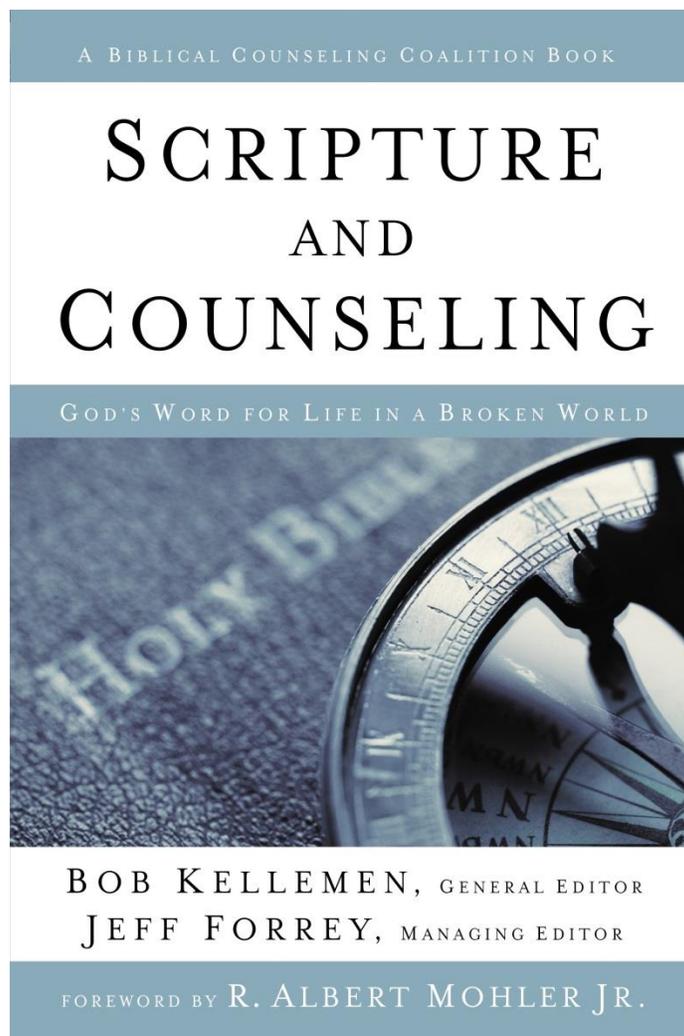


Scripture and Counseling

God's Word for Life in a Broken World

Bob Kellemen and Zondervan Publishing

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Foreword

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

One of the most revolutionary aspects of the Christian faith is the notion that the gospel of Jesus Christ begins with the assumption that our main problem is inside of us and our only hope for rescue comes from without. The secular worldview, driven by the engine of therapy in matters of counseling, is precisely the opposite—the problem is something outside of us, and the rescue we need is something that comes from within. This is the very antithesis of the gospel proclamation with which we cannot make peace. It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of human depravity with the ethos of self-esteem. It is impossible to mix orthodox theology and secular, therapeutic counseling.

Any attempt to reconcile these worldviews with the gospel is thus a way of intentionally or unintentionally subverting the gospel. Mixing secular psychology with the church's theology is to make the gospel something it is not. The history of secular counseling bears witness to this very fact. Freud, for example, told us that the problem is in our subconscious and must be treated by therapy, Jung formed the problem in the structures of the unconscious brain, Maslow told us that what we need is self-actualization, Bettelheim told us to get in touch with our stories, and the list goes on. These notions are, of course, contrary to the Christian worldview. Yet, one of the great tragedies of our age is that the average Christian bookstore is teeming with literature promoting the agenda of secular psychology. Sadly much of this literature can succeed in the Christian market by barely camouflaging the secular worldviews they are promoting.

The task of biblical counseling, then, must be undertaken with a sense of urgency. We are living in a time of tremendous cultural and theological confusion—a confusion that has led to a vast and dangerous infection of the church. Regrettably, many churches have embraced counseling that majors on the therapeutic. While perhaps marketable and pragmatic, this form of counseling orbits around the self and is thus theologically anemic and lacks the transforming power of the gospel—a gospel which reminds us that the solution to our problems comes from without, not from within.

The people of God, committed to the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God, must take their marching orders in matters of counseling from this same deposit of truth. Believers are called to counsel one another with the rich truth of God's word in a way consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At the center of this counseling ministry that we have to one another is the church—more specifically local churches marked by the truth, power, and authority of God's Word and of the gospel (Matthew 16:13-20). The communion of the saints, ordered by the authority of God's Word, is the center of biblical counseling.

Christ has richly lavished his grace on his church so that in so far as we minister, serve, and worship together we receive the vast riches of God's counsel together. Part of the biblical counseling ministry of the church takes place from the pulpit as local churches corporately submit themselves to the Word of God. Of course, many other times a more personal ministry of the Word is needed as members counsel one another with respect to specific problems and specific situations from the Scriptures.

The communion of saints exercises godly counsel by worship, preaching, the ordinances, and other means of grace. This means that the communion of the saints is a communion of godly counsel givers. We are not merely individual Christians, loosely scattered throughout the world. Christians are members of the body of Christ. Our identity is bound up in the community of God's people. And as Paul reminds us, "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). Therefore, congregations and churches must be theologically equipped to apply the Word of God to one another's lives. In this way the church is equipped, the church is called, the church is exhorted, the church is encouraged, and the church is made into the likeness of Christ.

As a communion of holy ones, our aim is to conform not just ourselves but one another to the image of Christ. In the words of Paul, each member is to work as God has gifted him such that the body "builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16). Words of godly counsel are thus the natural discourse of the believing congregation. Counseling is part of the natural order of the church, moving the saints toward faithfulness and maturity. Spiritual counsel is what takes places as the church together worships, teaches, preaches, ministers, serves, prays, suffers, celebrates, lives, and dies.

In light of these truths, I am thankful for the *Biblical Counseling Coalition's* commitment to promote counseling that is grounded in sound theology and rooted in the life of the church. I am even more thankful that they are producing the type of literature that you are now holding in your hands. *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World* is representative of the type of theologically-sophisticated and pastorally-sensitive counseling literature needed in so many evangelical churches. By this type of counseling, we honor God's Word as authoritative, uphold the proclamation of the gospel as our hope of redemption, and faithfully discharge our service to one another in local congregations.

Preaching on Ephesians 6:14, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "There can be no doubt whatsoever that all the troubles in the church today, and most of the troubles in the world, are due to a departure from the authority of the Bible." *The recent history of counseling ministries in evangelical churches* has demonstrated the truthfulness of Lloyd-Jones words. As churches outsource counseling needs to the secular world or adopt the worldview of therapeutic psychology into their own ministries, they damage the church's convictions about the authority and sufficiency of God's Word and belittle the redeeming power of the Gospel. The contributors to this volume are men and women who faithfully uphold the Word of God as the church's only resource for Christ-centered change. I commend their conviction in this Word which reveals how God has rescued sinners by turning them away from self to the cross and resurrection of His Son.

Preface

Our Prayer for You

Bob Kellemen

We face a tremendous weakening of confidence in the Bible as central to life. This is true for the pastor ministering to struggling people in the congregation, for the counselor in the counseling office, for the person in the pew talking with a struggling friend at *Starbucks*, and for the small group leader unsure of what to say to a hurting group member. *Scripture and Counseling* encourages these individuals—people like you—to regain their *confidence* in God’s Word for real life issues and equips them to grow in their *competence* in using God’s Word to tackle the complex issues of life.

Is God’s Word profoundly sufficient, necessary, authoritative, and relevant to equip God’s people to address specific, complex issues in today’s broken world? *Scripture and Counseling* does more than answer with a resounding “Yes!” It communicates a way of *viewing* God’s Word to address life in a broken world—a robust *theology* of the personal ministry of the Word. And it presents a way of *using* God’s Word to minister to broken people—a practical *methodology* of the personal ministry of the Word.

The “sufficiency of Scripture” has become an oft-debated buzz word in academic circles. However, this issue has vital ramifications well beyond academic debates. The failure to understand, develop, and implement a wise and practical approach to the sufficiency and necessity of God’s Word for the personal ministry of the Word has weakened the Church’s ministry of the Word and the Church’s impact in the world.

Scripture and Counseling focuses on a positive and practical presentation of scriptural authority, relevancy, necessity, profundity, and sufficiency for daily life. With real-life seriousness it addresses the vital question:

How do we *view* and *use* the Bible to help one another to deal biblically with the complex issues of suffering and sin?

Scripture and Counseling does not simply communicate, “Please stop going to the self-help section of *Amazon* to find answers for your problems.” Instead, *Scripture and Counseling* communicates, “Here’s why and how to develop a *robust biblical* approach to the personal ministry of the Word.”

The subtitle—*God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*—guides every chapter contributor. With every word they penned, they have asked, “How can my chapter encourage and equip pastors, small group leaders, biblical counselors, one-another ministers, and spiritual friends to trust God’s Word and to use God’s Word to minister to broken people?”

Our prayer for you as you read *Scripture and Counseling* is the same as Paul’s prayer for the believers in Philippi. Persecuted because of their faith (1:29-30), struggling with fears and anxiety (1:28; 4:6), experiencing relational conflicts (4:2), and battling against temptations toward selfishness (2:2-4) and self-sufficiency (3:1-11), they needed to hear the same Christ-centered message we need to hear today:

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless

for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God (1:9-11).

We pray that *Scripture and Counseling* will encourage you to trust God's Word to provide rich insight for living in the midst of even the most difficult times of suffering and the most distressing battles against besetting sins. We pray that *Scripture and Counseling* will provide you with a robust, loving, best-practice guide so you will gain competence in using God's Word to address the real-life issues of people in a broken world. And we pray that the result will be the Bride of Christ growing in Christlikeness to the glory and praise of God.

Introduction

The Preacher, the Counselor, and the Congregation

Kevin DeYoung and Pat Quinn

One of the firm convictions at our church is that the ministry of the preacher and the ministry of the counselor are not different kinds of ministry, but rather the same ministry given in different ways in different settings. Both are fundamentally, thoroughly, and unapologetically Word ministries. One may be more proclamation and monologue, and the other more conversational and dialogue, but the variation in approach and context does not undermine their shared belief in the power of the Word of God to do the work of God in the people of God. What shapes our understanding of pulpit ministry is a strong confidence in the necessity, sufficiency, authority, and relevance of God's Word. The same confidence shapes our understanding of counseling ministry.

The Word of God is necessary. We cannot truly know God or know ourselves unless God speaks. While Christians can learn from the insights of those blessed by common grace and those with gifts of reason and observation, the care of souls requires revelation from the Maker of souls. We preach and we counsel from the Scriptures not simply because they help us see a few good insights, but because they are the spectacles through which we must see everything.

The Word of God is sufficient. All we need for life and godliness, for salvation and sanctification has been given to us in the Bible. This doesn't mean the Scriptures tell us everything we need to know about everything or that there is a verse somewhere in the Bible which names all our problems. The Bible is not exhaustive. But it is enough. We don't have to turn away from God's Word when we get to the really hard and messy stuff of life. The Bible has something to say to the self-loathing, the self-destructive, and the self-absorbed. We do not need to be afraid to preach and counsel from the Word of God into the darkest places of the human heart.

The Word of God is authoritative. The Christ who is Lord exercises His lordship by means of His Word. To reject His Word is to reject Him. In a day filled with sermonettes for Christianettes we must not forget that what most distinguished Jesus' preaching from that of the scribes and Pharisees was His authority. The Word gives definitive claims, issues obligatory commands, and makes life-changing promises. All three must be announced with authority. This authority may be spoken in a loud voice or a soft whisper, in a prayer or in a personal note, with an outstretched finger or an open embrace. Authority is not dependent upon personality or one's position within the church building. Authority comes from God's Word, and the counselor no less than the preacher must bring this authority to bear on all those encountered, especially upon those who swear allegiance to Christ.

God's Word is relevant. Terms change. Science changes. Our experiences change. But the human predicament does not change, the divine remedy does not change, and the truth does not change. This makes the Word of God eternally relevant. Whatever work we can accomplish in the church apart from the Word of God is not the work that matters most. When it comes to matters of heaven and hell, matters of sin and salvation, matters of brokenness and healing, we are powerless in ourselves to affect any of the good change we want to see. This is why we must rely on the unchanging word of God. If Christ is relevant—and what Christian would dare say He is not—then we can never ignore what He has to say

to us. There is less wisdom in our new techniques than we think and more power in God's Word than we imagine.

A Gospel-Tuned Tag Team

I (Kevin) love the partnership in the Word that I share with Pat. It's encouraging—and unfortunately rare in many churches—to know that what I preach on Sunday will be reinforced by our counseling ministry Monday through Saturday. I don't have to worry that Pat will be working from a different foundation or pursuing a different cure. He's far more gifted than I am at asking questions, assigning homework, leading Bible studies, and gently helping people apply the Word of God to their problems. But though he may be more skilled in his context, he doesn't do anything substantially different than I do in mine. He talks about faith, repentance, sin, salvation, the gospel, justification, lies, truth, forgiveness, promises, commands, communion with God, and union with Christ—all the same themes I expound from the pulpit week after week.

I'd like to think my preaching makes Pat's counseling easier. He can build on what I teach, use what I preach, and remind people of last week's sermons because when we both work from the Word, we end up saying the same things. I know I've become a better preacher knowing that Pat is such a good counselor. Hearing the questions he asks and the cases he's working on helps me make sure that *my message does not just aim for an announcement of truth, but also for the care of souls*. It's always more effective to preach with real people, real hurts, real struggles, and real temptations in view. Being involved in our counseling ministry forces me to think how this week's text speaks to a teenager with same-sex attraction, or to an older man struggling with bitterness, or to a young couple with no hope for their marriage, or to a confused wife who can't stand her husband. If my sermons don't help with counseling, then I need to rework my approach to preaching. And if the church's counseling is totally unlike, in substance and grounding, faithful expositional preaching, then that church's counseling is probably something other than biblical. The preacher and the counselor working together, teaching the same truths from the same Bible to the same heart conditions, can be a powerfully gospel-tuned tag team.

The Preacher and the Counselor

I (Pat) have been serving as Director of Counseling Ministries at University Reformed Church since 2009. When Kevin became pastor in 2005, we discovered that we had a mutual love for biblical counseling and this eventually led to creating a new staff position for me. I have had the privilege of serving with Kevin as an elder, worship leader, teacher, and counselor, and have benefited greatly from his leadership, preaching, and encouragement. Our shared vision for the ministry of the Word has made it a joy to serve together.

Shared Convictions

One of our shared convictions is *a commitment to and confidence in the necessity, sufficiency, authority, and relevancy of Scripture for helping people work through suffering and sin issues in a way that glorifies God and brings spiritual growth—making disciples*. Since

one way of defining counseling is “remedial disciple-making,” this mutual commitment allows us to work together in direct and indirect ways. In my counseling training material I explain:

While God speaks in many ways, He has spoken finally, decisively, and authoritatively through His Son Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures (authority). While the Bible does not give an exhaustive list of all modern counseling problems and cures, it does provide a comprehensive way of looking at and addressing them (sufficiency and relevance). No other “word,” counseling model, or therapeutic technique can effect awakening to the reality of God, deep conviction of what is most deeply wrong with us, complete forgiveness and acceptance, death to the sinful nature, freedom to change, and hope of future perfection (necessity).¹

These shared convictions about Scripture allow us to be, as Kevin wrote, a gospel-tuned tag team to help people change. Here’s what this looked like in two counseling cases.

Tag Team Stories²

The first story illustrates how the necessity, sufficiency, authority, and relevancy of Scripture work with a modern psychiatric problem. The second relates how preacher and counselor worked together to help a troubled couple find grace to restore their marriage.

James

James came for counseling a couple of years ago struggling with extreme Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). The first time we met and I reached out to shake his hand he asked me if I had washed my hands. In addition to this germophobia, James was wrestling with doubts about God and his salvation. As James and I met, it became increasingly clear that unprocessed sin from his past and the rejection from a recent breakup with a young woman were making him feel unclean, provoking his doubts, and fueling his OCD. This was very disorienting and painful for him. It was a joy to use Scriptures like Hebrews 9:14 to help James better understand how the gospel of grace connected with his inner and outer experience of uncleanness: “...how much more will the blood of Christ (the great purifier), who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God (through an atoning sacrifice), purify our conscience from dead works (i.e. compulsive hand washings) to serve the living God” (parenthesis added).

One day James said that while he was tracking with this somewhat, what he was struggling with still seemed much more physical than spiritual. He wasn’t totally connecting his OCD with Jesus’ purifying sacrifice. This is where a seemingly obscure passage from Leviticus, which Kevin had preached through in 2009, proved an invaluable link between a sense of physical defilement and spiritual cleansing. We looked at Leviticus 15, which is all about laws for bodily discharges (James was especially troubled by these) and God’s remedy for physical uncleanness. I pointed out that even these physical issues needed a spiritual sacrifice of atonement (see Leviticus 15: 13-15), thus showing how our inner and outer selves are related and how God has provided a purifying remedy for both. This seemed to click with James and he left encouraged, but little did I realize how this

connection between Old Testament ritual laws and New Testament gospel would help set James free from OCD.

A week later James's father copied me on an email to family members about a conversation he and James had the day we had met.

This past Monday, after his session with Pat, I drove him to class. After a silent time of studying for class, James suddenly began sharing with me non-stop about 15 minutes of Scripture references that Pat and he had gone over, most of them focusing on what uncleanness was in the Old Testament and contrasting that with the purity we have before God through the blood of Christ. As we drove, I noticed that James was no longer holding his hands in that awkward way he has for weeks to avoid touching anything. I also noted that James decided to forego the extensive, elaborate hand washing with Germ-X that he has always done. Since that day, I would have trouble pointing to any unusual behavior whatsoever on James's part—no impossibly long showers, no inability to stop washing hands, etc. James confided in me, "I feel like I have been carrying a heavy burden around with me for years." The changes I have been seeing in him suggest God's lifting of that burden.

While James had much more growing in grace and freedom ahead of him, the immediate relevance and liberating power of Scripture to make a decisive difference in this life-dominating problem is stunning!

Frank and Cara

If James's story is about shared *convictions* about Scripture, Frank and Cara's story is about shared *ministry* in helping a couple restore their marriage after unfaithfulness. Kevin once said, tongue in cheek, "Pat, I make the messes (through preaching) and you clean them up (through counseling)." Here's how this worked in this couple's life.

A few years ago Frank and Cara went to church and heard Kevin preach a sermon on sexual purity. Frank recounts, "Almost immediately I felt besieged by guilt from the Holy Spirit about my unfaithfulness. I've never experienced anything like the following week. I was unable to shake that sermon or that text from my mind." As Frank wrestled with whether he should confess to his wife that week, he said, "Through my week of struggle, the consistent message I received from God was this: 'I'm big enough to handle the upheaval in your life that will result from your confession.'" God gave Frank faith to confess honestly and Cara courage to respond graciously, and sometime after this, at their request, we began marriage counseling. What followed was over a year of painful but ultimately glorious ministry of Word and Spirit. While I did most of the counseling overall, Kevin played a major role at the beginning and occasionally he and I met with them together: a couple of times to counsel and encourage and once to share in a marital re-commitment ceremony.

Obvious issues to deal with included helping Cara wrestle through disillusionment and the painful process of forgiveness, helping Frank to produce fruit flowing from repentance, helping them rebuild trust, and, most importantly, helping them see and repent of heart and behavior sins that were being exposed through this trial. The grace of God was beautifully evident. Frank showed consistent and brokenhearted repentance, and Cara showed amazing courage, perseverance, and grace. But it was not easy, especially for Cara.

There were ups and downs, times of leaping ahead and stumbling back, radiant hope and dark despair, sweet smiles and bitter tears—but always amazing grace. Often I sat back in awe at the power of the Redeemer to overcome the devastation caused by sin and Satan through His Word. Scriptures that relevantly spoke grace and hope to them included:

- “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”³ This helped them see that God was with them slowly but surely bringing hope out of despair.
- “...because they exchanged the truth for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is forever blessed.”⁴ Here we explored heart issues of various God-substitutes, cynicism, and unbelief that blindsided and tripped them up.
- “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things.”⁵ As they rebuilt trust in God and one another, it was important to explore together what “all things” means. We saw that it included the forgiveness of sins, massive hope and strength to suffer well on the way, power to forgive, and the sweet promise of an eternal honeymoon with Jesus in heaven.
- “Fear not, for you will not be ashamed...for you will forget the shame of your youth....For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name.”⁶ The LORD who is our “husband” and has reconciled us to Himself at great cost overcomes shame and gives hope for the future.
- The story of the Prodigal Son.⁷ This story (and especially Tim Keller’s wonderful treatment of it in *The Prodigal God*) was very helpful in identifying basic flesh patterns for Frank and Cara. Interestingly, they each identified with a different brother in the story.

It has been a privilege for Kevin and me (and others) to walk with these two as they trusted and followed God on a hard road. There is more sanctifying work ahead, but their lives are a trophy of God’s grace. One of my great joys as a counselor has been to hear Cara say things like, “I would never have believed God could change my heart this way” and “I see grace everywhere.”

The Counselor and the Congregation

Our vision for the ministry of the Word includes not only shared convictions and ministry between preacher and counselor, but also various training venues for the congregation in order to create a culture of one-anothering. We provide exposure to and training in biblical counseling through new member classes, leadership training, and two counselor training classes. Our goal is to equip members of the congregation to be “disciple-making disciples” in the home, in the church, in the community, and across the world. We hope soon to offer biblical counseling training to other local gospel-centered churches and to make it a part of our missionary care.

I have had the privilege of training a variety of people who are serving in a variety of ministries. Kristina, a former campus worker, currently finds biblical counseling training most helpful at home: “As a mom of little ones, I find myself applying biblical counseling

principles most often to my own heart and family. God’s Word is powerful and ‘face-to-face ministry of the Word’ is happening more often in our home.” Kevin has found the training helpful as a college Resident Director: “Before our class I would go to mentoring meetings without much preparation and with little time spent reflecting afterward to prepare for the next meeting. Learning to take notes and to take time to prepare for my time with students has been fruitful.” Mike is a counselor at a local Rescue Mission: “The ongoing classes on counseling homosexuals were over the top. About this same time, I was asked to counsel two people struggling with same-sex attraction. Because of our study, for the first time I felt compassion for men who wanted to change but didn’t know how to.” What a joy to help equip God’s people to minister his life-changing word in a variety of places—“as far as the curse is found.”

Conclusion

Preacher, counselor, and congregation all ministering the Word of life in a broken world—a beautiful vision. Have we arrived? Hardly. Do we have only success stories to report? Of course not. But we have seen enough of the relevance and power of the Word to press on. After all, this is God’s vision, not ours: “And he gave...pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.”⁸

Introduction

¹From unpublished University Reformed Church Biblical Counseling Training material: Pat Quinn, *Theology and Practice: CRUCIS Counseling*, 2013.

²Names and some details have been changed in these stories.

³Jeremiah 29:11.

⁴Romans 1:25.

⁵Romans 8:32.

⁶Isaiah 54:4-5.

⁷Luke 15:11-32.

⁸Ephesians 4:11-13.