

The Standards of Doctrine of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

The Preamble. We are an association of Christians who have been called together by God to help the Church of Jesus Christ excel in the ministry of biblical counseling. We do this with the firm resolve that counseling is fundamentally a theological task. The work of understanding the problems which require counseling and of helping people with those problems is theological work requiring theological faithfulness in order to accomplish that effectiveness which honors the triune God. Because theological faithfulness is a necessity in counseling, it is required of this association to articulate our convictions in this regard. We lay down this summary of Christian doctrine, which we believe represents the biblical standards of doctrine that biblical counselors must embrace to do their work faithfully.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE.

The 66 books of the Bible in the Old and New Testaments constitute the completed and inscripturated Word of God. God the Holy Spirit carried along the human authors of Scripture so that they wrote the exact words that he desired them to write. The words in Scripture penned by human authors are thus the very words of God himself. As inspired by God the Bible is completely free from error, and serves as the inerrant, infallible, and final rule for life and faith. The Bible speaks with complete authority about every matter it addresses. The words of Scripture concern issues of life and faith before God, and because counseling issues are matters of life and faith, the Bible is a sufficient resource to define and direct all counseling ministry.

[Acts 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:1-17; 2 Peter 1:3-21; 2 Peter 3:15-16](#)

II. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.

God is eternal and infinite in all of his perfections. This one God exists eternally in three distinct fully divine persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is creator of all that exists. He made the heavens and the earth out of nothing. He exerts comprehensive sovereignty over all of his creation. He possesses exhaustive and perfect knowledge of all events past, present, and future. He is present everywhere at all times. He is infinitely good with no shadow of sin in any part of his being.

[Genesis 1-3](#); [Psalms 139:1-16](#); [Isaiah 46:8-11](#); [Acts 5:1-4](#); [Romans 9:5](#); [Ephesians 1:11](#)

III. THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the second member of the Trinity. He exists as one person with two distinct natures, fully divine, and fully human without any mixture of the two. He was born of a virgin. He lived his entire life on earth without transgressing the law of God, thus earning righteousness for his people. He suffered a violent death on the cross to pay for the sins of his people. He rose miraculously from the grave on the third day as Lord and Savior, demonstrating his victory over sin, death, and the devil. He ascended bodily into heaven where he reigns over all creation, and actively upholds and intercedes for his people as his bride, the church, awaits his glorious return.

[Matthew 1:18-25](#); [John 17:6](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1-8](#); [Ephesians 1:21-23](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#); [Titus 2:11-15](#); [Hebrews 4:14-15](#); [7:25](#)

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Holy Spirit is the eternal third member of the Trinity. He is the person who convicts of sin and who indwells Christians. He regenerates believers and empowers them to live the Christian life, to understand the Scriptures, and to worship Jesus Christ. He is thus essential to the change sought in biblical counseling. He is the sovereign God who equips believers with gifts of service to do ministry in the church. He is the promised Counselor who continues the work of the Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ.

[John 16:4-15](#); [Romans 8:9-11](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12-30](#); [Ephesians 1:13-18](#)

V. THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE GRACE.

Salvation is thoroughly a work of divine grace from beginning to end. Before the foundation of the world the Father elected to save a people who would compose the church. Jesus Christ purchased the salvation of those individuals through his life, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to all who believe, creating the gift of faith in their hearts, and he keeps them in that faith forever.

[Romans 3:21-23](#); [Ephesians 1:3-14](#); [Ephesians 2:1-10](#); [Philippians 1:6](#)

VI. THE DOCTRINE OF MAN.

God created man out of the dust and breathed life into him so that he became a living person. Human beings are made in the image of God and were created by him to be the pinnacle of creation. God made mankind in two complementary genders of male and female who are equal in dignity and worth. Men are called to roles of spiritual leadership particularly in the home and in the church. Women are called to respond to and affirm godly servant leadership particularly in the church and home. God created the human person with a physical body and an immaterial soul, each possessing equal honor and essential to humanity. The Bible depicts the soul as that which motivates the physical body to action. These constituent aspects are separable only at death. The great hope of Christians is the restoration of body and soul in a glorified existence in the new heavens and new earth. Man is by design a dependent creature standing in need of divine counsel to serve God and to be conformed into the image of Christ.

[Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7; Proverbs 4:23; Roman 8:29; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; Ephesians 5:22-33; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10](#)

VII. THE DOCTRINE OF SIN.

God created mankind in a state of sinless perfection, but the human race fell from this state when Adam willfully chose to rebel against God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since that time every human being, except Jesus Christ, has been born in sin and separated from God. Every element of human nature is inherently corrupted by sin so that mankind stands in desperate need of the grace of God to be cleansed from sin by the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Sin increases the need for all counseling as people seek ministry to resolve problems in living caused by their own sin, the sin of others, and the consequences of sin in the world.

[Genesis 3:1-7; Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:1-21; 5:12-21](#)

VIII. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH.

The church is the bride of Christ called to proclaim the Word of God, administer baptism and the Lord's supper, and exercise church discipline. The church is the organism through which God accomplishes his mission in the world. It is the main agent for all ministry of the Word, including the ministry of counseling and discipleship.

[Matthew 16:18-20; Matthew 18:15-20; Romans 15:14; 1 Peter 2:1-12; Revelation 19:6-10](#)

IX. THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION.

Regeneration is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit where he transforms the hardened heart of a sinner into the soft heart of a believer, who loves God and obeys his Word. It is what makes the new life in Christ possible.

Regeneration, along with the God-given gifts of repentance and faith, is granted solely by grace, resulting in all the attendant evidences of our great salvation in Christ.

[Ezekiel 36:25-27; Acts 20:21 John 3:1-9; Titus 3:4-6; James 1:18](#)

X. THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION.

Justification is the sovereign declaration of God that the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been imputed to those who have trusted in his sinless obedience and his substitutionary atonement on the cross for their salvation. When God justifies a person, he no longer treats him as a sinner but reckons him to possess that righteousness which Jesus Christ earned on his behalf. The declaration of justification does not come through any past, present, or future merit in the sinner. Justification is based exclusively on the merits of Jesus Christ and is received through faith alone.

[Luke 18:9-14; Romans 4:1-12; Philippians 3:1-11](#)

XI. THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION.

Sanctification is a joint work between God and man, where God supplies grace for Christians to grow in obedience to Christ. While Christians are made holy in a definitive sense at conversion, it still remains for them to grow in holiness. This work of grace requires believers to utilize, by faith, the normal means of grace such as Bible reading, prayer, thought renewal, and fellowship in the context of the local church. Christians will experience real progress in growing more like Christ, yet this work will be incomplete in this life. The work of counseling is fundamentally the work of helping Christians to grow in this grace of sanctification.

[Acts 26:17-18; Romans 6:1-14; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:1-17](#)

XII. THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION.

God discloses himself to humanity in two ways. Special revelation is God's disclosure of himself to his people in the pages of Scripture. General revelation is God's disclosure of himself to the entirety of humanity in the things that have been made. General revelation and special revelation each come from God and so are of equivalent authority, though they differ in content. Special revelation discloses detailed information about the character of God and how to live all of life in a way that honors him. General revelation is a disclosure of the beauty and power of God, which leads to judgment. The subject matter of general revelation is the character of God, and not mere facts about the created order. General revelation requires special revelation to be properly understood and applied.

[Psalm 19:1-6](#); [Romans 1:18-23](#)

XIII. THE DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE.

God extends his goodness to all people by making provision for their physical needs and granting them intellectual gifts. This goodness, also known as common grace, is what grants unbelievers the ability to apprehend facts in science, for example, and is why believers can affirm the true information that unbelievers come to understand. The chief manifestation of God's grace is his salvation of sinners by the blood of Jesus Christ to all who believe. Common grace cannot overcome the corrosive effects of sin upon human thinking without this special, saving grace of Jesus. This reality guarantees that, though unbelievers can know many facts, they will misunderstand information that is most central to human life, which includes information about God, the human problem, and its solution in Christ. Because the central elements of counseling include God, the nature of the human problem, and God's solution in Christ, the counseling methods of secular people are ultimately at odds with a uniquely biblical approach to counseling.

[Matthew 5:44-45](#); [John 1:9](#); [Romans 1:18-23](#); [Colossians 1:21](#)

XIV. THE DOCTRINE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION.

The church has been called to go into the world with the task of evangelism and discipleship. In giving this commission, Jesus requires his people to use their conversations to point people to Christ in evangelism, and to build people up in Christ in discipleship. The Great Commission necessitates that all faithful counseling conversations must have Jesus Christ as their ultimate goal. Our Lord and Savior does not give believers the option to avoid counseling conversations, or to avoid directing those conversations toward

Jesus. The commitment of Christians to the Great Commission and to faithful biblical counseling is therefore one and the same.

[Matthew 28:16-20](#); [Romans 10:1-17](#); [2 Corinthians 5:11-21](#); [Colossians 1:24-29](#)

XV. THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS.

Jesus Christ will return for his church at a moment known only to God. At Jesus' coming, he will sit in judgment on the entirety of the human race. At the conclusion of this judgment, he will usher all humanity into the eternal state. All those who have spent their lives persisting in unbelief will go away into everlasting torment. The righteous in Christ will go away into everlasting joy in the presence of Jesus Christ. Christians can therefore have hope that all wrongs will be punished, that all righteous acts will be rewarded, and that God's people will ultimately abide with him forever. The hope of the new creation is the foundation of all counseling.

[Matthew 25:31-46](#); [Romans 2:6-11](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#); *Revelation 21*

Defining Biblical Counseling

What is the *Nature* of Biblical Counseling?

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.

What is the *Goal* of Biblical Counseling?

Biblical counseling seeks to reorient disordered desires, affections, thoughts, behaviors, and worship toward a God-designed anthropology in an effort to restore people to a right fellowship with God and others.

What is the *Method* of Biblical Counseling?

This is accomplished by speaking the truth in love and applying Scripture to the need of the moment by comforting the suffering and calling sinners to repentance, thus working to make them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ.

Our Values

What We Stand For

- 1. Theological Faithfulness** We believe that counseling is fundamentally a theological task. The work of understanding the problems which require counseling and of helping people with those problems requires theological faithfulness and submission to the way God explains life. Therefore, we hold to a [summary of Christian doctrine](#) which we believe represents biblical standards that biblical counselors must embrace to do their work faithfully.
- 2. Sufficiency of Scripture** We believe the contents of Scripture speak with authoritative relevance to the content of counseling conversations. Therefore, we hold that the Bible sufficiently informs the structure and content of counseling relationships.
- 3. Counseling Excellence** We believe that counseling must join accurate theology with godly character in order to honor the Lord Jesus and provide competent care. Therefore, ACBC is committed to setting [standards of counseling excellence](#). At ACBC we seek to maintain quality at every level in our organization to ensure that each counselee receives solid biblical counsel by our certified members.
- 4. The Church** We believe the church is the primary context for soul care, and that we must recover the church's responsibility to provide care for sufferers and sinners. Therefore, we encourage and support the indispensable ministry of biblical counseling as an expression of church life.