

Biblical Counseling

Introduction:

- As we begin our study of Biblical Counseling, it is important that we have a clear understanding of what true Biblical Counseling is and its history. Below is a breakdown of today's class.

Historical Background of Biblical Counseling
Definition
History
Theological Foundation

I. Definition:

i. What Biblical Counseling is not.

1.) An Autonomous Ministry.

- It does not take place in a vacuum outside of other ministries of the church. It is tied together with all areas of theology and involves discipleship.

2.) An Activity Reserved for the Experts. (we will talk more about this in a moment)

- Only "professionals" should counsel. The church is okay for the small things or to preach the gospel, but real in-depth counseling that deals with the hard issues must be left to the professional.
- Only they have the real knowledge and ability. This gives counseling a Gnostic flavor.
- The Gnostics said they had a secret knowledge. They knew spiritual things about God that Christians just didn't quite understand. They saw all matter as evil and the spiritual realm as good.
- We are advocating a model any believer, willing to be like the Bereans, can follow.

3.) An Optional Ministry.

- It is not just a ministry you can take or leave if you are to be Biblical. If we are to be faithful Christians, we need to be about the business of counseling. We see admonitions all throughout scripture to be about the business of Biblical counseling.

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

Colossians 1:28

²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

4.) **An Activity that is Insensitive or Uncaring.**

- Biblical counseling takes into account the hurts and real-life situations that people go through. It does not just quote Scripture and coldly tell people they just need to obey. Although this may be true, the counselor needs to walk through the trials and help the individual get to the heart issues so that there can be real heart change.
- So, the counselor does tell them to obey but the approach is gently and caring not harsh and legalistic. We need to be discerning and listen closely to what the counselee is saying before we answer.

Proverbs 16:24

Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

Matthew 10:16

¹⁶ "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Colossians 3:12

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Colossians 4:5-6

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

ii. **What Biblical Counseling is.**

1.) **It is the act of giving counsel to someone.**

- It discerns desires, thinking and behavior that God wants to change. If the person is coming to you for counseling, there is some reason for this. Something in their life is dysfunctional, it is not functioning the way God designed them to. Although they may not recognize this, you as the counselor are to help them recognize this and help them see how God can change the heart.
- Now, going back to the subject of counseling only being for the experts, I want you to listen to this. The definition of counseling in the websters dictionary (1979) is the following:
"professional guidance of the individual using psychological methods."
- What are the two things that right away stick out from this definition? It is something only done by professionals, and it is done through psychological methods.

- Sadly, this is not only how the world sees it but also how most Christians think about counseling today. It is something done in an office, by a professional, and very psychological.
- In contrast to Webster's definition, here is a good definition of counseling that is distinctly Christian:
- ***“Biblical counseling is the opportunity to speak into someone’s life using God’s wisdom, and not your own.”***
- The big difference is that in Biblical counseling we are not giving our own opinion or even the opinions of other “professionals” rather we are trying to help people to view their situation from God’s perspective.

Colossians 1:28-29

²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

2.) ***It uses God’s Word, by the Holy Spirit to change desires, thinking, and behavior.***

- As we will see, God’s Word and the person of Jesus Christ is the foundational cornerstone from which we as Biblical counselors provide our advice, encouragement, and comfort. It is not our job to change people, but to introduce them to someone who can change them at the heart level.

Proverbs 4:23

²³ Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Luke 6:45

⁴⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

3.) ***It seeks your sanctification (into Christ-likeness) for the glory of God.***

- Biblical counseling is not seeking to just help you feel better. Its aim is to help you work out your sanctification in your Christian walk so that you may bring glory to God.

John 17:17-19

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.

- Biblical counseling is also not something new. It may not have been done in the same way or looked at the same way as it is today, but it has always been done in the Church.

II. The History of Biblical Counseling:

i. The Early Church; The Reformers; The Puritans.

1. The Early Church.

- Counseling is not something new to our time of Christianity. Although it has not been “officially” labeled, Biblical Counseling, until recent years, It has always occurred as a natural function of corporate spiritual life since the Apostolic age.
- We see in the NT commands to admonish one another,

Romans 15:4

⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

- Encourage one another,

Hebrews 3:13

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.

- Comfort one another,

1 Thessalonians 4:18

¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- And build up one another, so that you may be healed,

James 5:16

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective ^[a]prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- Paul wrote that the strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength and not just please ourselves,

Romans 15:1

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

- These instructions apply to all church members, not just to some elite group of experts.

2. The Reformers.

- When looking at Biblical counseling and the Reformation, an understanding of the primary themes of the Reformation is essential.
- The battle cry of the reformation consisted of the five solas. Each of these Solas are crucial to the practice of Biblical counseling. They are not simply theoretical matters of abstract theology; they are

each crucial to addressing the very practical matters that are brought to the table in Biblical counseling.

Sola Scriptura = Scripture alone. Authority comes through Scripture alone. True Biblical counseling is rooted in Scripture. The Bible has the ultimate authority and power to change the heart.

Sola Gratia = Grace alone. Any heart change that takes place comes by the grace of God alone and not by one's behavioral changes.

Sola Fide = Faith alone. For any real change to take place, one must first have put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Sola Christus = In Christ alone. No other avenue of counseling can make any real heart change. Christ is the only way of salvation and thus the only avenue of heart change.

Sola Deo Gloria = Glory to God alone. All counseling must be done with the glory of God in mind.

- Biblical counsel can be seen in the writings of the reformers. John Calvin's book, "A little book on the Christian life." Is a great example. This book is full of Biblical counseling. It deals with self-denial, taking up our cross as well as walking in the newness of life.

3. *The Puritans.*

- The puritans were constantly engaging in Biblical counseling. It was not compartmentalized and structured as it is in our time. It was just a matter of doing ministry. You read their books and you see they constantly engaged in Biblical counseling. They were constantly using Scripture to urge individuals on to a greater sanctification.

- Here are some examples:

1.) The Doctrine of repentance by Thomas Watson.

2.) The Mortification of sin by John Owen.

3.) The Rare jewel of Christian contentment by Jeremiah Burroughs.

4.) The Fear of God by John Bunyan.

5.) Precious Remedies against Satan's devices by Thomas Brooks.

- In this book, Brooks discusses twelve types of temptation, eight varieties of discouragement, eight kinds of depression, and four classes of spiritual pride.
- This is a wonderful example of true Biblical counseling at its best.

6.) A Christian Directory by Richard Baxter.

- This work is staggering in its scope and comprehensiveness. It fills 900 pages of tiny two-columned type.
- This work has four sections.

1. Christian ethics.
2. Christian economics.
3. Christian ecclesiastics.
4. Christian politics.

➤ Here is an example of one of the sections:

Christian Ethics.

- 1.) For the unconverted
 1. 20 directions for the unconverted.
 2. 30 hindrances that keep men from Christ.
 3. 10 ways non-converted men are deceived into believing they are converted.

2.) For weak Christians 20 directions on how to grow in grace.

3.) General directions for walking with God.

4.) For dealing with the great sins most directly contrary to Godliness.

1. Unbelief.
2. Hardness of heart.
3. Hypocrisy.
4. Man-pleasing; the idolatry of approval.
5. Pride; Idolatry of power / Influence.
6. Materialism and worry; the idolatry of possessions.
7. Sensuality; the idolatry of physical pleasure.

- As you can see, this was all biblical counseling at its best. These men had a high view of God. This being the case, they knew that the bible is the place to find counsel. They would not think of tapping into secular philosophies or therapeutic methods in order to deal with heart issues.

- They understood that the lost world knows nothing of the spiritual, they only know how to help people mitigate the pain, they can offer no long-lasting change at the heart level because only God can change the heart.

- Things began to change in recent years. ¹

ii. The Psychology Trend of Recent Years.

- Psychology has had a strong and influential impact on the church regarding counseling. Many want to integrate psychology with Biblical teaching and call it Biblical counseling. But as we will see, these two areas are completely at odds with one another because they start from the complete opposite foundation.
- It is unfortunate that the techniques and therapies promoted and used by secular psychologists have been brought into the Christian counseling world. In doing so, many Christian counselors use terminology that sounds vaguely Biblical.

¹ John MacArthur and the Master's College Faculty, Counseling, How to Counsel Biblically, (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005). 3.

- These individuals will quote scripture and often blend theological ideas with the teachings of Freud, Rogers, Jung, or whatever school of secular psychology they follow. Although on the surface this may seem viable and even desirable, it is just the opposite.
- Many well-meaning Christian counselors have elevated the writings of these men or others like them, above scripture. The same thing was done in the early church with the writings of men such as Plato and Aristotle. The early church fathers wanted to merge these teachings with the teachings of the Bible.
- Unfortunately, trying to merge psychology with Christianity has given many the impression that adapting secular methods such as twelve-step recovery plans can be more helpful than spiritual means when dealing with sins. After all, these psychologists or psychiatrists are professionals.
- As you can imagine, this thinking has diminished the church's confidence in Scripture, prayer fellowship, and preaching as a means through which the Spirit of God works to change lives. It has diminished it so much so that some, writings such as Carl Roger's, "*On becoming a Person*" have become their newfound Bible.
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- How do we answer those who believe this way? Who are these men that came up with the various psychological methods and do their beliefs match up with Scripture? Is it possible to combine them together or not?

Sigmund Frued:

- ❖ Freud was one of the founding fathers of contemporary psychiatric thought and therapy. He began his career as a medical researcher but opted out due to a lack of funding he began to pursue psychiatric counseling.
- ❖ The foundation of Freud's thought was that people are ruled by their unconscious minds. He believed that human behaviors, responses, and attitudes are governed by primitive urges combined with a vast horde of personal experiences of which they have no knowledge or conscious control.
- ❖ Essentially, Freud saw man as an instinct-ruled beast dominated by primarily the drives of sex and aggression.
- ❖ This avenue of belief puts all the blame for one's behavior on either other people like one's parents or on the individuals' circumstances. The onus of one's predicament is never placed on them but on outside forces.
- ❖ Freud's beliefs are grounded in evolutionary thought. He did not believe that man has a soul. He did not believe in God. If this is where a belief system begins, it cannot be combined with Christianity at all.²

² Richard Ganz, PsychoBabble, *The failure of modern psychology and the Biblical alternative*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Publishing, 1993). 31-32.

Carl Rogers:

- ❖ Who was Carl Rogers? Rogers was a man who grew up in a Christian home and actually came to New York City to study theology at Union Theological Seminary.
- ❖ Not surprisingly, he became disillusioned with his theological studies at Union, an institution that was at the forefront of liberalism in the early twentieth century. They could not answer the hard questions.
- ❖ At the same time, Columbia University, which was directly across the street, offered Rogers a confident faith in the humanism of the day. Rogers ate humanism up and never looked back.
- ❖ In his book, *(On becoming a Person)* Rogers gently suggested that humans are at heart good and decent creatures with no more natural disposition toward hatred than a rose bud.³
- ❖ Rogers states that he looked within and found no hate. He did not believe that there were any bad people, just bad environments.
- ❖ Explaining Rogers view in an article written by two psychology scholars, Lawrence Pervin and Daniel Cervone, they stated,

“Rogers’ view on human nature is that while humans can have a tendency towards violent acts and aggressive behavior, he does not believe that it is their human nature. At its core, Roger’s believes that it is in human nature to self-actualize, to become better, and to do better, with the constant drive to being the best that the self and society wants. Roger’s does not believe that humankind is evil, but rather positive. Violent acts such as war and murder are not the core of humanity but the reaction to society and other mankind.” (Cervone & Pervin, 2010).

- ❖ This optimistic teaching coincided with the religious trend of those days. Intellectuals within the Church were downplaying sin as if it were ahold over from the Middle Ages.
- ❖ Things have only gotten worse since the days of Roger’s, Freud, and Jung. Today, record numbers of people are seeking psychological treatment.
- ❖ More Christians than ever before are seeking treatment at clinics and from professional counselors.⁴

³ William Kirk Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction, The Failure of Modern Psychology*. (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers: 1983), 17.

⁴ John MacArthur and the Master’s College Faculty, *Counseling, How to Counsel Biblically*, (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005).

iii. Return to Biblical Counseling.

- In contrast to those trends, the Biblical Counseling movement has been gaining strength among evangelicals. Clear voices are beginning to call the church back to the Scriptures as a sufficient help for people's spiritual problems.
- The fact of the matter is those who are coming back to Biblical counseling, are simply realizing what they already believe as a Christian (or at least they should).
- That Scripture is superior to human wisdom (1 cor. 3:19), that the Word of God is a more effective discernor of the human heart than any earthly means (Heb. 4:12).
- That the Spirit of God is the only effective agent of recovery and regeneration (Eph. 5:18-19); and that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ Himself (Col. 2:3).⁵

III. Theological Foundation:

i. The Foundational Presupposition

1.) Stated.

- The inspired and inerrant Word of God is the only authoritative source by which we can know absolute truth. It is totally sufficient to address any issue of which it speaks and for which it claims to be sufficient.⁶

2.) Confirmed.

- We not only state this fact, but we also see it confirmed in Scripture. We do not come to Scripture with trying to prove it to be authoritative, we come with the presupposition that it is authoritative.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God^[a] may be complete, equipped for every good work.

ii. The Process of Developing Our Theology

1.) Level One.

- We must begin by identifying the canonical Scriptures. In other Words, what constitutes inspired Scripture and how do we determine that?

⁵ Dr. John Street, Introduction to Biblical Counseling, The Masters Seminary, 2015.

⁶ Ibid.

2.) **Level Two.**

- We then seek to understand the canonical Scripture through the grammatico-historical method of exegesis.

3.) **Level Three.**

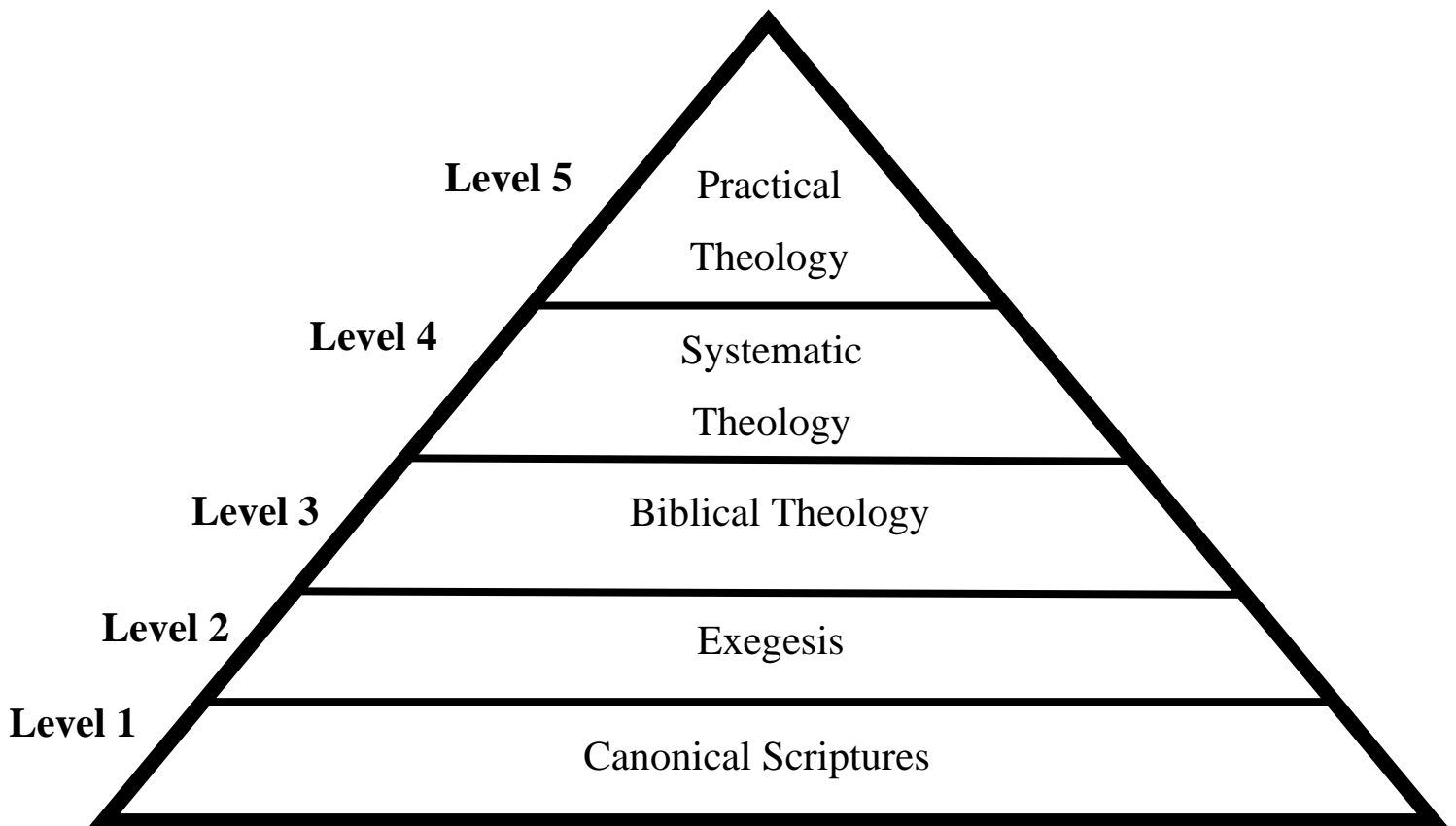
- From the exegesis of a canonical text, we engage in the discipline of biblical theology by formulating propositional doctrinal statements.

4.) **Level Four.**

- The propositions of biblical theology are correlated topically to produce a systematic theology.

5.) **Level Five.**

- Building upon a thorough systematic theology we may arrive at practical theological conclusions about life. Biblical counseling falls within the discipline of Practical theology.



iii. Implications from the Theological Pyramid

- 1.) Level 5 without levels 1-4 is not biblical counseling.
 - A.) Biblical counseling is not just a generic system with Scripture sprinkled over it.
 - B.) To many people without theological training are telling the church how to change and grow. The problem is the formation of their models.
 - (a) You can't even be completely confident of the results of the natural mind studying natural man because the natural mind is tainted by sin.
 - (b) Jeremiah 17:9 indicates that the fall of man had "noetic" effects (i.e., effects upon the heart/mind).
 - C.) For counseling to be considered biblical, Scripture must have an active functional control on any methods of change and growth we use.
- 2.) Levels 1-4 without level 5 is incomplete and ineffective.
 - A.) Theology was never given in a vacuum.
 - B.) Our job is not to simply dispense the Word; but to minister the Word.
 - C.) We have been in a battle for the Bible for many years. First, it was a battle with liberals of the issue of inspiration. Then, it was a battle over the issue of inerrancy. Today, the battle is with those who say the Bible is not sufficient.

2 Peter 1:3-4

³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

2 Timothy 3:15-17

¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is ^[a]inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- 3.) Examples of the significance of Systematic Theology as a Foundation for Biblical Counseling.

BIBLIOLOGY – The study of the Word of God.

- A.) The Bible is God breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of god may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- B.) All counseling must be grounded in the Word of God if it is going to have any true effect on an individual.

THEOLOGY PROPER – The doctrine of God.

- A.) God is triune. We can study the Godhead from two perspectives:

- (a) **The Ontological Trinity.**

- There is no ontological subordination. The Son is not in His being, less than the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not in His being less than the Son. Each member of the Trinity is fully God in every way.

- (b) **The Economical Trinity.**

- There is an economical subordination within the Trinity. We see there is an order and authority. The Father sent the Son into the world, the son submitted to the Father. The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to come into the world, and He submitted.

- B.) Our counseling must be theocentric (centered on God), not anthropocentric (man centered). All other counseling methods in the world today are in-fact anthropocentric.

ANTHROPOLOGY – The doctrine of man.

- A.) God created man as the apex of His creation, but man sinned.

- (a) This means man is not just an animal (as all other counseling methodologies claim).

- (b) This means man is not a victim of his own circumstances or environment.

- (c) This means man is not a god. He is the apex of God's creation, none the less, he is a created being.

- B.) Man is not autonomous. He is dependent on God for everything.

- C.) Man is directed by his heart; therefore, this is where change must take place. No other methodology attempts to or is even able to change the heart. Only the power of the Holy Spirit working through the living Word can change the heart.

HAMARTIOLOGY – The doctrine of sin.

- A.) There are several aspects to sin that need to be understood when we approach counseling.

- (a) **Sin has a hereditary aspect.**

- It is passed from a parent to a child.

Romans 5:12

¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

(b) **Sin has a progressive, habitual aspect.**

The more one sins, the more one desires to sin and the potential for the sin to get progressively worse in its manifestation is a real danger. The sting of conviction becomes less and less as the heart gets harder and harder.

Romans 7:18-19

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

(c) **Sin has a personal aspect.**

It comes from the heart and therefore the pull is extremely strong. The affections of one's heart must always be examined because the pull from sinful things is subtle and progressive.

B.) Without a clear understanding of Hamartiology, one cannot effectively counsel someone.

SOTERIOLOGY – The doctrine of salvation.

A.) An understanding of what it truly means to be saved is essential for Biblical counseling.

- (a) An unsaved individual needs to first be saved before they can be counseled by the Scripture. They are blind to the truth, dead in their sins. They must be brought to life before they can begin to life according to God's Word.

CHRISTOLOGY – The doctrine of Christ.

A.) There are critical elements of Christology that are foundational in biblical counseling.

- (a) Christ is the second Adam – The God-Man. He is our model.
- (b) Christ is our substitute.
- (c) Christ is our ascended Lord. Nothing is needed apart from His work- there is no problem He can't solve. Nothing is hopeless!

PNEUMATOLOGY – The doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

A.) To counsel well, one needs to understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

- (a) He is a person.
- (b) The Holy Spirit is necessary for the counselor to do his job.

Isaiah 11:1-2

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

ECCLESIOLOGY – The doctrine of the church.

A.) There is the universal and invisible as well as the local and visible church.

- (a) The Church is the body of Christ; Jesus is the head.
- (b) The Body of Christ is the place of worship and sanctification.
- (c) The Church has limited God-given authority.

ESCHATOLOGY – The doctrine of end times.

- (a) Christ rules, He has all authority (Hebrews 1:2-3).
- (b) There is never a situation he can't change if He wills.
- (c) The Second Coming gives hope for the future.

Biblical counseling must never be disconnected from a strong robust theological foundation.