

# “I’M A BIBLICALLY-INFORMED PSYCHOLOGIST”: Is Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling Really Just Integrationism?

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If words matter, then terms matter. A term is what describes a position, and a position describes one’s beliefs, from theology to methodology. If the author were to claim to be a “biblically-informed psychologist” it would *seem* to suggest that “biblically informed” is used adjectively to communicate that the author’s primary focus is indeed.<sup>2</sup> What kind of psychologist? A “biblically informed psychologist.” The adjectival use of “biblically informed” is modifying, as a descriptor, the type of psychologist the author is. The question still begs answering, “how much Bible? What level of Bible is used in the process of being a psychologist? Can one simply quote Romans 8:28 and claim to be a biblically-informed psychologist?”

The same could be said of the claim for one to be a “clinically informed biblical counselor.” Consider the following statement by the Gospel Care Collective: “Clinically informed biblical counseling [CIBC] seeks to bring the best of psychological research and clinical practices through a biblical worldview, offering clients a comprehensive and tailored approach to their emotional and spiritual growth.”<sup>3</sup> Does this mean that a CIBCCer primarily uses the Bible with some psychological insights? Does *clinically informed* mean that the Bible’s use in counseling is the focus, but the occasional incorporation of ‘clinically informed’

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<sup>2</sup> Many thanks to Dr. Jenn Chen for the clarification of this statement that came through personal dialogue while at The Master’s University (April 2025).

<sup>3</sup> “Gospel Care Collective – Counseling for the Whole Person.” accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.gospelcarecollective.com/>.

material finds its way into the counseling process? This lack of clarity is what has recently affected the biblical counseling movement, as seen through the varying positions articulated in Heath Lambert's, "Zombies in the Wilderness" article to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's (SEBTS) academic journal issued in Spring of 2024.<sup>4</sup>

*In this paper, the author will categorize the CIBC positions, critique those positions, and offer categorical solutions that would better help the overall BC movement.* This purpose statement will be accomplished by citing the leading organizations that call themselves clinically informed biblical counselors and then utilizing biblical categories to help construct how genuine biblical counseling can partly self-conceptualize going forward.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

In order to establish the author's thesis, a few terms need defining to ensure clarity. First of all, "categorize" is simply to "put into a category or to classify."<sup>5</sup> The author will seek to find categories of biblical counseling in this paper. *Categorize* is being used in its normal semantic range.

*Biblical counseling* will be utilized according to ACBC's definition: "Biblical counseling is the personal discipleship ministry of God's people to others under the oversight of God's church, dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God's Word through the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup> This definition is how the author is using the term *biblical counseling*, which is sometimes referred to as *nouthetic counseling* by those in the CIBC movement.

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<sup>4</sup> Nate Brooks et al., "What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?" (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 1–12, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/<https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf>. Heath Lambert, "Priests in the Garden, Zombies in the Wilderness, and Prophets on the Wall," First Baptist Church, accessed September 15, 2025, <https://fbcjax.com/first-thoughts/priests-in-the-garden-zombies-in-the-wilderness-and-prophets-on-the-wall-the-current-state-of-the-contemporary-biblical-counseling-movement/>.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam Webster, "Definition of CATEGORIZE," May 18, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/categorize>.

<sup>6</sup> "The Nature of Biblical Counseling - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors," [Https:// BiblicalcounselingCom/ \(blog\)](https://BiblicalcounselingCom/ (blog)), accessed June 6, 2025, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/the-nature-of-biblical-counseling/>.

Clinically informed biblical counseling (CIBC) is a newer term, and thus harder to delineate. However, the Gospel Care Collective provides its definition of CIBC, stating that “We provide care through the foundation and lens of Scripture while utilizing common grace findings of research and psychology to inform our methods of client care.”<sup>7</sup> Or, one could use Southeastern’s definition of CIBC, which states: “Redemptive counseling as a term therefore speaks to the redemption of the person and the redemption of common grace tools that may be used to aid in that redemption.”<sup>8</sup> This position seeks to provide both the utilization of the Bible and psychological methods, per its own claims. The above definition is how the author will use the term CIBC.

Next, the term *critique* means, “to examine critically; to review.”<sup>9</sup> The critique will inherently be compared to the Bible and the historic confession of what is meant by biblical counseling. For the sake of this paper, however, there should be no question of what is being meant by the term *critique*.

Finally, “categorical solutions” is intended by the author to synthesize the categories of CIBC and make a recommendation for how biblical counseling can better define camps within the movement. *Categories* means, “a division within a system of classification”<sup>10</sup> and the term *solutions* is intended as, “an answer to a problem: explanation.”<sup>11</sup> The phrase means that answers to the categorizing of biblical counseling will be provided.

## CATEGORIZATION OF CIBC POSITIONS

First of all, the world of CIBC is relatively new and somewhat small. Only one, prominent seminary of dozens actually claims this form of counseling.

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<sup>7</sup> “Gospel Care Collective – Counseling for the Whole Person.” accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.gospelcarecollective.com/>. Although there is no current authority on CIBC, this definition at least provides the reader with an understanding of the nature of what is being discussed. Furthermore, CIBC may indeed have further conversations, as will be demonstrated, that elucidate CIBC’s need for a uniform definit

<sup>8</sup> Brooks, et. Al, “What is Redemptive Counseling?,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> Merriam Webster, “Definition of Critique,” accessed May 26, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/critique>.

<sup>10</sup> Merriam Webster, “Definition of Categories,” May 19, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/categories>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., s.v. “solution.”

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) offers a Masters of Divinity in Biblical Counseling where Brad Hambrick says, “At SEBTS, you will receive a clinically-informed counseling education that can equip you for either a ministry or vocational setting or prepare you to work effectively with pastors or professionals.”<sup>12</sup> Of note, SEBTS faculty wrote a brief paper defining the nature of what CIBC and Redemptive Counseling entails. In the paper, SEBTS faculty state

Tools and methods for counseling may be derived from secular approaches to psychology and can be helpful (which is different from being essential). These tools and methods enhance our ability to minister the truth of God’s Word into our clients’ life. These tools and methods are not a replacement for the truth of Scripture or used to inculcate worldliness into the hearts of our counselees. Rather, these tools and methods provide additional ways of engaging the human person that are not explicitly spoken of in the text of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

This first position of the SEBTS faculty is thus inherently confusing as the CIBC faculty has differentiated between a “nouthetic counselor” and “biblical counselor” as evidenced in this quote: “This is what we are arguing as well – we are neither integrationists nor nouthetic counselors” or the statement, “should you as a reader walk away disagreeing with these commitments, our article has not failed. We are not pretending to be nouthetic counselors, and we are not pretending to be integrationists.”<sup>14</sup> That statement may be true, but in another section of that same document, the authors state: “Biblical counselors (both RC/CIBCs and nouthetic counselors) are in the business of growing moral righteousness.”<sup>15</sup> The discerning reader of the SEBTS position begins to notice the confusing terminology of the SEBTS faculty. However, the below chart represents, to the author’s best ability, what the SEBTS faculty is proposing:

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<sup>12</sup> “MDiv Pastoral Ministry with Biblical Counseling,” *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary* (blog), accessed May 28, 2025, <https://www.sebts.edu/degree/master-of-divinity/mdiv-pastoral-ministry-with-biblical-counseling/>.

<sup>13</sup> Nate Brooks et al., “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), pp. 5-6, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf.

<sup>14</sup> Brooks, “What is Redemptive Counseling,” 3,12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 8.

Far Left: <b>Integrationism</b> “Christian by Conviction and clinical by practice.” <sup>16</sup>	<b>CIBC</b> No clear definition provided but rather 10 core beliefs of the CIBC position.	<b>Nouthetic Counseling</b> “Its approach to counseling emphasizes the exposition of Scripture within the counseling setting and eschews the use of therapeutic techniques or tools derived from secular psychology.” <sup>17</sup>
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Two helpful distinctions to note is that the CIBC position is attempting to clarify what their definition of CIBC is and, secondly, the SEBTS faculty are not claiming to be nouthetic counselors.<sup>18</sup>

Hambrick, has also provided definitions of his own perspective of clinically informed biblical counseling.<sup>19</sup> He states, “I use the term CIBC to indicate that I am aware of the other types of care that may serve someone in ways I don’t, and I am willing to work cooperatively with those care providers.”<sup>20</sup> Hambrick further adds that by CIBC, he means that “he is not clinically trained” and the focus of his counseling is “not polemical.”<sup>21</sup> Finally, in defining CIBC, Hambrick states that the word *clinical* simply means, “drawing from the systematized wisdom of

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Upon further research none of the SEBTS faculty are certified with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors as of June 2, 2025 per the “Find a Counselor” function. Samuel Stephens, “Find a Biblical Counselor Near You - ACBC,” <https://BiblicalcounselingCom/> (blog), accessed June 2, 2025, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/find-a-counselor/>.

<sup>19</sup> Note, Hambrick’s name is on the paper by the SEBTS faculty but this paper was written before his personal blog post on May 7, 2025. Cf. Nate Brooks et al., “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 1-12, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf. “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling? | Brad Hambrick,” accessed June 2, 2025, <https://bradhambrick.com/clinicallyinformed/>.

<sup>20</sup> “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling? | Brad Hambrick,” accessed June 2, 2025, <https://bradhambrick.com/clinicallyinformed/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

a large number of cases counseled by a large number of counselors.”<sup>22</sup> Hambrick, also primarily refers to himself as a “biblical counselor.” While he claims this designation, it is interesting to note that he avoids utilizing the term “sufficiency” of Scripture because it has been associated with those who use the word “finally and exclusively.”<sup>23</sup> It appears that Hambrick prefers to use the term *finality* and *primacy* to demonstrate, while Scripture may be the final authority and central to counsel, it is not the only “... source of information on life struggles and their remedy.”<sup>24</sup> This CIBC position emphasizes the legitimacy of the use of clinical methods since the Bible’s authority does not necessitate its exclusive utility in the counseling room.

Perhaps the last and final category of those claiming to be clinically informed biblical counselors would be that of the Gospel Care Collective (GCC).<sup>25</sup> It is an organization that claims to offer counsel for the “whole person” and it is led by Jason Kovacs. The GCC claims the following definitions of what it means by clinically-informed biblical counseling:

Clinically informed biblical counseling seeks to bring the best of psychological research and clinical practices through a biblical worldview, offering clients a comprehensive and tailored approach to their emotional and spiritual growth....

We provide care through the foundation and lens of Scripture while utilizing common grace findings of research and psychology to inform our methods of client care....

In this counseling model, trained professionals apply evidence-based therapeutic techniques and interventions through the framework and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> “But that term has begun to be used with the connotation of exclusivity (i.e., Scripture is the only source of information on life struggles and their remedy). I want to honor those who use the term to mean they exclusively use the Bible as their only source for the counsel they offer. So here I choose to use the terms ‘primacy and finality’ to allow room to tease out important distinctions while still honoring the ultimate authority, relevance, and transformative power of Scripture.” Hambrick, “What I Mean by Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?”

<sup>25</sup> “Gospel Care Collective – Counseling for the Whole Person.” accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.gospelcarecollective.com/>.

interpretive grid of biblical wisdom and principles.<sup>26</sup>

While the author will offer insights on this definition later, it represents what seems to be quite similar to that of the SEBTs faculty and Hambrick. One glaring difference is that Hambrick makes no claim to use the psychological methods that both the GCC and SEBTs claim to either employ or are amenable to employing.<sup>27</sup> Hambrick says he is not clinically-trained to implement such psychological methods, whereas the GCC states that they employ “evidence-based therapeutic techniques.”<sup>28</sup>

Kovacs and Hambrick seem to be on different sides of the CIBC continuum as Kovacs has been trained in, promotes, and utilizes Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI). TBRI is defined by the Karen Purvis Institute Child Development as,

TBRI® is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. TBRI® uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment needs, and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors. While the intervention is based on years of attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, the heartbeat of TBRI® is connection.<sup>29</sup>

Kovacs himself implements secular psychological methods while attempting, per the GCC, to vet those methods “through the framework and interpretive grid

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<sup>26</sup> “Gospel Care Collective – Counseling for the Whole Person.”, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.gospelcarecollective.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Hambrick says, “If the question is, “Do you do EMDR, EMFT, CBT, or another acronym representing a secular model of counseling?” the answer is simply, ‘No’” in Brad Hambrick, “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling? | Brad Hambrick,” accessed June 2, 2025, <https://bradhambrick.com/clinicallyinformed/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Gospel Care Collective – Counseling for the Whole Person.”, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.gospelcarecollective.com/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development,” accessed May 9, 2025, <https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.4RbIqm4W.ne3BFExI.dpbs>. Of the function of the Karyn Purvis Institute, the Institute claims, “The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development is a program of the Department of Psychology in the TCU College of Science & Engineering in Fort Worth, Texas. Our mission is: to improve the lives of children through research, education, and outreach that addresses the impact of early abuse, neglect, and trauma. Our research and interventions are empowering parents, professionals, and students with trauma-informed strategies that improve outcomes for children and youth.”

of biblical wisdom and principles.”<sup>30</sup> Hambrick offers no suggestion that he would practice such in counseling, although he sees value in such an effort.<sup>31</sup>

In order to better understand the nature of the differing CIBC positions, the author proposes the following continuum based on the above definitions:

Left: <b>Integrationism</b> “The movement has sought to take legitimate research and theory from contemporary psychology and cultivate a psychological and clinical sophistication in their understanding of people, in order to help promote the well-being of Christ’s people.” <sup>32</sup>	Left-Leaning <b>CIBC:</b> Very little difference from Integrationist but simply offers more biblical content. Practices therapeutic methodology	Moderate <b>CIBC:</b> Believes that the Bible is authoritative but not exclusive. Doesn’t practice therapeutic methodology.	Right: Biblical (Nouthetic) <b>Counseling</b> “Biblical counseling is the personal discipleship ministry of God’s people to others under the oversight of God’s church, dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word through the work of the Holy Spirit.” <sup>33</sup>
<i>Example:</i> Eric Johnson	<i>Example:</i> Jason Kovacs	<i>Example:</i> Brad Hambrick	<i>Example:</i> Heath Lambert

<sup>30</sup> “Gospel Care Collective – Counseling for the Whole Person.” accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.gospelcarecollective.com/>.

<sup>31</sup> “The care of a social worker, psychiatrist, counseling specialists, or residential treatment provider (to name a few) may serve a given individual in ways I cannot.” Hambrick, “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling?”

<sup>32</sup> Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007), 88.

<sup>33</sup> “Our Mission - A Definition of Biblical Counseling,” <Https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/> (blog), accessed June 2, 2025, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/our-mission/>.

The above diagram helps to demonstrate that even within CIBC there is fluidity and the positions are not clearly delineated (to date). The dashed lines represent that the positions are mostly similar, yet Hambrick and Kovacs would represent different perspectives of CIBC. (For the reader, one more chart provided by Tim Allchin helps also delineate the overall perspectives of counseling based on doctrine.<sup>34</sup>)

In light of the above categories, the author will now offer a few critiques that the CIBC position must, at least, consider for the future of their own movement, along with the biblical (nouthetic) counseling position, which must also be considered.

## CRITIQUE OF THE CIBC POSITIONS

Terminology matters, as stated above. If the author states that they are a biblically-informed psychologist, that modifier warrants clarity. Is the author a psychologist primarily? Does biblically-informed mean that the author utilizes the Bible in counseling or believes the Bible has a benefit when used (i.e., similar to that of Kovacs and Hambrick)? The challenge of the CIBC is that the verbiage of the term is inherently confusing. A short history lesson would be helpful for the reader.

According to Heath Lambert, “On Tuesday, October 8, 2013 at our annual meeting The National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC) voted to change our name. The proposal passed with an astounding 91% and our organization is now called the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC).”<sup>35</sup> It has been a brief 12 years that ACBC has identified itself with

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<sup>34</sup> Tim Allchin, Biblical Counseling Center, “4 Types of Christian Counseling,” February 19, 2025, <https://biblicalcounselingcenter.org/4-types-of-christian-counseling>, Accessed May 23, 2025.

<sup>35</sup> “From NANC to ACBC - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors,” [Https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/](https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/) (blog), accessed June 2, 2025, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/from-nanc-to-acbc/>. An awkward acknowledgment is worth noting for the reader: In 2013, the Association of Biblical Counselors was already existent. ABC claims that, “The Association of Biblical Counselors began as a basic website in 2005 serving several dozen members” in “Membership” on the Association of Biblical Counselors website <https://christiancounseling.com/membership/> in “Biblical Counselors,” Association of Biblical Counselors (blog), accessed June 2, 2025, <https://christiancounseling.com/>, <https://christiancounseling.com/membership/>. ABC claims that “biblical counselors know that Scripture alone stands sufficient in providing

the phrase “biblical counseling” whereas the phrase, “nouthetic confrontation, Christian counseling” and “nouthetic counseling” have all represented what ACBC has intended by what is currently called “biblical counseling.”<sup>36</sup> The challenge is that when ACBC claims biblical counseling and Jason Kovacs claims biblical counseling, those are quite different claims. Call it nouthetic counseling, Christian counseling, or nouthetic confrontation, a central issue is what is the source of counseling and how does that affect the methodology of counseling. This is part of the current confusion in the biblical counseling movement.

Historically, the terms that represent *biblical counseling* were to suggest that the counselor is using the Scripture as the authoritative guide for the counseling process. Jay Adams said in 1979: “Only an external, divinely delivered revelation provides the way out of subjectivism. This is so even the commitment of the believing counselor to the Scriptures as his *authoritative source* for counseling, because this commitment itself is not subjectively, but divinely, motivated (cf. 1 Corinthians 2; emphasis added).”<sup>37</sup> The key to understanding what comprises biblical counseling is that Scripture is both the authority *and* the source.

Today, in the midst of ongoing debates within the movement, the term *biblical counseling* warrants clarification. The biblical (nouthetic) counselor claims stake to the term, while the CIBCer also utilizes the term *biblical counseling* but each in a very different way. SEBTS faculty state that, “We believe that nouthetic counselors rely too exclusively on biblical exposition, leading them to focus predominantly on the moral elements of their clients’ struggles, often to the neglect of addressing the suffering dimension of a counselee’s hardship.”<sup>38</sup> The CIBC position is clearly attempting to differentiate themselves from a biblical (nouthetic) counselor while still using biblical counseling to identify themselves.

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a comprehensive understanding of the psychology of man and they do not mix or ‘integrate’ any other false psychologies with the truth of God’s word” in “Biblical Counselors,” Association of Biblical Counselors (blog), accessed June 2, 2025, <https://christiancounseling.com/>, <https://christiancounseling.com/mission-beliefs/>. This means that ACBC renamed itself to ACBC after ABC was already using the biblical counseling term for eight years.

<sup>36</sup> Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1970), 41. Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973).

<sup>37</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> Nate Brooks et al., “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024).

## COMBINING OF ANTITHETICAL TERMS

The inherent difficulty of the CIBC counselor is the use of the Bible within the counseling process. Kovacs may promote and practice TBRI, while Hambrick may be open to the use of TBRI but may not practice it personally. CIBC undoubtedly uses the Bible, but not as *the* source of counseling. Hambrick himself, as stated above, uses “primacy” and “authority” without using the term “sufficiency.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, to say, “clinically-informed” as a modifier for “biblical counseling” has a wide and confusing range of possibilities. The historic norm has been to suggest that biblical counseling is claiming the authority *and* the sufficiency of the Bible.<sup>40</sup> Again, to quote Adams, “this is the commitment of the believing counselor to the Scriptures as the authoritative source for counseling.”<sup>41</sup>

This semantic confusion for CIBC is that what was formerly a claim to the Bible as source and authority with the term *biblical counseling*, now CIBC is claiming to still be *biblical counseling* but to include the very thing *biblical counseling* was attempting to rid itself of—secular, psychotherapeutic practices. This semantic confusion is like the author claiming to be a morning person, night owl. The author is both an early riser and a person who goes to bed late. Or, if the author claimed to be a non-counseling, counselor. Those terms are confusing because one rightfully wonders what a counselor does if they do not counsel? In the same way, the CIBC movement is inherently confusing because of the terms it has chosen to identify itself. “Clinically Informed Biblical Counselor” has historically meant that a person is not a biblical counselor and that is why they are incorporating therapeutic practices into their own practice.<sup>42</sup> The first critique is that of semantic identifiers for CIBC warrant greater consideration as the terms are confusing and contradictory.

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<sup>39</sup> Brad Hambrick, “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling? | Brad Hambrick,” accessed June 2, 2025, <https://bradhambrick.com/clinicallyinformed/>.

<sup>40</sup> Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977). Tim Clinton, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2024).

<sup>41</sup> Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> In a comment to that of fairness, some have used a newly coined term, “Redemptive Counseling” to communicate CIBC, or to use it synonymously with CIBC. “Many curious Christians, counselors, and church leaders have run across a relatively new term: redemptive counseling, more commonly referred to as clinically-informed biblical counseling” and “There are benefits to both terms, which are to be read as synonymous” Brooks, “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?,” 1, FN1. From the author’s perspective, Redemptive Counseling at least differentiates from biblical counseling and is a better descriptor of what is really taking place.

## NO INTERNAL CLARITY ON THE TERMS OF CIBC

Next, the honest biblical counselor has to reckon with the reality that this newly formed field lacks internal clarity regarding its own categories. Perhaps the most prominent voice of the CIBC movement is the SEBTS faculty. Yet, to date, there are no known book publications that serve as a clarification of the movement. SEBTS is known for its journal, *Southeastern Theological Review*, and one key moment in the CIBC history tracks to the Spring 2024 edition of the review. In that edition, the faculty of SEBTS made claims of integrationism, biblical counseling, and “therapeutic theology.” This is about the extent, however, of publications on the work of CIBC. Furthermore, this journal edition was received with much critical feedback.<sup>43</sup> This journal hardly identified a field and provided clarity to the CIBC movement.

To say this another way, the CIBC field does not know what it is yet, either. Terms like redemptive counseling, clinically-informed biblical counseling, and the differing perspectives of the role of the Scripture have yet to be delineated. The biblical counselor should ask if this is Hambrick’s, Kovacs’, or the SEBTS’s definition of CIBC. Even outsiders to biblical counseling have commented on the unhelpfulness of the term CIBC and how it lacks clarity.<sup>44</sup> Matter-of-factly, the CIBC movement is largely undefined and highly controversial. There are no meaningful publications and no leading organizations on the CIBC movement. What that should tell the reader is that this movement may or may not last. Furthermore, it is difficult, though possible, to critique a movement that has yet to define itself. This second critique lends itself to discernment and a ‘pause and wait’ mentality to see what comes of this movement. It may be an isolated movement to that of SEBTS or it may indeed grow to larger influence. There are not enough indicators to discern as of the writing of this paper.

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<sup>43</sup> Omri Miles, “Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling’s Failed Attempt at Balance,” [Https://BiblicalcounselingCom/](https://BiblicalcounselingCom/) (blog), accessed May 23, 2025, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/clinically-informed-biblical-counseling-failed-attempt-at-balance/>. “Priests in the Garden, Zombies in the Wilderness, and Prophets on the Wall: The Current State of the Contemporary Biblical Counseling Movement | First Baptist Church Jacksonville,” accessed May 28, 2025, <https://fbcjax.com/first-thoughts/priests-in-the-garden-zombies-in-the-wilderness-and-prophets-on-the-wall-the-current-state-of-the-contemporary-biblical-counseling-movement/>.

<sup>44</sup> Bob Kellemen, “Why I Don’t Call Myself a ‘Clinically-Informed Biblical Counselor’ (CIBC),” RPM Ministries (blog), May 26, 2025, <https://rpmmministries.org/2025/05/why-not-cibc/>.

## CIBC HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN INTEGRATIONISM

What was historically a term to identify “Bible as source” (i.e., biblical/nouthetic counseling) has been combined with a term that conveys “the Bible isn’t the only source (i.e., clinically informed, research aware, etc.). Thus, clinically informed biblical counseling is creating its own array of questions due to its own identification with the field of biblical counseling. Lambert puts his finger on the issue by saying:

Anyone who wishes is free to integrate therapeutic resources with biblical ones. I believe it is a terrible error and think you and the people you mean to help will be harmed by it. But I am not the lord of anyone’s life. You may practice any counseling system you choose. But when you do, you must be honest. The use of secular therapies in counseling is not what biblical counselors do. It is wilderness behavior, not garden behavior. In the old days the voices urging us to integrate the Bible with secular thinking honestly called themselves integrationists. Today the voices calling us to integrate deceptively call themselves biblical counselors. The opposition has concealed themselves in our midst.<sup>45</sup>

The third critique of the CIBC movement is that the CIBC effort is what has historically been an effort of integrationists. As Lambert notes, in the “old days” the integrationists would at least call themselves integrationists. Now, CIBC is attempting to take the term *biblical counseling* and redefine it back to what it was intended to *not* be.

Consider what the following integrationists defined their task as within counseling:

- **James Dobson:** “We aren’t saying that all troubles have a physiological or psychological basis. But physiological and psychological factors are often

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<sup>45</sup> “Priests in the Garden, Zombies in the Wilderness, and Prophets on the Wall: The Current State of the Contemporary Biblical Counseling Movement | First Baptist Church Jacksonville,” accessed May 28, 2025, <https://fbcjax.com/first-thoughts/priests-in-the-garden-zombies-in-the-wilderness-and-prophets-on-the-wall-the-current-state-of-the-contemporary-biblical-counseling-movement/>.

a critical part of the overall mix. As a result, Christians can find valuable help with many of life's difficulties by consulting with a qualified doctor, psychologist, or trained therapist. We believe that Christ's lordship applies over all these professions—particularly when the practitioner seeks Christ in all aspects of their work.”<sup>46</sup>

- **Eric Johnson:** “The movement has sought to take legitimate research and theory from contemporary psychology and cultivate a psychological and clinical sophistication in their understanding of people, in order to help promote the well-being of Christ’s people.”<sup>47</sup>

Of note, the descriptions of integrationists are those whose definition of their own counseling model is strikingly similar to that of the current CIBCer. Remember that the CIBCer is claiming, “Tools and methods for counseling may be derived from secular approaches to psychology and can be helpful (which is different from being essential). These tools and methods enhance our ability to minister the truth of God’s Word into our clients’ life.”<sup>48</sup> There’s very little, if any, ideological difference between what classic integrationists have claimed about the nature of their counseling and what the current CIBCer is claiming.

It is the claim of the CIBCer that they are inhabiting this in-between space, “RC/CIBC occupies a space between these two approaches [nouthetic counseling and integrationism].”<sup>49</sup> Though this is the claim, the facts are obvious in that this is not the genuine truth. CIBC is more like integrationism than it is different.

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<sup>46</sup> “Perspectives on the Compatibility of Christianity and Psychology,” *Focus on the Family* (blog), accessed June 5, 2025, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/perspectives-on-the-compatibility-of-christianity-and-psychology/>.

<sup>47</sup> Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007), 88.

<sup>48</sup> Nate Brooks et al., “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 1–12, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf.

<sup>49</sup> Nate Brooks, “What is Redemptive Counseling?”, 8.

## CATEGORICAL SOLUTIONS FOR BIBLICAL (NOUTHETIC) COUNSELING

In order to help the biblical counselor, the author will finish by providing solutions for the BCer to possess clarity on categories of BC. First of all, the CIBCer believes in the authority of Scripture, but not the sufficiency to the same degree.<sup>50</sup> As has been noted, the CIBCer believes that Scripture is true but not the only source.<sup>51</sup> In the Fall of 2024, the author helped draft the Sufficiency Statement (SS) in which this nuance was clearly delineated:

As this doctrine [Sufficiency of Scripture] is applied to counseling, it means that Christians require no special knowledge or methodology drawn from outside Scripture to construct a system of counseling care. Scripture explicitly claims to address our entire spiritual life, including the challenges faced in a fallen world which are the same challenges we face in counseling conversations.

Any approach to counseling that attempts to supplement Scripture with secular resources is in error and will harm those it means to help. Such attempts constitute an implicit denial of Scripture's authority and sufficiency. Accordingly, such practices exist outside the stream of faithful biblical counseling and discipleship.<sup>52</sup>

This categorical differentiation is what draws a marker between the CIBC movement and the BC movement. BC claims integrating is erroneous and hurtful, while the CIBCer claims integrating is helpful and desirous.

In this way, the BCer should have a category of “Sufficiency” by which the BCer can discern from those who would integrate, while still claiming the title of BC. Perhaps the best tool is not only agreement to theological definitions but also to that of the Sufficiency Statement itself. The author has now required of all biblical counseling faculty at The Master’s University agreement to the SS. For example, job descriptions now include this qualification: applicant must be “Able to sign in agreement with the Sufficiency of Scripture Statement.” This phrase

<sup>50</sup> See above, FN#21.

<sup>51</sup> Brad Hambrick, “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling? | Brad Hambrick,” accessed June 2, 2025, <https://bradhambrick.com/clinicallyinformed/>.

<sup>52</sup> “Sufficiency Statement,” November 22, 2024, <https://sufficiencystatement.com>.

helps to clarify what type of biblical counselor is the faculty applicant (or if they are really a BCer in the first place)?<sup>53</sup>

*Of note, an applicant does not qualify to teach at The Master's University if they cannot sign the SS in agreement. What does this solution provide?*

First of all, the BC movement is in need of a line by which one can evaluate whether a person is a biblical counselor or an integrationist. The SS category should not be used as an adjective, but rather as a confession. “Do you want to go to church with me? Hmm, what type of church is it? We are Southern Baptist.” For instance, biblical counseling can promote itself as such but then use the SS to define what type of biblical counselor they really are. This helpful categorization is a necessity for our modern times and will prevent some of the turf wars over the term *biblical counseling* itself.

One last thought for the reader on this point: if a person does not sign the SS though in agreement with the statement, as they have total right to do, it is the author’s perspective that partnership can still be maintained while not signing the statement. However, if a person cannot sign because of a difference of theology or commitment, then a fracture has occurred. Part of the current debate in BC is the reasons for not signing (which admittedly may be good) but the logical progression is still a lack of clarity. When Billy Graham did not sign the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy, it created many questions: did he agree with the statement, did he believe in inerrancy, and other categorical questions.<sup>54</sup> One author claimed that Graham could not sign the Chicago Statement because, “For the sake of the gospel, Billy had to be very careful with his public endorsements.”<sup>55</sup> That same issue is inevitably present for the SS statement. And the author does not recommend creating shepherding problems and organizational disunity for those in leadership to endorse the SS. Regardless the motivation for not signing, there will be a lack of clarity for those who choose not to sign the SS. In an ideal situation, the SS can at least start a conversation and a line for the BC movement as a whole.

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<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, there are other issues of common grace that are clarified in the statement. The doctrine of Sufficiency and the doctrine of Common Grace are perhaps the most misunderstood by the integrationist movement and thus the SS is allowing for clarity.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Stephen J. Nichols, *R.C. Sproul: A Life* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021). Christopher Haun, “Billy Graham, Evangelism, Evangelicalism, and Inerrancy,” *Defending Inerrancy* (blog), February 27, 2018, <https://defendinginerrancy.com/billy-graham-and-biblical-inerrancy/>.

<sup>55</sup> Haun, “Billy Graham, Evangelism, Evangelicalism, and Inerrancy.”

## ACBC CERTIFICATION

The next categorical solution is that of ACBC certification. Of note, none of the faculty at SEBTS, Hambrick, or Kovacs are ACBC certified. The author is not aware of the membership statuses of these individuals but there seems to be no indicator that these individuals have sought to be ACBC certified and have been denied membership. Furthermore, the individuals that were invited from the CIBC movement to the 2025 Colloquium have declined to come. What does this tell ACBC? *The CIBC movement is not attempting to be ACBC certified and ACBC certification is not possible for those who are CIBCers.* This categorical solution is another recommendation from the author.

ACBC's standards of doctrine address issues of revelation, common grace, and the doctrine of Scripture.<sup>56</sup> In these standards of doctrine, ACBC states "the Bible is a sufficient resource to define and direct all counseling ministry."<sup>57</sup> If one becomes a member of the ACBC organization, it thus prohibits them from being a CIBCer. This categorical solution is also one for the good of the movement. Currently, CIBCers are not seeking membership with ACBC and ACBC membership prohibits one from being a CIBCer. Thus, to clarify the movement going forward, true biblical counselors who want to communicate clearly their position should focus on their certification and their organizations certification with ACBC.

## EXPERIENCED VERSUS INEXPERIENCED BIBLICAL COUNSELORS

One future category that will need to be included for the biblical (nouthetic) counselors that the CIBCer has recognized. Hambrick says,

It is more accurate to understand that "clinical" means drawing from the *systematized wisdom of a large number of cases counseled by a large number of counselors.* When I am studying a subject, I want

<sup>56</sup> "Standards of Doctrine - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors," [Https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/](https://Biblicalcounseling.Com/) (blog), accessed June 6, 2025, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/positions/standards-of-doctrine/>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

to know both (a) what does the Bible say and (b) what do those who have worked with a large of number of cases like this see. The Bible is authoritative and inerrant. Counselors are not. But their observations about common patterns and commonly overlooked factors are useful.<sup>58</sup>

Hambrick notes something worthy, but looks to the wrong source for the information. He is speaking to the idea of wisdom and case experience in biblical counseling. Biblical (nouthetic) counseling is on the brink if needing to differentiate between the newly certified biblical counselor and the seasoned biblical counselor. Implicitly, the ACBC counselor may grow in case experience and wisdom but there are no ways to determine when this has happened categorically. The CIBCer wants to learn from those who have counseled such issues but are looking to secular, unbelieving therapists for those insights.<sup>59</sup> The BCer must gently navigate the fact that the Scripture is sufficient *and* a single female counselor may not be the best counselor for an older, male counselee.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, a married counselor may not be able to speak into the nuances of singleness in quite the same way that a single, biblical counselor can. For the sake of categorical recommendations, the author will call this last category “experience.”

What every pastor, biblical counselor, and BC leader knows through wisdom (James 3:13-17) is that some cases are more fitting for a certain counselor and another case is better for different counselors.<sup>61</sup> CIBC has claimed a desire to learn from those in the realm they are counseling, and the BCer must do so, as well, but maintaining the proper focus of *where to look for this information*. In a way, there should be an experienced group of biblical counselors to which the inexperienced group of BCers can look and ask questions. This category warrants establishment within ACBC and the genuine BC movement. As it stands, only the Level II

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<sup>58</sup> Hambrick, “What I Mean by Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling?”

<sup>59</sup> “Rather, these tools and methods provide additional ways of engaging the human person that are not explicitly spoken of in the text of Scripture” in Nate Brooks et al., “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 1-12, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf.

<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless that this violates the standards of conduct for ACBC.

<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, case wisdom helps a BCer know where to start in the application of the Scripture and where to avoid in the beginning of counseling. The author’s own counseling has taught him this nuance, as well (cf. Matt. 7:1-7).

category differentiates but one can simply be ordained and become a Level II ACBC counselor—this level doesn’t correspond to counseling experience.<sup>62</sup> The practical effects are that ACBC Counselors can claim expertise in an area, but really should grow in case wisdom from a true BCer that can help them apply the right Scripture to the right problem. Call this discernment, wisdom, or counseling experience—this next category is what the CIBCer is looking for in the wrong places.

In an ideal world, this last category would not only correspond to counseling hours but a measure of fruit in those hours. A BCer can have multiple first sessions, but no second sessions because counselees do not return. In this way, a counselor has ‘hours’ but not fruit. It is the author’s perspective that long-term BCers can be measured in both their hours in counseling and fruitfulness in those sessions. This category of experienced vs. inexperienced will allow the BC movement to grow in wisdom and excellence in the application of the sufficient Scriptures. It is the author’s perspective that the newly certified ACBC counselor needs further experience to be well-versed in an array of biblical counseling cases.

This Final categorical solution is this: how much experience does a BCer have as measured in hours and fruitfulness?

## CONCLUSION

As has been demonstrated, *the author categorized the CIBC positions, critiqued those positions, and offered categorical solutions that would better help the overall BC movement.* The subtitle of this paper is, “Is Clinically-Informed Biblical Counseling Really Just Integrationism?” The answer to that question is, “yes.” What has historically been claimed as Integrationism is now what the clinically-informed biblical counseling movement is practicing. Though the CIBC movement is yet to be identified and clearly delineated, one can be sure that the CIBC movement is quite different from biblical counseling.

Although this may be true, the BC movement as a whole can have definitional

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<sup>62</sup> “ACBC Certification FAQs – Association of Certified Biblical Counselors,” accessed June 6, 2025, <https://crm.biblicalcounseling.com/certification-faqs/>.

clarity and continue to grow in Christlike excellence in counseling. Furthermore, the CIBCer can use the wisdom of man but the wisdom of God will always prove to be superior: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 2:25).

The next chapter of the BC movement is one of great hope as the Word of God shines into the most complicated of problems—and provides genuine transformation (Romans 12:2).