

Appendix 1

How Biblical Counseling Helps Churches Fulfill the Great Commission

by Rob Green

The great commission is not the great suggestion. It is a commission given by Christ, first to his disciples and then to all of us. As a result, our church programs, functions, and initiatives are at one level evaluated by their ability to help us accomplish the objectives of the great commission. As we think about the Scriptures we realize that Christ has made the successful completion of his mission not just possible, but absolutely certain! The guarantee is that Christ will build his church and nothing, not even the gates of Hell itself, will stand against it. This passage is not a guarantee that every local church everywhere will actually work to accomplish Christ's plan. Thus, the question is not *whether* the great commission will be accomplished, but only to what degree *your church will participate in it*. The hope, of course, is that Christ made all the provisions necessary for the growth of the church (both in size and in character). In Matthew 28:19-20 He commissioned His disciples to "make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe

all that I have commanded you." The book of Acts explains how the church, which started with a small band of 120 followers

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spread across the known world. The expansion and the provisions for that expansion continue today. According to Eph. 4:7-11 Christ gave and continues to give individuals for the express purposes of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry and to the building up of the body of Christ, which includes growing believers to maturity (vv. 12-16). In other words, the work of the great commission remains today. Thus all churches have a very simple mission: to win people to Christ and disciple them to be faithful followers of Christ. The purpose of this article is to explain how biblical counseling helps churches

fulfill the mission given by Christ. In order to accomplish that task, three questions must be answered: (1) What is biblical counseling?; (2) How does biblical counseling help the church evangelize?; and (3) How does biblical counseling help individuals with genuine Christian growth?

WHAT IS BIBLICAL COUNSELING?

It is true that the term 'biblical counseling' is a common term. After all, who is willing to put on their sign the following message, "Unbiblical Counseling Offered, Please Call for an Appointment." In fact, the use of the term by many organizations was one of the reasons why Jay Adams coined the phrase "nouthetic counseling." It was an attempt to separate one type of so-called biblical counseling from another.¹ Counseling that I believe is truly biblical has three basic elements. First, biblical counseling involves a commitment to bring the Bible to bear on the issues of life. In other words, the Bible is our source of truth for everyday life. This implies of course that biblical counseling is

committed to a grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible to ensure we are using the Bible correctly. Thus, the biblical text means what it has always meant. However, once that meaning has been properly determined, it must be applied to current life situations. Second, biblical counseling involves a commitment to the sufficiency of the Scriptures. This means that we believe that the Bible is truly able to handle life's problems. Whether we are talking about marital conflicts, dealing with anger, counseling those struggling with depression, or helping others communicate biblically, the Bible has the answers. We wholeheartedly reject the notion that our problems today are somehow outside the limits of biblical principles. As a result, we reject an eclectic approach to counseling theory. This also means that while we would accept the saying "all truth is God's truth" that does not mean that general revelation is equally instructive to the special revelation found in the Bible. We believe that the Bible has all the answers for living a life pleasing to God in today's world. Third, biblical counseling involves a commitment to the perspicuity (understandability) of the

Bible. The Bible is not just a book for scholars, pastors, and other church leadership; it is for everyone. That means we believe that God wanted to communicate with us and He wants us to understand what He thinks is best. Instead of taking the Bible out of the hands of believers (as has been done in church history), we believe the Bible should be put in the hands of believers. Biblical counseling unashamedly stands on the truths of Scripture determined by grammatical-historical interpretation applied to the life of every single believer in Christ. The Scriptures alone provide the truth necessary to actually accomplish the Lord's command to "walk worthy of

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the calling to which you have been called." In other words, the job of the biblical counselor is to discern thought processes and behaviors that God would want changed, to then use God's Word to help the

individual change at the heart level and at the behavior level in order to benefit the person and bring glory to God. Now that the concept of biblical counseling has been described it is necessary to see how it might help churches fulfill the great commission.

HOW DOES BIBLICAL COUNSELING HELP THE CHURCH EVANGELIZE?

Biblical counseling helps churches evangelize by means of their members in three distinct fashions. First, biblical counseling helps individuals to demonstrate a willingness to meet people where they are and help them. There is an old cliché that says, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." While churches should not make a statement like that their mantra, we all must recognize that there is a certain amount of truth to that statement. As people see how much you care about them, as people and about their problems, doors of opportunities open. Some of those folks will see for the very first time in their life that the Bible has the answers. Second, while many, many people have come to Christ through various evangelistic efforts, the efforts that seem most successful involve persons searching for answers.

What better time to meet those that do not know Christ than when they are hurting to the point that they would be willing to listen to a biblical counselor? Counseling gives you a captive audience of hurting people who need answers. Third, biblical counseling, since its focus is on the Bible and the truths that it teaches, helps counselees uncover heart issues. They may come to counseling for one reason, but as is often the case, there are heart issues that run much deeper. In other words, counseling is an opportunity to help unbelievers understand their greatest need of all – a saving knowledge of Christ. Some counselees may not even realize that they have this need. Yet, your willingness to listen, to help, and to instruct helps the person be much more receptive to your counsel about other issues as well.

HOW DOES BIBLICAL COUNSELING HELP INDIVIDUALS WITH GENUINE CHRISTIAN GROWTH?

Biblical counseling not only opens the door for evangelism, but it is also a helpful tool to disciple believers. In fact, we call counseling for believers “intensive discipleship.” We, as church leaders, have to accept the fact that some of

those who have been in church for many years still have problems and struggles. Sinful patterns remain in their lives and these patterns stand in the way of those persons being effective ministers in your church. Biblical counseling facilitates growth in five different ways. First, biblical counseling offers people the hope that they can actually change. Since we believe the Bible

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is from God, that it is sufficient, that it is understandable, and that God has given all believers the benefit of the indwelling Holy Spirit there is hope both for the future and for now. The consequences of sin do not have to be the end of the story. In fact, God is in the midst of their situation making them more like Christ. A second benefit is that biblical counseling gives the counselor (or pastor) an opportunity to apply the truths of Scripture to a

particular situation. Most sermons have to be general enough to include applications to all persons in the church. Even in smaller churches there are teens, young married families, empty nesters, and senior saints, but time in the counseling room allows you to apply the texts to one or two persons face to face. We believe this is very consistent with Paul’s statement that says he ministered the Word from house to house (Acts 20:20). Third, biblical counseling helps the counselees, and by extension the entire church, focus on practical life change. Counselees have specific homework that helps them learn to apply the biblical text to their problems in fresh ways. Amazingly enough, counselees often make positive changes in areas not discussed in the counseling room as a result of the Spirit is conviction and the counselee’s practice of applying the text to their original problems. This kind of growth for people in the church is contagious. Others want to grow and change when they watch God work in the lives of their friends and family members. Would there be good interaction if at the next deacon’s meeting, everyone had to speak about the ways they had changed in the last

year? Or, would there be silence? Biblical counseling helps to develop an atmosphere in the church that makes progressive sanctification an important issue for everyone. We are all learning and growing and there should be regular, genuine change in issues like the way husbands love their wives, in the way wives submit to their husbands, in the way that parents communicate with their children, and in the way we understand the abundant grace of God. A fourth benefit has to do with the pastor himself. Involvement in biblical counseling often helps the pastor see the "real" issues with which people struggle. He sees the sins, how they came about, and the heart attitudes and idols from which they began. This has often resulted in pastors ministering the Word more effectively from the pulpit. Sermons are more passionate and designed to help everyone in the congregation amend their lives to greater Christlikeness. Illustrations, while not of actual cases, are nevertheless informed by his time in the counseling room. Unity is a fifth residual benefit of

biblical counseling. This is especially true for churches that have their leaders trained because the focus of the ministry changes. While there will always be business aspects to the ministry, counseling helps remind us all that ministry is about people. Churches that understand the needs of the lost and their fellow believers who are struggling with sin issues have no time for harmful activities. Imagine what could be accomplished if all the energy that went into gossip, conflicts and conflict resolution, and selfishness were reinvested in the great commission?

Summary

This article was designed to make the connection between biblical counseling, when rightly defined and well done, and the great commission. We believe that a counseling ministry can make a significant difference in your church as it has in ours. At Faith Baptist Church (Lafayette, Indiana) we have seen numerous people come to Christ and many, many believers have joined our church because the church has helped them when they needed help the

most. Some of our prior counselees serve in leadership positions today. Even when believers have not joined our church after counseling, we are honored that the Lord would give us the opportunity to strengthen a sister church by helping them to disciple one of their families. Biblical counseling can be a powerful ministry to help you and your church to be an active participant in the great commission.

End Notes:

¹ This is very similar to the hermeneutical debate taking place in our world. The term "literal" interpretation used to mean something. Now the term has been adopted by practically everyone. The rise of "open-theism" has sadly resulted in a change in the definition of "inerrancy." My point is that terminology is coined and used in order to mark distinctiveness. Just as it is a bit silly to have a reformed theologian, a historic premillennialist, a progressive dispensationalist, and a traditional dispensationalist all claim to be doing literal interpretation; it is a bit silly to call all counseling biblical.

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