



A Theology *of* Soul Care

ESSAYS IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

EDITED BY NICOLAS ELLEN · JOSH STEPHENS
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READER'S SAMPLE

The foreword by Lance Quinn, and
the opening of Chapter One

A Theology of Soul Care: Essays in Biblical Counseling

FOREWORD BY LANCE QUINN

Over fifty years have now elapsed since the so-called biblical counseling movement began. This movement continues its long-standing influence upon American Christianity and beyond, especially related to the ways and means of helping beleaguered Christians who struggle in their increasing maturity toward Christlikeness. Though this seems on the surface to be a rather harmless ministry endeavor, sizable disagreements among Christians were beginning to take place in various evangelical counseling circles, especially the presumed need for the integration of psychology and therapy alongside Holy Scripture. This heretofore presumed commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture was now being threatened by those Bible-believing evangelicals who were, at one and the same time, using both theological and methodological means to give the best counseling now available, or so they thought.

Enter Jay Adams into the burgeoning fray. Adams wrote a book in 1970 entitled *Competent to Counsel*, which was published by what is now known as Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers. The book's shelf-life was immediate for decades, and even extended when Zondervan Publishers picked up the title, which is in their line to the present day (alongside other later books by Adams). At the time of this 1970 volume, Adams was a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and such a debate about practical pastoral ministry efforts seemed out of place for such an august theological institution as this Presbyterian seminary! Adams's efforts, however, in the areas of teaching, writing, and lecturing in seminary and many other places around the United States—to say nothing of a growing awareness of much of his personal counseling done in area churches—thus created an unintended backlash against

those evangelicals who were themselves convinced of a psychological and therapeutic, yet disparate, integration movement of their own.

What, therefore, are the actual roots of this ongoing movement which Adams inadvertently spawned, and why has there been such an ongoing debate about it to this very day? Perhaps a large part of the answer to this question lies in both contested theological and methodological dilemmas at the time of the writing of this volume by Adams. The book's content raised many important questions across the landscape of evangelicalism, mainly due to Adams's call for a commitment to the sufficiency of Holy Scripture for counseling Christians. At the same time, the book issued a clarion call to all those who would counsel others biblically (indeed, especially pastors) to renounce any admixture of the flawless, perfect truth of God's Word with such dubious conjoined theories and principles derived from secular sources of thought. Such integration between God's inerrant Word and mere human opinion—regardless of how sophisticated mankind's reasoning may appear to be—must be vigorously eschewed, allowing Scripture to reign supreme (for a fuller treatment, see Nicolas Ellen's valuable chapter in this volume on the historical background of the biblical counseling movement).

It is fitting now that, after more than half a century since Jay Adams's *Competent to Counsel* was published, the so-called biblical counseling movement is yet alive and well, and such proof is evident in the production of yet another stellar volume on counseling which you now hold in your hands. With a full array of essays that include biblical counseling philosophy, history, theology, methodology, application, and more, those within the biblical counseling movement will find a treasure trove of assistance in these pages. I know of no other compendium on the key matters of biblical counseling that seeks to cover the necessary ground as these helpful essays do. My hat is off to the four editors (and their accomplished writing team), who have worked diligently to select and arrange these teachings of biblical truth. It is my hope and prayer that when it comes to biblical counseling in general, we all shall rely on God's divine power, since he has "granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the

true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet 1:3 NASB).

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A Biblical Philosophy of Soul Care

NICOLAS ELLEN AND JOSH STEPHENS

The Definition and Direction of Soul Care

Soul care can be defined as utilizing the Word of God (the Bible) within its original context to provide solutions and applying those solutions to non-organic, immaterial, spiritual, and what the world calls “psychological” or “mental disorder” problems. The Word of God is applied with precision to achieve two primary outcomes: the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of saints. Essentially, soul care is biblical systematic theology in practice. Whether delivered in small groups or one-on-one settings, it addresses non-physical problems by providing comprehensive answers rooted in Scripture. Ultimately, it is the practical ministry of understanding and applying theological truth to the complexities of life.

Therefore, soul care is an avenue whereby evangelism and discipleship take place on an interpersonal level. Every Christian is called to the work of evangelism and discipleship, which means every Christian is called to the work of soul care. At some level, all of us have had to address some problem or concern on an interpersonal level with someone, which led to using the Word of God to either lead them to Christ or to help them change and grow in Christ.

The Objectives of Soul Care

Soul care has five key objectives. First, soul care seeks to lead a person into salvation when it is discovered that the individual is not a Christian. Soul care does not presuppose faith. It meets individuals

where they are spiritually to share the gospel of Jesus Christ when appropriate. Second, soul care seeks to provide help for individuals who are dealing with various kinds of suffering. For the one who is suffering, soul care can provide appropriate consolation. Third, soul care seeks to help Christians address their sin issues and develop in sanctification through addressing thoughts, motives, desires, words, actions, relational patterns, and service patterns through the put on/put off process that is explained in Romans 6 and 8, Ephesians 4, as well as Colossians 3. Through the wise counsel of the Word of God, soul care seeks to help Christians put on godly patterns and habits accordingly. Fourth, soul care seeks to provide sage-like wisdom to guide individuals into the best course of action in life. Where individuals are seeking to make good, godly decisions, soul care provides godly wisdom to help guide people into the best course of action. Finally, soul care seeks to help individuals with somatic issues in life. As individuals have physical problems, soul care seeks to help those individuals find the appropriate medical doctor to address those physical issues while addressing any spiritual issues that may follow, or that may have caused the physical issues.

Soul care seeks to accomplish its objectives by guiding people into developing a godly perspective of God within the context of their situation. A wrong perspective of God leads to wrong conclusions about life. This results in living without faith, which is sin. Second, through the Word of God, soul care seeks to guide people into a godly perspective of themselves and others. Pride distorts this view, causing people to rely on human opinions. Consequently, they lack a true biblical perspective and need the correction that Scripture provides. Third, through the Word of God, soul care seeks to guide people into a godly perspective of their situation. Individuals evaluate their lives according to their feelings. Soul care seeks to help people interpret life by the truth so that they may live as God commands in their situations. Applying these practices helps guide the lost to salvation, console the sufferer, and confront the sinner toward sanctification. It also provides wisdom and distinguishes physical issues requiring a physician from the spiritual issues at hand.

The Evaluation of Soul Care

We can evaluate soul care from three primary perspectives. *Conceptually*, we examine the biblical principles taught to accomplish the practice's objectives. *Methodologically*, we analyze specific biblical models and techniques used to deliver care. Finally, *apologetically*, we explore the logical and theological defense of soul care in relation to secular and integrated alternatives.

The conceptual perspective of soul care determines what truth is presented in counseling, while also defining, explaining, and interpreting problems through a biblical lens. If you do not understand how to interpret the problems that people bring to counseling, you cannot provide the proper solutions in caring for them. Biblical principles clarify life's problems, demonstrating that while the world may invent new categories for our struggles, there is truly nothing new under the sun or the Son. Moreover, the conceptual perspective of soul care identifies the solutions and goals to accomplish. What good is it to know what is wrong from a biblical perspective but not be able to give proper solutions? Scripture allows us to define problems accurately and determine the corresponding solutions that guide our counsel. With this biblical clarity, the counselor can differentiate between root sins and fruit sins, ensuring the individual is led toward a biblically grounded path.

The methodological perspective establishes the model of biblical counseling by dictating how truth is presented and how the counselee is approached. In evaluating soul care from a methodological perspective, we identify different ways one is to approach various matters using the Word of God. Methodological soul care guides how we apply Scripture to a variety of concerns—ranging from salvation and suffering to issues regarding sin, sanctification, wisdom (sage), and the body (soma). This perspective dictates the structure of counseling by establishing the proper steps and timing for a session. Furthermore, it governs the process, equipping counselors to gather data effectively and to know precisely when to console, confront, or clarify biblical solutions.

The apologetical perspective defines how we defend the legitimacy of soul care against opposing views. First, it addresses secular psychology by using a biblical worldview to challenge psychological assumptions. Second, it counters integrationism (mixing Scripture with psychology) by demonstrating that God's wisdom is superior to human wisdom and should not be diluted. Ultimately, this perspective validates soul care to the Body of Christ, confirming that Scripture is sufficient to handle all of life's moral, non-organic, non-physical, mental, or psychological problems.

Soul Care and Worldviews

Because your worldview determines your practice of soul care, your counseling is only as biblical as the teachers shaping your values. To identify who is truly influencing your perspective, you must ask three fundamental questions regarding the nature of man, the root of his problems, and the necessary solution. These answers reveal whether you are guided by the wisdom of God or the systems of the world. True biblical counseling is an extension of evangelism and discipleship; without this anchor, soul care drifts toward secular models that prioritize self-centered relief (feeling better) over God-centered transformation (becoming better).

The Best Context to Provide Biblical Soul Care

In a culture that is predominantly self-oriented, it is probably not difficult to understand why the centrality of the local church is unpopular. It is important to remember that the church was designed to combat a self-centered approach to life by setting believers in a community, where they consider others more important than themselves (Phil 2:3–4). The church's origin is divinely designed. Jesus declares, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18 ESV). Therefore, the local church must be embraced as the ideal environment for soul care. As God's divinely appointed support system for believers, it provides the essential foundation for a thriving counseling ministry.

Element 1: Doctrinal Stability

As Paul writes to Timothy at the end of his life, he makes an intriguing comment about the church. He says, “If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Paul describes the church as the pillar of truth. Jesus has designed the local church to be truth-driven. Whether it is the public or private ministry of the Word through counseling and discipling, the church is one of the entities God uses today to maintain the proclamation of the truth. Wayne Mack explained, “If the pillar of a building is removed, as Samson proved in his last act in the Philistine temple (Judg. 16:29–30), the building will topple and the people inside will be injured or killed.”¹ The value of the church and the truth it upholds is paramount to the lives of believers. Paul understood this when he advised Timothy to instruct others not to teach a different doctrine or devote themselves to any other teaching than the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Tim 1:3). The apostle Paul had watched people “shipwreck their faith” when they did not live by the teaching of Jesus. The church is a needed environment in caring for God’s people.

Element 2: Local Church Membership

A secondary element that is important to a soul care ministry is the priority of local church membership. David Watson records the statement of a student during the Jesus Movement of the 1970s: “Jesus Yes! Church No!”² For quite some time, there has been a struggle for individuals to fully commit to a local church family. If local church ministry has been neglected, then membership is by default neglected. An individual will never become a member of something they do not see as valuable. Local church membership is indispensable to soul care. We aim to connect people to God’s truth and community, recognizing that the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) was entrusted to the

1 Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavelly, *Life in the Father’s House: A Member’s Guide to the Local Church*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 26.

2 David C. K. Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 13.

local church. This mandates the pattern of discipleship we see revealed in the book of Acts. One reason church membership is important in soul care ministry is that the community of believers is commanded to look out for each other (Heb 10:19–25). First Corinthians 5 is an example of the importance of membership in soul care. A man in the local church at Corinth had been engaged in sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1), and Paul indicts the church for not having already put him outside of their assembly for such unrepentant sin. Paul says, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside” (1 Cor 5:12–13). The charge against the whole church was that they were neglecting to safeguard the members of the local church. By not addressing this individual, the testimony of the gospel was at stake as well as the purity of the church. Kevin Bauder writes,

Clearly, Paul believed that some people were inside the church at Corinth while others were outside it. Those inside were accountable to the whole congregation for their conduct. The congregation possessed the authority to expel anyone whose error was sufficiently grievous. This authority was mediated through the assembled church, not through private individuals or subgroups of the congregations.³

The early church fully understood its responsibility to provide spiritual care for both individuals and the congregation. But prioritizing membership does not prevent a ministry from serving those outside the church. Instead, it presents an opportunity to strengthen other congregations or to connect unaffiliated individuals to a local church family.

3 Kevin Bauder, *Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012), 56.

Element 3: Preventive Care

The local church is a vital setting for consistent preventive care among God's people. It is a fellowship of believers who, though Spirit-indwelt, are not yet perfect; they are actively fighting sin and undergoing the process of sanctification (Rom 7; Gal 5:16). As members are transformed into Christlikeness, the joy of supporting one another through suffering should be the norm. By emphasizing soul care, the entire congregation can be trained to recognize and support those who are hurting. Jesus often sought out people who were suffering. He said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28–30).

God designed the church as the perfect support system, where pastors and believers care for one another (Eph 4:11–12; Gal 6:6; Matt 18:15). Brad Bigney and Steve Viars write,

Ephesians 4:11 says that Christ gave the church some to be shepherds as well as teachers. Sadly, most seminaries focus almost exclusively on homiletics, exegesis, essential teaching functions, but they neglect the tasks of shepherding and equipping others in counseling and soul care.⁴

The individual support for believers is carried out by the shepherds. Jay Adams states, "Thus, it is the task of every pastor to become competent to counsel, even if he has not received adequate training and even if he is not now adequate for the task."⁵ Pastoral care within the local church is one way God has gifted the local church with an individual who is appointed to watch over their souls (Heb 13:17).

4 Brad Bigney and Steve Viars, "A Church of Biblical Counseling," in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 22.

5 Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 174, Kindle.

The church is also designed with a community support system that encourages Christlike growth and activity (Matt 18:15–18; Eph 4; Acts 2:42–47). Mark Dever writes,

In a healthy church, private corrective discipline is happening all the time. People in the church sin. But growing Christians welcome other Christians into their lives for the purpose of confessing their sins to one another (James 5:16; 1 John 5:5–10). That is, in large part, how spiritual growth happens—by accepting biblical correction. You need to be modeling this kind of humble accountability as a pastor and encouraging it in other members.⁶

Preventive care through accountability is necessary in community life. Without such preventive care, the church's effectiveness will be stunted by sinfulness. The pastor is not the only protector of the community (1 Tim 4:16). Church members must protect one another from being drawn away from a life of faith in Christ (Heb 3:12). Local church-based counseling places the ministry under the authority of God's ordained church. This setting enables pastors and leaders to safeguard the ministry of the Word in both its public and private forms. Bigney states, "Churches that are biblical counseling centers are constantly looking for ways to comfort those who are suffering and to confront and correct those who are sinning."⁷ Because of the preventive measures designed by God into the structure of the church, it is advantageous for a counseling ministry to come under the authority of the church. Local church pastors are given to the church to help equip the members for ministry to each other. Preventive care is God's sovereign support system, designed so that both individual and community supports are built directly into the fabric of the local church. Praise God for his wonderful plan!

6 Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel*, 2005 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 68.

7 Brad Bigney and Steve Viars, "A Church of Biblical Counseling," in *Biblical Counseling and the Church*, 25.

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