counselee that they are no longer under sin’s dominion but are a child of God. That one statement brings hope for the future and comfort for the immediate.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3** “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.”
 - Paul tells us what the will of God is for us, our sanctification. In particular that we are set apart to holiness from sin. In this context, Paul is focusing on being set apart from sexual impurity.
 - Why do we deal with sin in counseling? Because the will of God is that His people would be sanctified; set apart and holy for His use.
- Then again in **verse 7** “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”
 - After justification, sanctification is at the forefront of Paul’s mind throughout his letters. It is of the utmost importance to live your life in a way that is set apart for the glory of God by killing sin in our lives.
 - The sanctification stage is where we will spend the majority of our Christian life. It is hard and gets frustrating, but we can have victory.

- **How does this concept of sanctification relate to Biblical counseling?**
 - Like Paul, is this your goal for those you are interacting with?
 - Do you simply seek to ease the pain of someone so they can scurry through this life with no cares or worries?
 - If sanctification is our ultimate priority and we want to see people grow in holiness, we are going to exhort them in that way.
 - It is important to remember that not every issue that someone has is undergirded by some specific sin.
 - As I said before, all calamities have sin at their root...the sin of Adam and Eve brought death into this world.
 - But the fact that someone is sick or had a death in the family or lost their job does not mean they *must* have some particular sin causing it.
 - With that being said, God uses all things in our lives to sanctify us and bring us into a closer relationship with Him.
 - Do not just dismiss something that happens because there was no root cause of sin.
 - In John 9 the disciples asked Jesus who sinned that the man would be born blind. Jesus answered in 9:3 “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”
 - God allowed or caused this man to be blind for the express purpose of God’s mighty works being displayed on that day.
 - When you read the story in **John 9**, it is clear that this miracle of Christ caused some to believe, some to question and others to further harden their hearts. This was the purpose.
 - ***It is okay to struggle!*** Much of the counseling I have done over the years has started with the counselee being ashamed they struggle with their sin.
 - I would assert that it is the struggle that shows you are not giving into it. It is the struggle that shows the Holy Spirit is actively working in your life to keep you away from that sin. It is also the struggle with sin that makes our hearts long for the day that it is over.
 - Sanctification has everything to do with Biblical counseling. We are encouraging people not to look for the easy way out but to stay the course and allow the Lord to work in their lives.
 - The writer of Hebrews exhorts us in **Hebrews 12:11** “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”
 - So much of our culture and attitude today is that we do not want to struggle but want everything to come quick and easy. So when we see that taking place in someone else’s life, we want to alleviate their pain as well.

- It is through that pain and suffering that God is working. As the writer of Hebrews says, after the discipline has trained us, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
 - How many trials and hard times can you look back on and see what God has taught you? How many of those lessons would you have missed out on had you tried to skip out on the trial or sanctification process?
- Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:13** “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”
 - This passage shows us that we are not alone. We are not the first person to face this trial and we will not be the last.
 - This is a vital truth to communicate to your counselee. No matter what they may be facing, thousands before and after will go through their struggles.
 - Paul also says that *God is faithful*. It is important to remind those in hard times that God is faithful.
 - God’s faithfulness is not based upon our faithfulness (**2 Tim. 2:13**), but on the fact that He is God. Remind them of this fact.
 - God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can handle. This is an interesting phrase when practically played out. It may not feel like you can handle what you are in, but because God placed you there, He will also give you the grace to handle it (**2 Cor. 12:9**).
 - God is faithful to provide a way out. There are no shortcuts to sanctification. The way that God provides may be right through the hardest of times, it may be wandering through a desert for 40 years.
 - We must choose not to sin or give in to despair, but always choose to do what is right in the sight of God.
 - Lastly, the whole point of this is that *you will be able to endure it*. Staying on the path that God has provided will ensure that you have the grace that He gives.
 - God’s grace will sustain us as we go through trials, but we must remain faithful to Him and His word. To be continually empowered by His grace means making His choices our only choice.
 - God may never remove the burden in your life, but He will always give you the grace to endure it. We should seek to live faithful lives regardless of the circumstances which surround us.

- **How do we accomplish the goal?**

- So, we know that sanctification is the goal and that God uses various trials and calamities in our life to accomplish this goal. So what do we tell the people they can do while in the midst of their pain?
- Paul says in **Philippians 2:12-13** “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*”
 - One must realize that sanctification is a two-part process. As the Holy Spirit is leading, the person must be following and doing.
 - To know what to do is half of the battle, but it is not winning the battle. We must know what to do and then actually do it.
- Peter says in **1 Peter 1:2** “...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.*”
 - The Holy Spirit empowers us to *obey Jesus Christ*. This is what we communicate to the people that we are counseling.
 - If you are a believer, then you have the Holy Spirit. If you have the Holy Spirit, then you are expected to obey Jesus.
 - It really is that simple. It is the hardest and longest battle you will have in your life, but you have been empowered to not only win, but completely conquer.
- So how do we do this? In the Biblical counseling world, it is called *putting off and putting on*.
- Paul says in **Ephesians 4:20-24** “But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, *to put off your old self*, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and *to put on the new self*, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”
 - Here is the principle that Paul is communicating; *you cannot just stop doing something but must replace it with something good*. We are to stop the old way, but not just stop sinning, we are to replace the old sinful ways with a God honoring new life.
- Paul gives an example of this in **verse 28** “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”
 - This is putting off the old man (stop stealing) and putting on the new (looking out for others who are in need).

- God desires for Christians to actively pursue the *putting on* of the biblical changes to whatever they are striving to *put off*. Our focus should be on the *putting on* in order that we will successfully *put off*.
 - As Paul says in **Philippians 4:8-9** “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”
 - The old patterns and ways of thinking must be unlearned and replaced with new biblical habits, patterns and predispositions.
- ***This all takes time!***
 - We should shepherd and encourage those that we are counseling that their sinful patterns were not shaped in a day and so they will not be broken and replaced in a day either.
 - But, they must continually strive after replacing them...this is Biblical counseling at its core. Becoming and thinking more and more like Christ and obeying His commands and not allowing the old sinful self to rule and reign any more.
- Especially learn how to take your thoughts captive: **2 Corinthians 10:5** “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”
 - We will discuss this much more thoroughly next week, but so much of what comes upon us starts in our thoughts.
 - Are we allowing Satan and his thought to dominate us or the objective word of God to shape us?
 - The battle is real and the consequences are we either live in the victory that has been secured for us, or we live under the domination of lies.
 - Putting off and putting on is hard, but commanded throughout Scripture and those to whom we counsel need to know what to do and where to go.

Looking forward to next week:

- We are going to discuss some specific issues and how best to handle them. We will look at things like depression, PTSD, anxiety, death and other common issues in the church.
- Also look at how to help those who have been abused or neglected in the past and are still struggling with it now.

- **Those in Christ have already put on Christ.**³
 - “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27).
- **Those in Christ are commanded to put on Christ.**
 - “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14).
- **Those in Christ have already put on the new self/man.**
 - “[You] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10).
- **Those in Christ are instructed to put on the new self/man.**
 - “[Your were taught] to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24).
- **Those in Christ are to put on the whole armor of God.**
 - “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12).
 - “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. . . . Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:11, 14).
 - “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8).
- **Those in Christ are to put on love and other virtues.**
 - “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12).
 - “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).
- **Those in Christ have perishable, mortal bodies that will one day put on imperishable, immortal, heavenly bodies.**
 - “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:33).
 - “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2).
- **Those in Christ have already put off the old self/man.**
 - “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices” (Col. 3:9).
- **Those in Christ are instructed to put off the old self/man.**

³ List is modified from original version found at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/putting-on-christ-putting-off-sin/>

- “[You were taught] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires” (Eph. 4:22).
- **Those in Christ are to put away all sin and vice.**
 - “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25).
 - “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12).
 - “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).
 - “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).
 - “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander” (1 Pet. 2:1).