

Editorial

## BIBLICAL COUNSELING TRENDS: Common Grace, the Body, and Special Revelation

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First of all, welcome to the Fall 2023 volume of *The Journal for Biblical Soul Care (JBSC)*! In the Lord's kindness, the *JBSC* has now crossed the five-year threshold of publication. In 2017, I surveyed the landscape of biblical counseling and found that there were no areas of academic conversation for biblical counseling. The Biblical Counseling Coalition (BCC) was the closest area for iron-sharpening-iron conversations, at a closed-door retreat held once per year. However, even the BCC did not publish a journal from their conversations. Furthermore, the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*—the trendsetter in biblical counseling literature—had taken a practitioner turn and focused mostly on methodology. This was the prompting I needed to help initiate the *JBSC*.

The *JBSC* has a way to go, which must be admitted. We have found authors, partnered with ACBC, acquired an editorial staff, and published continuously for five years, yes, but we have yet to receive one response to the academic articles published. This should not be—especially amongst a biblical counseling landscape that is changing so rapidly. I acknowledge that to craft a response takes significant amounts of time, but also a level of critical thought and engagement. Many biblical counseling leaders are limited in their ability to write, but I wonder is there not any disagreement?

At this point in biblical counseling history, we are seeing tribes develop,

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tribes that are rallying around sufficiency of Scripture, general and special revelation, common grace, the role of the body, and a few other doctrinal issues. “I’m of Paul, I’m of Apollos,” we could say. For example, one perspective among biblical counselors would propose that biblical counseling must reject all secular observational data, while another perspective would look for “common grace” good in the secular findings of unbelievers. The latter is an example of biblical counselors that are claiming to be more “holistic.” The holistic biblical counselor is one tribe forming amongst us.

Another rallying point is that of the role of specified knowledge when counseling. This tribe rallies around terms like “trauma informed” or “addictions specialist” when looking for a biblical counselor. Some see the sufficiency of Scripture on the chopping block or, the argument goes, that if we overly specialize biblical counseling then do we really believe it is the Bible that is sufficient? Or do we *need* specialty training and badging plus the Bible? Specialized knowledge is another tribe forming amongst us.

Due to the developing tribes, I have a question to the tribes of our time: *will the biblical counseling movement identify astute theologians who are the gatekeepers of doctrinal fidelity and allow for experienced practitioners to work with those theologians?* Let me explain.

I live in between two worlds myself. I teach at an elite institution in biblical counseling, yet I also pastor in a local church. I hear academic colleagues tell me of what the Bible says, to which I agree with no doubt, but also wonder if they have ever counseled. Or how long has it been since they were in the trenches of a difficult counseling case? Garrison (or academic) life is clean-and-tidy, but the front lines of counseling are not. While we would never deviate to pragmatic, “whatever works” counseling, there are obvious times when an academic does not seemingly know what it is like in the real trenches of counseling. A complex divorce counseling case benefits from wise experience to navigate. My concern is the practitioner may dismiss the necessity of doctrinal experts and believe that their practice is what matters most. A “snobbery” that says, “You do not know what it is like in the counseling room.” The troubles of our current climate are that we can tend to have astute theologians tell us what is, yet the theologian lacks significant counseling experience. Or, conversely,

astute practitioners teach on biblical counseling topics, but they themselves seem to lack significant theological training. Does experience change the Bible? No. It does, however, help you to learn what is biblically appropriate for the counseling situation—whether this person is fainthearted or unruly, for instance (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Will the biblical counseling movement become expert counselors who submit to expert theologians? This is the question of our day.

The flashpoints of this tribalism are common grace, the role of the body, “trauma-informed counseling,” and other significant doctrines. Instead of certain organizations balking at compromise by others, I suggest we identify two categories in biblical counseling: theologian and practitioner. We need to ensure our practice is rightly built upon the theological method and sound exegesis. Yet, we need practitioners to help theologians understand what it is like in the trenches of counseling, which should allow the theologian to exposit *the right* passage for the situation. Without these, our movement will fracture to tribalism and lobbing accusations of doctrinal compromise or methodological ignorance. The time has come for a category of theological trainer and practitioner expert.

What does this have to do with the *JBSC*? This journal is committed to upstream conversations that will benefit downstream practice. It is my aim to guide us to the deeper conversations of what must be mentioned in garrison for the sake of biblical fidelity first, then faithful practice second. The authors of this edition are advancing the conversation in ways I think you will find meaningful. Logan Williams is going to make a case that a biblical counselor has particular responsibilities in escalating cases to church discipline. Not all cases lead to church discipline, but some do—and should. Francine Tan critiques Bessel van der Kolk’s perspective of the “traumatized body,” which has been a topic of no small discussion. Hannah Miller shows the contaminating effects of allowing sexual sin to permeate a local church, as found in 1 Corinthians 5. Lastly, Jonathan Holmes makes a case for spiritual maturity as a preventative step for sexual immorality, using 1 Corinthians 3-6.

Each of these articles advance a conversation within biblical counseling. As the reader, you must reckon with the views of van Der Kolk or understand

the importance of church discipline and instruction in sexual ethics for the local church. When does a counselor go to the elders? These are the upstream articles that will advance faithful practice downstream, which is the aim of the JBSC. For these reasons, I commend these articles to you.

Moreover, I commend to you a vision of the future of biblical counseling where faithful doctrine and faithful practice are united. We must engage in rigorous study of the Scripture so as to faithfully engage in rigorous counseling. Without the JBSC, or its equivalent, our movement will be greatly stunted. These academic conversations are a necessary place to sharpen what we know in God's sufficient word and what we do in the counseling room.

*May God's kindness lead us to excellence in biblical counseling for His glory!*