Biblical Counseling Philosophy

I. Introduction

As practiced at the Anabaptist Discipleship Center, the goal of biblical counseling is spiritual, relational, and personal maturity as evidenced in desires, thoughts, motives, actions, and emotions that increasingly reflect Jesus (Ephesians 4:17-5:2). We believe that such personal change must be centered on the person of Christ. We are convinced that personal ministry centered on Christ and anchored in Scripture offers the only lasting hope and loving help to a fallen and broken world. In light of this core conviction about Christ-centered, Word-based ministry, we affirm the following central commitments as biblical counselors.

II. Scripture

We believe that God's Word is authoritative, sufficient, and relevant (Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 4:12-13). The inspired and inerrant Scriptures, rightly interpreted and carefully applied, offer us God's comprehensive wisdom. God comprehensively addresses the sin and suffering of all people in all situations. In Scripture, we learn to understand who God is, who we are, the problems we face, how people change, and God's provision for that change. No other source of knowledge thoroughly equips us to counsel in ways that transform the human heart (Psalm 19:7-14; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3).

Wise counseling is an insightful application of God's all-embracing truth to our complex lives (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Philippians 1:9-11). It does not merely collect proof-texts from the Bible. Wise counseling requires ongoing practical theological labor in order to understand Scripture, people, and situations (2 Timothy 2:15). We must continually develop our personal character, case-wise understanding of people, and pastoral skills (Romans 15:14; Colossians 1:28-29).

When we say that Scripture is comprehensive in wisdom, we mean that the Bible makes sense of all things, not that it contains all the information people could ever know about all topics. We affirm that numerous sources (such as scientific research, organized observations about human behavior, those we counsel, reflection on our own life experience, literature, film, and history) can contribute to our knowledge of people, and many sources can contribute some relief for the troubles of life. However, none can constitute a comprehensive system of counseling principles and practices. Scripture alone teaches us to biblically and critically evaluate information and actions from any source (Colossians 2:2-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

III. The Gospel

We believe that wise counseling centers on Jesus Christ. Through the Gospel, God reveals the depths of sin, the scope of suffering, and the depth of grace. Wise counseling gets to the heart of personal and interpersonal problems by bringing to bear the truth, mercy, and power of Christ's grace (John 1:14).

We point people to a person, Jesus our Redeemer, and not to a program, theory, or experience. We place our trust in the transforming power of the Redeemer as the only hope to change people's hearts, not in any human system of change. People need a personal and dynamic relationship with Jesus, not a system of self-salvation, self-management, or self-actualization (John 14:6). Wise counselors seek to lead struggling,

hurting, sinning, and confused people to the hope, resources, strength, and life that are available only in Christ.

IV. The Holy Spirit and Prayer

We believe that both genuine change of heart and transformation of lifestyle depend upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-16:16; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Biblical counselors know that it is impossible to speak wisely and bring about true and lasting change apart from the decisive, compassionate, and convicting work of the Spirit in the counselor and the counselee. We acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the One who illuminates our understanding of the Word and empowers its application in everyday life. Dependent prayer is essential to the work of biblical counseling (Ephesians 6:18-20). Wise counselors humbly request God's intervention and direction, praise God for His work in people's lives, and intercede for people that they would experience genuine life change to the glory of God (Philippians 4:6).

V. The Process of Change

We believe that wise counseling should be transformative, change-oriented, and grounded in the doctrine of sanctification (2 Corinthians 3:16-18; Philippians 2:12-13). The lifelong change process begins at salvation and continues until we see Jesus face-to-face (1 John 3:1-3). The aim of wise counseling is intentional and intensive discipleship. The fruit of wise counseling is spiritually mature people who increasingly reflect Christ by enjoying and exalting God and by loving others well and wisely (Galatians 5:22-6:10). Biblical counseling helps believers to understand what it means to be in Christ (Romans 6:3-14). It equips them to apply the principles of progressive sanctification through renewing their minds and actions based on Scripture with a motive of love for God and others (Romans 12:1-2).

We believe that human behavior is tied to thoughts, intentions, and affections of the heart. All our actions arise from hearts that are worshipping either God or something else, therefore we emphasize the importance of the heart and address the inner person. God fully understands and rightly weighs who we are, what we do, and why we do it. While we cannot completely understand a person's heart (even our own), God's Word reveals and penetrates the heart's core beliefs and intentions (Hebrews 4:12-13).

We believe wise counseling addresses both the inward and outward aspects of human life. The Bible is clear that human behavior is not mechanical, but grows out of a heart that desires, longs, thinks, chooses, and feels in ways that are oriented either toward or against Christ. Wise counsel appropriately focuses on the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, on the inner and the outer person, on observable behavior and underlying issues of the heart (Matthew 23:23-28). Biblical counselors work to help struggling people to learn wisdom; to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength; to love one's neighbor as oneself; and to endure suffering in hope. Additionally, we encourage a thorough assessment and sound treatment for any suspected physical problems.

VI. Biblical Care

We believe that Christ's incarnation is not just the basis for care, but also the model for how we care (Hebrews 4:14-16; John 13:34-35). We seek to enter into a person's story, listening well, expressing

thoughtful love, and engaging the person with compassion (1 Thessalonians 2:8). The wise and loving personal ministry of the Word takes many appropriate forms, from caring comfort to loving rebuke, from careful listening to relevant scriptural exploration, all while building trusting, authentic relationships (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15; 1 John 4:7-21). We believe wise counseling takes into account all that people experience. Such awareness not only shapes the content of counseling, but also shapes the way counselors interact so that everything said is constructive, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to the hearer (Ephesians 4:29).

VII. Spiritual Warfare

We affirm the reality of spiritual warfare. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul challenged believers "to put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11). We stand against the spiritual forces of darkness by clothing ourselves in the armor provided by God—"the belt of truth... the breastplate of righteousness... feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace... the shield of faith... the helmet of salvation... the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:14–17). Paul concluded the presentation of the resources provided the believer for spiritual warfare with a reminder of the power of prayer in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). When a biblical counselor presents the truth of Scripture in counseling, walls of doubt, temptation and sin can fall, strongholds of worldly ideologies, lies and life dominating problems can be taken, and lives of men and women can be transformed. Loving proclamation of truth, the gospel, and repentance, combined with prayerful trust in the sovereignty of God is the counselor's responsibility in spiritual warfare.

VIII. The Church

Since the Trinity exists in community, we believe that we best reflect the Him as we live and grow in community (John 17; Ephesians 4). Sanctification is not a self-improvement project, but a process of learning to love and serve God and others. Wise counseling embeds personal change within God's community—the church—with all God's rich resources of corporate and interpersonal means of grace (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We believe that the church should be both the center and the sender of Gospel-centered counseling (Romans 15:14).

IX. Conclusion: Unity in Truth and Love

The Anabaptist Discipleship Center is committed to glorifying Christ and multiplying disciples through the personal ministry of the Word (Matthew 28:18-20). We trust in Jesus Christ in whom grace and truth are perfectly joined (John 1:14). We cling to His Word, in which truth and love live in perfect union (Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:8). We love His Church—living and speaking the truth in love, growing up in Him who is the Head, and building itself up in love as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:15-16).[1]

[1]Adopted from the Biblical Counseling Coalition