

## **Biblical Ministry and the Evangelical Church**

The Word of God intends that the Church be the center from which hurting persons receive the help, consolation, guidance, and ministry that they so desperately need. This manual is designed for use in biblical discipling, the majority of which should be provided in and through the local evangelical Church.

Because of the importance that secular psychology has been given in the mindset of present-day evangelical Christians, the almost automatic response regarding a person who is having problems is, "He/she needs to have professional help." (By "professional" is meant that beyond what the church with its spiritual orientation can provide.) A stalwart of one of the strongest evangelical churches in Phoenix, when conversing with one of the Total Life Ministries (TLM) staff members about the biblical ministry that TLM provides said, "At what point do you then refer people to the professionals?" One interesting fact is, that many of those who come to TLM for help have already been to the professionals and found them to be without permanent solutions to their problems!

Actually, although TLM over the years has ministered to persons from over seventy local Churches (in Phoenix alone), the desire is not that churches refer hurting people to TLM, but that the churches minister to their own people by means of biblical discipleship.

One book on biblical counseling states:

*"Biblical discipling should be under the authority of the local Church body and accountable to the leadership of the Church. Each discipler should be in submission to the Lord, the leadership, and the Body of Christ. Disciplers should be appointed and designated by the leadership to serve the Lord by ministering to those in the congregation who are suffering from problems of living. Because of heavy reliance on the Holy Spirit and because discipling is a function of the Body of Christ and the expression of the love of God, there should be no fee. Ideally, discipling should be a natural outflow of love and ministry in a fellowship of believers who know and love one another..."*

*"The basic elements for change already exist within the church in which there is an environment of love and in which there is sound teaching of the Word. Biblical*

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*discipling in the Church is a more personal and specific form of ministering the mercy and truth of God. Therefore, biblical counseling should not appear foreign. And yet, many ministers and lay people feel totally unequipped because they think that biblical counseling somehow has to emulate psychological counseling."*<sup>1</sup>

*Another author states: "One of the key issues in the case [the 1980 lawsuit against Grace Community Church] was the question of whether churches should have the legal right to counsel troubled people from the Bible. Many would argue that giving someone advice from Scripture is a simplistic approach to counseling. We are told, 'The Bible may be fine as an encouragement to the average person, but people who have real problems need a psychological expert's help'.*

*"'Christian psychology' as the term is used today is an oxymoron. The word psychology no longer speaks of studying the soul; instead it describes a diverse menagerie of therapies and theories that are fundamentally humanistic. The presuppositions and most of the doctrine of psychology cannot be successfully integrated with Christian truth. Moreover, the infusion of psychology into the teaching of the church has blurred the line between behavior modification and sanctification."*<sup>2</sup>

As you see, a number of authors are thinking in this direction concerning the needs within the church itself. One writes: *"One of the most desperate needs within the church is for personal and family and marriage counseling - but it must be biblical and not psychological. For this to be supplied, the church must be willing to support biblical ministers who can thereby provide the necessary help without charging for it. Many young people sense a call of God upon their lives to work in this vital area, but their only possibility of support is to charge a fee - which means that they must be licensed by the state and therefore conform to secular standards of education and competency. The Church must provide adequate training in biblical discipleship, yet at the present almost nothing of this nature is available...*

*"It would be unthinkable for the state to license and impose such control over those who preach and teach from Scripture. Yet we consider it normal for those whom we expect to counsel from the Bible to be regulated in this way. Only when*

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*the Church considers ministry to individuals to be as important as preaching to and teaching congregations will biblical ministry take its rightful place in the Church. Until then the best of sermons will still leave many practical needs unmet and hurting people will unfortunately continue to turn to psychologists for lack of real solutions being put into practice by the local Church."* <sup>3</sup>

When one considers the sufficiency of Christ, the authority of God's Word, the never-failing presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and the Church as God's appointed instrument for communicating His truth to His own, the tendency of Christians to look elsewhere for what they consider to be "real" answers, is astounding.

Note the words of Scripture:

Bow down thine ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto My knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips... Have not I written unto thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee? Proverbs 22: 18-20 (KJV)

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete... Colossians 2:8-10

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world do you submit yourself to decrees... Colossians 2:20

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back to the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? Galatians 4:9

Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." John 6:69

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We believe that true biblical discipleship ministry, therefore, is the responsibility of the local evangelical Church. Accordingly, those who come to TLM for counsel are asked to obtain a response from the senior minister of their Church indicating in writing that (1) he is aware of the situation regarding this person's need; (2) the Church is unable to provide the necessary discipleship ministry or has exhausted its resources for doing so; and (3) he is giving his permission for the person to seek discipleship ministry at TLM.

Moreover, the biblical discipleship ministry process includes direction toward involvement in the ministry and worship of the local Church, for encouragement, growth, and stability for the individual or couple being ministered to. Many assignments include the Church member's communicating to his/her senior minister what God is doing in the person's life and seeking additional guidance. God Himself is to receive the ultimate thanks and praise for any changes taking place.

<sup>1</sup> How to Counsel from Scripture, by Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Moody Press, 1985

<sup>2</sup> Our Sufficiency in Christ, by John MacArthur, Word Publishing, 1991

<sup>3</sup> Beyond Seduction, by Dave Hunt, Harvest House, 1987