

ADULT FELLOWSHIP GROUP

BIBLICAL COUNSELING FOUNDATIONS

WEEK 3: THEOLOGY PT 2: HAMARTIOLOGY & APPLICATIONS

- February 22: Psychology, Christian Psychology/Integration, and Biblical Counseling at a Glance
- March 1: Theological Foundation – View of Man
- March 8: *Missionary Share – Daniel Herceg*
- March 15: Theological Foundation – View of Sin & Applying Theology to Counseling Issues
- March 22: Sanctification: The Goal and Content of Biblical Counseling
- March 29: Preparing Our Hearts to Counsel One Another
- April 5: *No AFG – Resurrection Sunday*
- April 12: The Process of Counseling: Teaching, Conviction, Correction, and Training
- April 19: Navigating Specific Counseling Issues

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- What do you think of when you hear the term *counseling*? What are the qualifications to counsel someone? What is the ultimate goal/aim? What does the process look like? What tools are needed to counsel someone?
- Counseling is the opportunity to give advice to someone who asks for it. What makes counseling different for Christians is that *our advice is centered on God's wisdom, and not our own.*
- For believers, the common vernacular used today is that of *Biblical Counseling.*
- The concept of biblical counseling is coming alongside one another with a biblical worldview that views God's word as the sufficient means of counseling, believers as competent to (and commanded to) counsel, and heart change as the ultimate goal of counseling.
- This biblical counseling class is a foundational 7-week series geared towards two main goals:
 - That each person would have an understanding of what biblical counseling is, and
 - That each person would understand the practical implications and outworkings within the church as it pertains to practicing biblical counseling.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF HAMARTIOLOGY

- There is nothing in our world that sin has not infected.
 - As MacArthur notes, there are only four chapters of the Bible that do not mention sin or sinners...Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22¹. This goes to show that sin is a major doctrine and study throughout the Bible.
 - We must have a robust understanding of sin and how it has displaced all of mankind and to what extent it has infected mankind.
- Sin entered the world in **Genesis 3** when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree that God had commanded them not to eat.
 - From here, we can derive a basic, working definition of sin.
 - Sin is any act against the command of God and puts man at the center of his will, not God.
- From that sin in Genesis 3, we know that all of mankind is under the curse of sin.
 - **Romans 5:12** – *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.*
 - This is where we need to come to biblical convictions about the doctrine of **original sin**.
- In this passage, Paul asserts that by **one man** sin came into the world, and through that, death, and death spread to **all men** and that **all men** sinned.
 - It is the final *all men sinned* that many have issues with.
 - **Psalm 51:5** – *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*
 - **Ephesians 2:3** – *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*
- Here is a list of various views in a brief summary:²
 - **Bad Example:**
 - Some hold that Adam's sin is a bad example left for all people. When people sin, they follow Adam's bad precedent. Humans are not actually guilty for Adam's sin, nor do they inherit a sinful nature from him. They rather choose to follow Adam's bad example. No direct transmission of sin exists between people and Adam.
 - This was held by Pelagius (360-418), a heretic that supposed man's will was sufficient to save him.
 - With this view, if Adam was a bad example, then Christ is just a good example to follow, not a needed Savior for our sins.
 - **Inherited Sinful Nature:**
 - This idea claims that Adam's sinful nature was passed down, but the guilt was not. Adam's offspring are conceived with a disposition that is bent toward sin.

¹ Biblical Doctrine p. 452

² Ibid p. 462

- This means that man must choose to sin, and only then are they held guilty for sinning.
 - **Romans 5:18** – *So then as through one transgression **there resulted condemnation to all men**, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.*”
 - This word *condemnation* is a legal term used by Paul to establish guilt which was passed down.
 - This view is common among Arminian believers who also believe in “prevenient grace” which actually takes away Adam’s guilt from mankind.
 - **Realism/Seminal View:**
 - This view was held by Augustine and supposes that all men were *in* Adam when he sinned and therefore all men are held guilty.
 - This is commonly defended by **Hebrews 7:9-10** when the author says that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham as he was in Abraham’s loins.
 - Realism does well to establish the fact that man has a sinful nature and are guilty because they participated in Adam’s sin.
 - Where it falls short is that the same is not true for our righteousness. We are not righteous because we *participated* with Christ, we are righteous because His righteousness was *imputed* to us.
 - **Romans 5:19** – *For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.*
 - **Representative Headship/Federal Headship:**
 - This view states that the action of a representative is determinative for all the member who are united with him.
 - When Adam fell into sin, all mankind after him was condemned because of their relationship with him.
 - This means that all who are then associated with Christ then have His righteousness counted towards them.
 - This aligns well with the flow of Romans 5 in the connection of Christ as the true and better Adam.
- The reason that I want you to know the popular/various views is so you will know how to counsel and what the counselee may have in mind.
 - If someone comes to you thinking that Adam was simply a bad example to follow (and, therefore, Jesus is simply a good example to follow vs. a Savior for lost sinners) or that they are really not that bad, you know that you need to start with the gospel and work from there.
- People need to know that they are sinners and that there is nothing which they can do that can put them in good standing before God. There is only one way, through the sacrifice of Christ, that they can be accounted righteous before God.

- **How does this affect our counselling? .**
 - **Sin has a hereditary aspect.**
 - God’s word is consistent that all of mankind are sinners. All of mankind will stand in judgment before God, some going on to eternal life in heaven, others hell.
 - The people you will be counseling are sinners. No matter how their stories play out or how innocent they sound/how it is someone else’s fault, you are talking to a sinner.
 - **Sin has a habitual aspect.**
 - “It is the nature of man, even the nature of a believer, to be easily entangled in sin. It happens so easily. And frankly, there are certain sins which more easily entangle each of us than other ones. Each of us in our own lives have certain propensities for specific kinds of sins. It can be because we have in the past life cultivated habits of sin which now plague us even after our salvation.”³
 - Even though you will primarily counsel believers in the church, they can still struggle with habitual sin.
 - **Hebrews 12:1** *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...*
 - Never underestimate the seriousness and power of sin.
 - When counselling, we listen and find out if the person has a track record of sin.
 - It usually sounds something like “...I never seem to make the right decisions...” or “...I really thought it would turn out different this time...”
 - These are some key phrases that most likely point to habitual sin.
 - **Sin has consequences.**
 - The moment you think that you will never commit a certain sin, you have just taken a step towards committing it.
 - When someone is not guarding their heart and is caught in a pattern of sin, there are numerous consequences:
 - Sin deprives believers of a life of growing in grace and communion with God.⁴
 - Sin weakens the soul to deny strength needed for the daily Christian life.
 - Sin becomes a delight to the person, rooting identity in their sin.
 - Sin becomes the thing that we think about the most.
 - There will never be a sin that we get away with, whether it is regret for the rest of our life or some other way, sin is not something to take lightly.
 - This is important when counseling. Because sin has consequences, the problems in one’s life *may* be caused because of sin.
 - All of our hardships are because of sin; we live in a fallen world.
 - However, there are consequences which are specifically because of sin.

³ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-106/dealing-with-habitual-sins>

⁴ <https://www.challies.com/reading-classics-together/6-evil-effects-of-sin/>

- **Sin has affected man completely.**
 - A question we have to ask is how much of man's makeup has been tainted by sin.
 - In other words, has sin infected man's thoughts, reasoning, knowledge, emotions, motives, actions, etc.?
 - Are there any parts that are still pure?
 - Biblically, we know that everything in man is affected by sin. (***Total Depravity***)
 - This doctrine is helpful on two fronts:
 - We don't take man's wisdom over God's, for man is infected with sin.
 - The person we are counseling is also tainted by sin and will view their circumstances with tainted eyes.
 - Man is polluted and corrupted in all aspects.
 - There is not one part of man that has escaped the effects of sin.
 - **Jeremiah 17:9** - *The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?*
 - **Romans 1:21** - *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*
 - **Ephesians 4:17** - *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.*
 - *Futility* means "what is devoid of truth and appropriateness or depravity."
 - This is such an important fact to realize when we consider using works/methods/tools of unbelievers in counseling.
 - Our foundation and truth for counseling must come from the Word of God, not from those who are devoid of truth.
 - With all of this, it is important to understand that before one is born again, they are not spiritually neutral...they are actively enemies of God. Man hates God (Rom. 8:7) and he is unable **AND** unwilling to accept any spiritual truth. (1 Cor 2:14)
 - This is why it is important to ***start with the gospel*** and move from there.
- As I said before, it is primarily people in the church you will be admonishing/counseling as you walk in your Christian life. Though the majority of verses which have been quoted or referenced refer to the old or unsaved man, it is vital to know that Christians still sin.
- Even though a born-again person is a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and has been given new desires (1 John 3:9) the sin infection has not left him.
 - In a sense, the longer a person lived in sin before being born again, the more they bring with them into their new life. (Sometimes referred to as the "hamartiological hangover")
 - This may be through consequences, thoughts, desires, etc.
 - This does not mean that person is forever doomed or will have a subpar Christian life. It does mean they may have to work harder at renewing their mind or other areas.
- Moving forward, over the next couple of weeks, we are going to examine how that change happens. Namely, how the process of sanctification fits into the counseling process.

APPLYING THEOLOGY TO ISSUES WITHIN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

- While we have only taken time to observe two areas of doctrine (man and sin), it would be helpful to take some time to see how this impacts our thinking regarding current vernacular and issues within the realm of biblical counseling.
- Because of biblical counseling's reliance upon Scripture and acknowledgment of the spiritual issues, there can be misconceptions and pushback, including:
 - Biblical counselors always encourage counselees to quit taking medication
 - Biblical counselors are against medical science
 - Biblical counselors do not care about suffering; they only confront sin
 - Biblical counselors spiritualize every issue in a person's life
- However, if we examine how the Scriptures would speak to these issues, it's clear that these are not true.
- So then, how does a biblical view of man and sin affect our thinking in areas of counseling, specifically, with the ideas of mental illness and the use of medication?

How Should Believers Think About Mental Illness?

- The concept of mental illness is one of the most widely debated, controversial, and polemic topics in the realm of counseling today.
- How, then, should a believer think about this?
- I do not believe the Bible supports the idea of mental illness *as it is defined in the secular realm.*
- Let's first observe the concept of an illness
 - Within the secular realm, the terms "illness", "disease", and "disorder" have, for the most part, become interchangeable. Another, more general, term often used is "dysfunction".
 - "The DSM states that mental disorders "reflect a dysfunction" in one of the areas that underlie "mental functioning.""⁵
- Next, let's look at some definitions from secular psychology of mental illness:
 - The American Psychiatric Association says mental illnesses are "health conditions involving changes in *emotion, thinking* or *behavior* (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses can be associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities."⁶
 - The DSM states that a mental illness is "a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's *cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior* that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning."⁷
- Is cognition, behavior, or emotional regulation immaterial or material? Do they come from the body?

⁵ Greg Gifford, *Lies My Therapist Told Me: Why Christians Should Aim for More Than Treating Symptoms*, 182.

⁶ <https://www.psychiatry.org/443/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>. (emphasis added)

⁷ American Psychiatric Association, ed., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 20. (emphasis added)

- One of the underlying theological issues that develops this kind of ideology is rooted in our anthropology: **distinguishing between the brain and the mind**.
- In Scripture, the mind is always referred to as an aspect of the immaterial man:
 - OT:
 - *Leb*: the inner man...soul, comprehending mind, affections, and will, with occasional emphasis of one or the other by means of certain verbs.⁸ (591 uses, 30 referring to the mind, 0 references to the physical brain)
 - NT:
 - *Nous*: the faculty of intellectual perception, way of thinking, mind, attitude, as the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being, the mental side of man by which he shows himself to be a feeling, willing, thinking being. (24 uses referring to the mind)
 - *Dianoia*: the faculty of thinking, comprehending, and reasoning, understanding, intelligence, mind (8 uses referring to the mind)
 - *Noema*: the faculty of processing thought, mind, understanding⁹ (6 uses, referring to the faculty of thought or a thought itself)
- All of these words emphasize different faculties, but all are referring to the mind as an aspect of the immaterial man.
- When seeking to understand the status of the mind, Scripture does indicate that the mind is indeed sick, but it is not with a physical malady or disorder – it is **sin**.
- Therefore, the remedy for the mind is not physical intervention (as there would be if you found a mass or deformity on your brain during a brain scan). Rather, we are called to pursue spiritual transformation.
 - First, in salvation (1 Cor 2:16 – *but we have the mind of Christ*)
 - Then, in consistent renewal through the process of sanctification (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23)
- With these things in mind, here are some helpful distinctions regarding the mind and the brain:
 - The mind is the immaterial component of a person that hosts and initiates thoughts, imagination, choices, reason, and logic.
 - This does not mean that mind is uninfluenced by the brain when it functions.
 - The natural state of the mind is corrupted, and the Christian experiences renewal of the mind so the mind can focus on the things above.
 - This does not mean that an unbeliever’s mind is missing, but rather that it is darkened.
 - The mind is everlasting. There will be no point in which the mind ceases to exist or function.
 - The brain may die and cease to function for a period of time before the resurrection of the dead.

⁸ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 524.

⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*

- Regardless of the external treatment of the brain, none of those treatments will change the immaterial mind.
 - This does not mean that poor brain health affects in no way the mind. However, brain health cannot cure the immaterial issues of the mind.
- For the mind to be renewed, this takes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian who has been born again.
 - It is not possible for the unbeliever to have a renewed mind.
- The brain is the outer-person organ of the body and it is located inside the cranium.
 - The mind does not always correspond to the physical location of the brain because it is immaterial. It would be inaccurate to say the mind is inside the brain.
- The brain and the mind are intimately connected in their operation.
 - Though the mind and brain are interconnected, the mind will outlive the brain because it is everlasting and the brain may cease to function at physical death.
- The brain is not renewed as the mind is, but the brain is affected through the renewal of the mind.
 - A renewed mind will affect the physical health of the brain because the renewed mind should be stewarding the outer man with wisdom.
- A person can take medicine and receive physical surgeries to treat the organ of the brain.
 - A person cannot take medicine or undergo physical surgeries to address the immaterial mind.
- For a person to be considered “brain dead” generally reflects that there is no physical life within them.
 - However, a physically dead brain does not indicate that life has truly ended since the life of the soul is everlasting.
- The brain should receive the proper care and treatment of a medical doctor.
 - A medical doctor will not be able to treat the immaterial mind (that is, a psychiatrist).¹⁰

What About Chemical Imbalance?

- One area worth noting is that of “chemical imbalance” in the brain, which refers to abnormalities of serotonin levels in the brain that can lead to mental health issues, such as depression.
 - This would lead many to believe that a mental health diagnosis (depression) is related to a physical issue within the brain.
 - Thus, taking antidepressants, which claim to raise serotonin levels, is a biochemical answer to this mental illness.
- However, there is little empirical evidence or agreement of this thesis from those within the realm of secular psychology.

¹⁰ *Lies My Therapist Told Me*, 85-86.

- There have been research studies, including one conducted in 2022 by the University College of London, which determined that, “The main areas of serotonin research provide no consistent evidence of there being an association between serotonin and depression, and no support for the hypothesis that depression is caused by lowered serotonin activity or concentrations.”
- In response to this, Noam Shpancer, Ph. D., a professor of psychology at Otterbein University and a practicing clinical psychologist, stated, “First, you should realize that while antidepressants may work for you, they do not work for everybody, and we do not know how they work. Anyone who tells you differently is lying—to you or to themselves (or both). Second, if you hear a medical professional using the term “chemical imbalance” to explain depression, you are hearing a fictional narrative (or a sales pitch), not scientific fact. Look for better-quality care.”¹¹
- Let’s bring this back, now, to the concept of mental illness.
 - Using the terms “illness”, “disorder”, “disease”, or “dysfunction”, which are inherently physiological in nature, for issues of the mind does not align with a biblical view of man.
 - To conflate the mind and the brain, seeing them as synonymous and applying language of physiological disorders or dysfunction to those areas that Scripture would define as issues of the inner man, can lead to greater frustration and lack of clarity on the true solution.
 - “Maybe you have been told your whole life that you have a so-called mental illness. But because these are not pathological brain conditions, you in fact *can* change, to the glory of God. You are not stuck with this arbitrary diagnosis or the treatment plans that correspond to it.”¹²
- Another thing to note is that not even those within the secular psychology realm all agree that the concept of mental illness is a hard, verifiable science.
- In fact, within the revisions DSM (specifically between the DSM-IV and the DSM-V), there was a drastic change to the definition of mental illness.
 - **DSM-IV:** A mental disorder is a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress or disability or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom.
 - **DSM-V:** A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior *that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning*. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders *unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above*.

¹¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/202207/depression-is-not-caused-chemical-imbalance-in-the-brain>

¹² Ibid, 195.

- This change was made without any explanation or without presenting any evidence on why it needed to be changed.
- This led many within the secular psychology community to wonder why the definition could be changed so easily, including psychologist Dr. Eric Maisel, who pointed this out in *Psychology Today*:
 - “The very idea that you can radically change the definition of something without anything in the real world changing and with no new increases in knowledge or understanding is remarkable, remarkable until you realize that the thing being defined does not exist. It is completely easy – effortless, really – to change the definition of something that does not exist to suit your current purposes. In fact, there is hardly any better proof of the non-existence of a non-existent thing than that you can define it one way today, another way tomorrow, and a third way on Sunday.”¹³
- “There is no medically verifiable way to diagnose a so-called mental illness—it is symptom-based diagnosing. This is the confession of leading organizations and so-called mental health experts.”¹⁴
- “If you dig into the mental health literature, you’ll see that mental illnesses are nonverifiable descriptions of symptoms. Behind the curtain, secular therapy has no substantive help to offer the Christian. Rather, it has arbitrary so-called mental illnesses that change, often conveniently, to fit the politics or zeitgeist of the day.”¹⁵
- So then...
 - Do suffering and pain exist? **Yes**
 - Are there physical issues that require physical treatment? **Yes**
 - Should Christians completely disregard medical science? **No**
 - Are the issues described under the banner of mental illness real issues? **Yes**
 - Is the secular view of mental illness in any way biblical or scientific? **No**
- When it comes to biblical counseling, we understand that people are facing real problems, and there are, at times, physiological issues that need to be addressed.
- However, we must be discerning about what is classified as an issue of the outer man (brain) and of the inner man (mind).

RECOMMENDED READING

- *The Gospel and Mental Illness* by Heath Lambert
- *Lies My Therapist Told Me* by Greg Gifford
- *Will Medicine Stop the Pain* by Elyse Fitzpatrick & Laura Hendrickson, M.D.
- *The Christian’s Guide to Psychological Terms* by Marshall and Mary Asher

¹³ <https://www.madinamerica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Defining-a-Mental-Disorder.pdf>

¹⁴ *Lies My Therapist Told Me*, 184. “The strength of each of the editions of DSM has been ‘reliability’—each edition has ensured that clinicians use the same terms in the same ways. The weakness is its lack of validity.” Thomas Insel, “Transforming Diagnosis,” National Institute of Mental Health, April 29, 2013, <http://psychrights.org/2013/130429NIMHTransformingDiagnosis.htm>.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 198.