

"Affirmations and Denials: A Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling"

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I. True knowledge about people and counseling practice

" *We affirm* that the Bible is God's self-revelation in relation to His creatures, and, as such, truly explains people and situations.

We deny that any other source of knowledge is authoritative for explaining people and situations.

We affirm that the Bible, as the revelation of Jesus Christ's redemptive activity, intends to specifically guide and inform counseling ministry.

We deny that any other source of knowledge is authoritative to equip us for the task of counseling people.

We affirm that wise counseling requires ongoing practical theological labor in order to understand Scripture, people, and situations. We must continually develop our personal character, case-wise understanding of persons, pastoral skills, and institutional structures.

We deny that the Bible intends to serve as an encyclopedia of proof texts containing all facts about people and the diversity of problems in living.

We affirm that the ideas, goals, and practices of counseling must cohere explicitly with the historic creeds, confessions, hymns, and other wise writings that express the faith and practice of the church of Jesus Christ.

We deny that the wisdom of the past sufficiently defines the issues of counseling ministry for today, as if the requisite wisdom were simply a matter of recovering past achievements.

We affirm that the Scripture defines and speaks to the gamut of problems in living for all people in all situations.

II. The givens of the human condition and the scope of biblical truth

We affirm that human beings are created fundamentally dependent on and responsible to God. People can only be understood when these realities control the counselor's gaze.

We deny that any form of autonomy severs people from dependency on God. *We deny* that any form of determinism neuters moral accountability to God.

We affirm that the ideal for human functioning is faith working through love. Such love for God and neighbor is the standard against which to specifically understand what is wrong with people. It is the goal to which counseling must specifically aspire.

We deny that any other standard or goal is true.

We affirm that evil, done by us and happening to us, is the fundamental and pervasive problem in living. Our own sin, in all its facets and dimensions, is primary and self-

generating. The circumstances that happen to us provide both provocative context ("trials and temptations") and just consequences ("reap what you sow") for our moral response, but do not determine the quality of our moral response.

We deny that any other diagnostic system is valid, universal, or penetrating. *We deny* that nature and/or nurture determine the quality of our moral response.

We affirm that the Scripture defines and speaks to the gamut of problems in living for all people in all situations.

We deny that biblical truth is limited to a narrow sphere of "religious" or "spiritual" beliefs, activities, persons, emotions, and institutions, separated from the other spheres of daily life.

We deny that any particular realm of human life can be sectored off as the unique province of the theories, practices, and professions of the modern psychologies.

III. The solution to the sin and misery of the human condition

We affirm that the Bible teaches, invites, warns, commands, sings, and tells the solution for what troubles humankind. In the good news of Jesus Christ, God acts personally. In word and deed, He redeems us from sin and misery through the various operations of His past, present, and future grace. God uses many means of grace, including the face-to-face conversations of wise counseling.

We deny that any other solution or therapy actually cures souls, and can change us from unholy to holy, from sinners to righteous, from insanity to sanity, from blindness to sightedness, from self-absorption to faith-working-through-love.

We affirm that God's providential common grace brings many goods to people, both as individual kindnesses and as social blessings: e.g., medical treatment, economic help, political justice, protection for the weak, educational opportunity. Wise counseling will participate in and encourage mercy ministries as part of the call to love.

We deny that such goods can cure the soul's evils. When they claim to cure the human condition, they are false and misleading, competing with Christ.

We deny that Christless counseling—whether psychotherapeutic, philosophical, quasi-religious, or overtly religious—is either true or good. Their messages are essentially false and misleading, competing with Christ.

IV. The nature and means

We affirm that the growth process for which counseling must aim is conversion followed by lifelong progressive sanctification within every circumstance of life. Our motives, thought processes, actions, words, emotions, attitudes, values—heart, soul, mind, and might— increasingly resemble Jesus Christ in conscious and evident love for God and other people.

We deny that there is any method for instantaneous or complete perfection into the image of Jesus Christ. The change process continues until we see Him face-to-face.

We deny that the processes and goals labeled self-actualization, self-fulfillment, healing of memories, meeting of psychological needs, social adaptation, building self-esteem, recovery, individuation, etc., describe valid aims of counseling, though they may evidence analogies to elements of biblical wisdom.

We affirm that the Bible explicitly teaches the fundamentals of counseling method by precept and example. Through speaking the truth in love, we act as tangible instruments of God's grace in the lives of others.

We deny that the modern psychotherapies rightly understand or practice wise counseling methodology, though they may evidence analogies to elements of biblical wisdom.

V. The social context and scope of counseling ministry

We affirm that the Spirit and the Word create the church of Jesus Christ, and that the people of God should provide the personal, social, and institutional loci for speaking the truth in love.

We deny that the mental health professions and their institutions have the right to claim any sector of problems in living as their particular prerogative. Even those who suffer mentally disabling medical problems need godly counseling.

We affirm that the aims, content, and means of counseling ministry are of a piece with public ministry, the spiritual disciplines, and mercy ministry. These are different aspects of the one redemptive ministry of Christ.

We deny that the persons and problems addressed by the activity termed "psychotherapy" fall outside the intended scope of the ministry of Christ in word and deed.

We affirm that the primary and fullest expression of counseling ministry occurs in local church communities where pastors effectively shepherd souls while equipping and overseeing diverse forms of every-member ministry.

We deny that the institutional forms and professional roles of the mental health system provide a normative and desirable framework for counseling ministry.

We deny that current forms of church life and conceptions of the pastoral role are necessarily adequate and normative as vehicles to train, deliver, and oversee effective counseling ministry. The body of Christ needs institutional reformation, development, and innovation.

We deny that parachurch and other cooperative forms of counseling ministry in the body of Christ are inherently wrong.

VI. God's providence and the interplay between His common grace and the intellectual-practical effects of sin

We affirm that numerous disciplines and professions can contribute to an increase in our knowledge of people and how to help them. Scripture teaches a standpoint and gaze by which believers can learn many things from those who do not believe.

We deny that any of these disciplines and professions can align and constitute a system of faith and practice for wise counseling.