Why invest your time and energy in reading *Biblical Counseling and the Church*? There is only one answer to that question: because every author of every line of every chapter in this book shares a single thought-shaping, heart-engaging, ministry-guiding, and word-selecting commitment. What is that commitment? *To let the Bible shape everything they think.* To shape what they think about themselves, about life, about identity, meaning and purpose, about relationships, about human emotions and human problems, about solutions and change, about the past, present, and future, and about how we can be instruments in the hands of the God of the Bible, agents of grace and change in the lives of people we counsel.

Because the authors of this book are committed to looking at all of life through the lens of the Word of God, they have a particular perspective on people and on change. This is more than telling people to “take two verses and call me in the morning.” No, here you find expansive and practical wisdom that works where the rubber meets the road in everyday life in this fallen world. This wisdom flows from two central perspectives: in how a biblical thinker views *people* and how a biblical thinker views *change*.

**Two Essential Questions, Two Guiding Answers**

This may sound arrogant and mystical, but I believe it really is possible to know the answers before you’ve heard the questions. No, I am not talking about the contextual counsel that you would give a potential counselee. I’m simply noting the fact that if you take the Bible seriously you always have two answers to two questions that form the basis for what you will say to every counselee.

What are these questions? What are the two essential questions that every counselor will ask and that each of the authors of this book addresses in a distinctively biblical way?

**Question One: Who are people, anyway?**

The way that you answer this question will shape and direct everything you do. The Bible gives four deeply specific and helpful answers to this question; people are *creatures, sinners, sufferers and saints.* Now, these aren’t four separate identities, but the collected identity that makes each person who and what they are. Everyone carries three of these identities and many people all four.

You simply cannot offer people the help they need unless you understand that you are looking into the face of a *creature* of God. No counselee is an independent being with a right and ability to achieve happiness however they see fit. No, every person is the creation of

...
God; made for His purpose, made dependent of Him for life and made morally responsible to Him.

But the authors know something else as well. It is the mournful reality that every person is not only a creature; they are *sinner*s as well. They have rebelled against God and are, therefore, separate from him, but are also broken inside. Their hearts don’t function the way that the Creator intended, so they will insert themselves in the center of their world and they will look for life where it cannot be found. They will attempt to live independently and to get others to serve their kingdom. In so doing, they will suffer their own insanity while laying the blame on the people and circumstances around them. In counseling you have to recognize that you’re always dealing with the sinfulness of sin.

Creatures, yes and sinners, yes, but there is more. These writers know that everyone they counsel is also a *sufferer*. Between the “already” of their birth and the “not yet” of God drawing his world to an end, suffering is the universal experience of every human being. From the pains of childbirth to the physical ravages of old age, from being picked on by your friends to gross racism, from family violence to murder, from political corruption to global war, from physical sickness to mental dysfunction, from being rejected to never knowing true love—nothing in this broken world operates as God intended, and we all suffer the results.

But there is a fourth identity, one not shared by all. By grace many human beings are not just creatures, sinners, and sufferers, they are also *saints*: people who have been forgiven by God, restored to relationship with him, and have God’s life now bubbling up inside of them. By grace they have new eyes to see and a new heart to receive and understand all that God has given them. By grace they know that the thing they need to be rescued from most of all is themselves.

The book you’re about to read is trustworthy because every writer takes seriously these four identities; *creature, sinner, sufferer* and *saint*. But there’s a second, equally foundational question to be asked and answered.

**Question Two: What in the world does change look like?**

The work of counseling *is* change, and submission to the Word of God drives you to a unique perspective on personal change. Only someone committed to biblical thinking would ever hold to the idea that *the hope of change is a person and His name is Jesus*. The authors of this book offer you something very different. They haven’t put the hope of their counseling work in a system. Everything that is written in this book flows out of a deeply held belief that lasting personal change requires a person, a Redeemer. Here’s why this is true.

The humbling bottom line of the work of counseling is that the thing we most need to be rescued from is ourselves! Our basic problem is deeper than history, biology, or our relationships. What’s *inside* of us is far more dangerous to us than what’s *outside* of us. You can live beyond your history, you can run from a bad situation, you can escape a destructive relationship, but you simply cannot run away from yourself.

God sent His Son to provide the rescue we could not provide for ourselves. And we don’t just need that rescue once, we need it again and again and again until all is finally restored and made new.
So I commend this book to you, not because of my confidence in the authors, but because of the confidence the authors have in the liberating truths of the Word of God. With this unwavering confidence, they can know things about you and me and Jesus that make counselors and churches powerful tools of transforming grace in the hands of our Redeemer, who came to make lasting change possible for everyone who humbly seeks it. Read, reread, and absorb this book. It will not only help you as you serve others as an agent of God's grace, it will change you as well.

—Dr. Paul David Tripp, Author, and President of Paul Tripp Ministries