

**First Presbyterian Church of Columbia**  
**Theological Foundations for Counseling in the Christian Counseling Center**

January 31, 1994

We understand “counseling” in its broadest sense to be one person helping another person grow toward wholeness in relationship to God, others and self. However, this paper is concerned primarily with the kind of counseling done by a staff therapist in the Church Counseling Center.

Christian counseling is the bringing of truth of the Scriptures to bear upon problems in the life of the person. It involves the therapeutic application of empathetic listening, discerning insight and practical strategies as well as the careful application of the Word of God directly or indirectly to the situations presented to the counselor. It involves a significant relationship with a genuine, compassionate individual. Together the client and the counselor seek truth within the context of faith and then learn to apply such truth to daily living.

Christian counseling may include pastoral counseling, psychology, discipleship, training, therapeutic counseling, family counseling, career counseling, as well as other approaches to the helping process.

**Assumptions**

1. All truth is God’s truth, wherever it may be found, but the Scriptures are the only infallible rule for faith and practice. Thus, Scripture must be our foundational authority in counseling. Empirically derived conclusions and observations from the human sciences are useful and necessary, but they must always be subject to the authority of Scripture.
2. Human beings are created in the image of God, but their relationship to God, to others and their perception of themselves are marred by rebellion against God’s authority and His nature.
3. The root of all emotional and physical disorders (being against or different from God’s order) is Adam’s sin. The fallenness of all mankind that came through the sin of Adam, along with the ongoing sinfulness of individuals, if left unchecked, negatively and increasingly influences all of our values and behaviors.
4. People may have disorders which are caused or exacerbated by physiological imbalances. Often the organic aspect of a disorder cannot be corrected by counseling alone, but requires the attention of a medical specialist.
5. People may have disorders which are caused or exacerbated by satanic powers and oppression.

6. People may have disorders which are the result of their personal sinful choices. These choices bring spiritual, emotional and intellectual harm to themselves and those around them.
7. People may have disorders which are the results of the sinful choices of others (e.g. family and society). Yet these disorders may become sinful on the part of an individual if not addressed appropriately.
8. People may suffer pain or have disorders through no fault of their own. All disorders are contrary to God's original and ultimate purpose for His people. Nevertheless, they are sovereignly used by God for the accomplishment of His will and gracious purposes, among which are the development of godly character, maturity and glory to Himself.
9. There may be situations in which a person's view of God and his interpersonal relationships are so contaminated that he or she could be hindered from embracing the truths of Christ. In such cases, counseling may be of assistance in the work of evangelism.
10. In addition to a right relationship with God, the scope of counseling includes aiding people in developing Biblically ordered relationships with themselves and others. Counseling can play a strategic role in discipleship and maturation.
11. God may choose to work with or without the use of human beings in the healing of individuals.
12. God may choose to work immediately. He may also bring about healing through the longer-term processes of evangelism, counseling, discipleship, fellowship and other forms of Christian activity.

## **Doctrine**

1. Human Nature: Human beings are made up of different yet related dimensions. The physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, intellectual, and volitional components are all affected when any one component is affected.
2. Sin: When human beings sinned against God, all of the components of their human nature were affected. When human beings continue to sin against God, they continue to be negatively affected in all that they are. Sin influences and contaminates the whole person. Even after God's forgiveness, some negative consequences of sin can remain.
3. Scripture and Science: The Scriptures must always be the ultimate judge of truth, wholeness, and faithfulness in human life. For this reason, the counselor must always be

a diligent student of the Scriptures. There are many specific aspects of human life which are not directly addressed in Scripture. On some of these, God has granted knowledge to us through the developing human sciences. The findings of these sciences may be useful to us in addressing human problems. Thus, the counselor must be as diligent a student of the human sciences as the medical doctor is of medicine, or the engineer is of physics, etc. Counselors must be prepared to use Biblical and scientific principles appropriately and effectively in the counseling session.

4. Regeneration: In regeneration a person is made a new creature in Christ. While his or her personality may not change, there is a different motivation within the believer. Before regeneration, an individual is motivated by sin to rebel against God. After regeneration, the Holy Spirit empowers and motivates the individual towards Christlikeness. The regenerated individual, at this point, is not living a perfect life, and must strive to grow and mature through obedience and the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. Justification: In accepting the gift of salvation, an individual is declared righteous in Christ. While a justified person may still commit sin, be deficient in Christian virtues, or suffer from various disorders, he or she is fully accepted by the Father through Christ and is no longer under condemnation by the law of God.
6. Sanctification: At the point of salvation, a believer's physical, emotional, relational, intellectual, and spiritual being begins a process of growth and purification. God, the Holy Spirit, works with the Scriptures, through the Church, the means of grace and the body of believers ministering to one another.
7. Teaching and Discipleship: It is the role of the church in general and believers in particular to teach and disciple people to know who God is and who they are in relation to God, and what He requires from them. Teaching and discipleship can encourage and enhance an individual's growth in grace. Counseling can be one of the means in that process.

### **The Goals of Christian Counseling**

The goal of Christian counseling is maturity in Christ. Maturity in Christ is being like Christ, submitted to God and His standards in all areas. Maturing believers are characterized by behaviors and attitudes which are in accordance with Biblical standards, influenced, motivated and guided by the Holy Spirit. Significant life experiences, environment and personality makeup are increasingly understood and addressed as the believer matures. Temptation, sinfulness, personal limitations, and life experiences have less and less control and influence as the individual moves toward spiritual maturity. However, as the believer continues to grow to be more like Christ and to have the mind of God, he or she may become more aware of his or her own hidden and continued sinfulness, human frailties, root causes of surface problems,

emotional damage, and disorders as well as a need for greater and greater dependence upon god.

Counseling is not an end in itself. Counseling attempts to assist the efforts to free men and women from the ravages of sin and ignorance so that through the power of the Holy Spirit they can embrace God in an intimate way, carry out godly relationships within God's Church and the world, and live an obedient, authentic Christian life according to the principles of Scripture.