

**CONFRONTING**  
**the**  
**Biblical Counseling Foundation's**  
***Self-Confrontation* Manual**

**A PsychoHeresy Awareness Position Paper**  
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For a number of years we have recommended the Biblical Counseling Foundation's manual currently titled *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship*. However, with our growing concern about the biblical counseling movement, we have taken another look at the manual as an integral part of the counseling training program offered by the Biblical Counseling Foundation (BCF).

We express many of our concerns about the growing biblical counseling movement in our book *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*, which could have been titled *FOR THE BIBLE, but Against Biblical Counseling*, since *FOR THE BIBLE* is truly the thrust of our book. Yet, our rising concern about the biblical counseling movement influenced the order of the title. Yes, we are *FOR THE BIBLE*. But we have serious problems with much of what is now called "biblical counseling."

One of the big problems with the biblical counseling movement is the erroneous impression, encouraged by many organizations, that one needs to take a biblical counseling course or complete a biblical counseling program before one can counsel from Scripture and certainly before one can excel in ministering godly counsel. Therefore, many Christians enroll in these programs with the idea that they need such specialized training before they can or even should minister biblical counsel to another believer. However, the truth is that, for a variety of reasons, one could become a worse counselor after taking such training.

We say categorically in *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*:

Any person who can be used by the Holy Spirit to lead another to salvation or along the way of sanctification is competent to be used by God to give wise counsel without needing specialized biblical counseling training.<sup>1</sup>

The "training" must be biblical, and the promoters of these training programs would agree with that. However, a disagreement we would have with the biblical counseling training program promoters is that they attempt to prepare individuals to be "biblical counselors," when they should prepare individuals to give godly counsel as they minister to one another in the body of Christ as part of the biblically ordained ministries found in Ephesians 4:11-16, Romans 12, and elsewhere in Scripture.

One needs to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Such study occurs in worship services, Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and at other times of reading and instruction in the Word. Such study occurs in biblical counseling programs as well, but there too much error and baggage that come from an emphasis on the process of counseling. We describe these problems in *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*.

One feature of many biblical counseling training programs is the identification of a number of areas of problems (including sins and shortcomings) with Bible verses that may be applicable to such problems. Pastors and lay people alike are then intimidated into believing they need the training to learn the verses that apply to specific problems before they can minister appropriately. We quote from a letter from one pastor:

I have just finished reading your latest publication *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*. I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your willingness to go in print challenging the biblical counseling movement.

I studied under Jay Adams at Westminster Seminary. I was greatly blessed under Adams and was convinced of the necessity to counsel from the Word of God as a pastor in a local church.

I am blessed to pastor a church where I have preached the whole counsel of God. Very little counseling is needed apart from the preaching of the Word of God, and the counseling that is given each other by the members of this church.

I have counseled couples and seen marriages saved. I have also seen rebellious children changed (some also hardened). The changes came not after weeks and years of “biblical counseling,” but in the context of the fellowship of the church, and usually after one or two periods of confrontation or encouragement using the Word of God.

After being barraged by all the solicitation about getting degreed or certified by conservative seminaries and the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, I was beginning to feel inadequate again. Since reading your book, I will stay with the high calling of the biblical ministry in the local church.

Thanks again for your work. I’m sure you will get much negative feedback. Just count me among those who are greatly appreciative of your book.<sup>2</sup>

What we say may shock those in the biblical counseling movement, but it is entirely unnecessary to take such classes and learn the verses as listed in their manuals in order to be used by God to minister godly counsel to one another along the way to Christian maturity. Problems of living present possibilities for Christian growth, but it is not necessary to know or learn specific verses about specific problems for Christian growth to occur.

We have studied the academic research on counseling for over 20 years. Based upon our familiarity with the research, and we believe that researchers would agree with us, it would make no difference in the results of biblical counseling whether or not a counselor used or entirely avoided the specific verses related to the problems confronted and whether or not one ever completed a biblical counseling program.

In other words, one does not need to learn the lock-step relationship between specific verses and problems to minister appropriately and effectively to one another in the body of Christ according to God’s Word. Why? Because the true counselor is the Holy Spirit and He will convict a heart and change a life. It is the Word that will be used by the Holy Spirit. Whether one uses specific verses related to problems or other passages of Scripture, the results will be equivalent—except that the handbook-trained biblical counselor more often comes with the worldly baggage described in *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*.

One more answer to the question of “why?” is this: According to research, the number one reason why people change is because they want to. In most instances in which a person needs to change, that individual will know what needs to be changed even before counseling begins. The problem may be spiritual stagnation often brought about by disobedience to Scripture. The person may be spiritually stagnant and need spiritual growth. Reading the Word and obeying the Word in any area of life will bring both spiritual and behavioral change in one who desires to follow Christ at the cost of taking up his cross and denying himself.

### **The Relationship of BCF’s Manual to the Biblical Counseling Movement.**

*Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship*<sup>3</sup> is the required text for the first course in BCF’s biblical counseling training program. One may argue that this book is a discipleship book, not a counseling manual. But this book has to do with discipleship **and** counseling. Not only is this book used in the first course of the BCF counseling training program, but BCF equates counseling with discipleship. A BCF article titled “Equation for Effectiveness: Biblical Counseling = In-depth Discipleship” says, “Many Christian leaders have separated discipleship

and biblical counseling when, in fact, Scripture makes no such distinction.”<sup>4</sup> However, we disagree with that conclusion.

Jesus’ disciples were those who followed Him and learned from Him. Disciples are followers who are learning to be like their master. Thus Christian discipleship is the process of following Christ and becoming like Him. It does not require a counselor apart from the Holy Spirit, though it does involve an evangelist, pastor and teacher. Teaching and learning are much closer to the biblical idea of discipleship than counseling, especially any counseling that is contaminated by the one-up-one-down mentality of psychological therapy. Nevertheless, BCF uses the terms *discipleship* and *counseling* as synonyms, such as in the following statement:

We should not approach discipleship as a salesman who has a predetermined set of ideas to get across, but as a physician who works with each individual to help him through any test, no matter how formidable it may initially seem to be. In-depth discipleship (biblical counseling) requires great diligence in study and practice.<sup>5</sup> (Parentheses in original.)

*Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship* is a counseling manual with an extended case study along with counseling instructions. Furthermore, the Self-Confrontation Course, which uses this book as its initial text, is, according to BCF, “the first part of a comprehensive training program in biblical counseling.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, the supplements of the manual include aspects of worldly counseling never found in Scripture.

Even Christian psychologists and psychiatrists claim to be doing discipleship when, in fact, they are practicing psychotherapy and psychiatry.

Under the leadership of John Broger, the Biblical Counseling Foundation (BCF) in Rancho Mirage, California, developed training programs and manuals for biblical counseling. Over a period of years they wrote the *Self-Confrontation Syllabus*, which has gone through a number of revisions and was used in BCF training programs. Bracy Ball, BCF Vice President of Operations, asked us to critique an earlier version of the Syllabus and we did so. To our knowledge, our suggestions were addressed in a later revision. Until two years ago, we wholeheartedly recommended the BCF syllabus and training. As a matter of fact, numerous pastors and lay people first heard about BCF from us. Nevertheless, we no longer recommend, without reservations, BCF or the manual, now titled *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship*.

### **Basic Doctrine**

The best and most useful aspect of *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship* is the presentation of basic Bible doctrines in the first chapters, which read more like a basic catechism than a counseling book. These chapters are especially helpful to people who have never previously learned the basic doctrines of Scripture. Would these same Christians have bothered to read a book on basic doctrine that was not connected to the idea of counseling or solving problems? Since the manual is both a discipleship manual and a counseling manual, people who have been Christians for many years, but have never had a solid grasp of basic doctrine, have an opportunity to learn and apply basic doctrine without the embarrassment of being in a beginning doctrine class.

The popularity of the BCF manual reveals the famine in many churches and provides foundational teachings that must be lacking in many lives. Its usefulness suggests that churches need to teach and reteach classes on basic Christian doctrine. The inclusion of homework in this manual also suggests that Christians are willing to do homework to solve their problems and to

equip themselves for ministry. Thus, Bible teachers should not hesitate to expect Bible students to study the doctrines of Scripture themselves.

Besides basic doctrine, *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship* also stresses the practical application of biblical doctrines. For those reasons the initial chapters of the book can be quite useful. However, the emphasis on counseling, the problem-centered approach of later chapters, and the psychotainted sections in the appendix (discussed later in this paper) prohibit us from recommending it without reservations. However, if used, the manual and course should never be elevated to the point of being more than just supplementary material.

### Use of Scripture References

The presentation of biblical doctrine in *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship* is helpful. And, as one works through the BCF manual, there are numerous Scripture passages to look up along the way. The plethora of verses gives the impression that they were generated with a computer program and then not thoroughly evaluated. On the other hand, BCF is to be commended for their obvious use of Scripture. However, many of the verses used are only tangentially applicable, inapplicable, or simply misused. The manual badly needs a theologian with a great amount of time to check all verses used in the manual.

The great number of verses to look up tends to discourage studying the verses in context. Thus, rather than a section of Scripture being used in some depth, there are many individual verses strung together to support a particular principle. Some verses are used numerous times to support various principles. If this is indeed a discipleship manual, it should teach people to study verses in context.

At times BCF misuses verses simply because they do not exegete them properly. But, of course, this is another weakness. If they exegeted the verses in depth, the manual would end up to be several volumes instead of one.

For example, on the cover of the original syllabus preceding the title is the following Scripture reference: “Matthew 7:1-5.” The apparent reason for its position on the cover and its use within the manual is to support the idea that to counsel others, one must first learn to confront oneself. BCF says:

Self-confrontation must continue throughout your Christian walk if you are to avoid the hypocrisy of judging the failures of others without first examining your own life in a biblical manner (*Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:41-42*).<sup>7</sup>

Matthew 7:1-5 certainly has to do with judging and hypocrisy. However, the BCF use of Matthew 7:1-5 and the above quote turns counseling into judging. Following the logic of their use of terms leads one to this unfortunate syllogism: *Counseling* equals *discipleship*. *Counseling* equals *judging*. Therefore, *discipleship* is *judging*. To drive the logical progression even further: If *discipleship* equals *counseling*, does *disciple* equal *counselee*?

While removing the beam from one’s own eye before attempting to remove a splinter from another person’s eye is what those who are under the law must do if they are not to be identified as hypocrites, this verse has to do with judging, not counseling, unless as BCF implies, counseling and judging are the same thing. Look up the words *judging* and *counseling* in a dictionary and see the difference.

Is BCF saying that biblical counseling is primarily “judging the failures of others” by persons who attempt to avoid hypocrisy through self-confrontation? Is “judging the failures of others” the main thrust of BCF? If not, they should not use Matthew 7:1-5 as a foundational verse for

justifying their first course. A more appropriate verse would have been Galatians 6:1-3, which directly gives instruction for restoring a fellow believer. This verse has to do with the personal ministry of restoration, not with judging.

But, again, judging is apparently a very important aspect for counseling and discipleship for BCF, since their Principle 3 says:

Practicing God's Word begins with judging yourself and removing sinful obstructions from your own life (Matthew 7:1-5; 1 Corinthians 11:28-31; Hebrews 12:1). Then, you have the privilege and responsibility of restoring others to victorious living (Matthew 7:5; Romans 15:14; II Corinthians 1:3-4; Galatians 6:1-5).<sup>8</sup>

By justifying their methodology of self-confrontation with this verse, they make judging a primary activity for both counseling and discipleship. We would question the order and emphasis of this Principle 3 with 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which indicates that practicing God's Word begins with doctrine. Then after the doctrine comes the reproof, which is not necessarily "judging yourself," but rather conviction by the Holy Spirit. Judging ourselves is not necessarily a good activity. Lots of people judge themselves and improve their flesh and deafen themselves to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We may even decide what we want to improve in ourselves by our own self-judging and God may have a different order of change, a more significant depth of change.

The self-confrontation process does require a great deal of looking at oneself and judging oneself. The manual declares:

Discipleship requires constant self-examination that is in accordance with God's Word (based on Matthew 7:1-5; I Corinthians 11:31; Galatians 6:4).<sup>9</sup>

But do we become like Christ by looking at ourselves or by looking at Him? Yes, we are to examine ourselves and judge ourselves, but there is no indication that this is to be a constant activity. In fact, constant self-examination may lead to disguised self-improvement and self-righteousness. In spite of good intentions and many biblically sound statements, self-confrontation easily becomes self-preoccupation, works oriented activity, and bondage clouding our liberty in Christ. The greater emphasis in Scripture appears to be looking to Christ and at Christ in order to become like Christ.

Matthew 7:1 does have to do with judging, not counseling. Regarding Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged," William MacDonald says:

Sometimes these words of our Lord are misconstrued by people to prohibit all forms of judgment. . . . But Jesus is not teaching that we are to be undiscerning Christians. . . . The NT has many illustrations of legitimate judgment of the condition, conduct, or teaching of others. In addition, there are several areas in which the Christian is commanded to make a decision, to discriminate between good and bad or between good and best. Some of these include:

1. When disputes arise between believers, they should be settled in the church before members who can decide the matter (1 Cor. 6:1-8).
2. The local church is to judge serious sins of its members and take appropriate action (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-13).

3. Believers are to judge the doctrinal teaching of teachers and preachers by the Word of God (Matt. 7:15-20; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Jn. 4:1).
4. Christians have to discern if others are believers in order to obey Paul's command in 2 Corinthians 6:14.
5. Those in the church must judge which men have the qualifications necessary for elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13).
6. We have to discern which people are unruly, fainthearted, weak, etc., and treat them according to the instructions in the Bible (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:14).<sup>10</sup>

To best understand Matthew 7:1-5 and Luke 6:41-42, it is also necessary to do more work on the use of *mote* and *beam* and how those words relate to the use of the words *thou hypocrite*. Even then, there is much more to be learned here. This is only one of numerous examples of either misuse or superficial use of Bible verses. It is one of many examples of BCF drawing inferences from Bible verses to make implications for biblical counseling, rather than presenting the intended meaning of the verse.

### **Intimidation**

Within the chapter titled "Purposes of This Course" under the section "Overview of Biblical Counseling Training," John Broger says:

The overall objective of biblical counseling training is to teach members of the local church body to face the challenge of living biblically in a fallen world and to prepare them to counsel others in a strictly biblical manner.<sup>11</sup>

This is a worthy goal: to equip the body of Christ. Such instructions and tools may indeed enable people to live more effectively for Christ. However, instructions and tools can also become shackles of legalism and bondage.

Numerous people have expressed to us that the manual is too intimidating to use. Others have been intimidated by the idea that they must go through special training before they can minister to others in the Body of Christ. Though meant to be a help, the manual, the self-confrontation course, and the additional four levels of counseling training can become a burden. How does that happen?

Supplement 1 of the BCF manual says:

The Bible itself states that the truths contained within it are entirely sufficient to enable a person to live a life pleasing to God (*II Peter 1:3-4*).<sup>12</sup>

Other supporting verses are given in this section to emphasize the sufficiency of Scripture. However, immediately following this section is one titled "Developing Biblical Habits." This section touts the use of the BCF Self-Confrontation course. It says:

In order to establish a scriptural base for biblical counseling, 105 biblical principles and their supporting verses are presented in the BCF Self-Confrontation course. These biblical principles can be applied in a **systematic manner to overcome any problem of life** and are not a mixture of man-contrived theories sprinkled with a few Bible verses unrelated to problem solving. Instead, these biblical principles provide the essential foundation for any person to change his unbiblical patterns of living and establish new habits of biblical

behavior. While extensive and unalterable, these biblical principles are not meant to be all inclusive due to the living and active characteristics of God's Word (*Hebrews 4:12*).<sup>13</sup> (Bold added.)

This not too subtle move from using the Bible to using the BCF manual, because it is organized with 105 "unalterable" biblical principles with a plethora of Bible verses, is one reason why individuals are intimidated by the manual. The intimidation is found in the legalistic-sounding lists of should and should-not, in the 105 principles to be followed, and in the numerous verses to look up if one is to follow Scripture. This round about manner of approaching Scripture, while systematically organized, focuses more on the principles themselves than on the context of Scripture. While on the one hand, such principles may clarify or emphasize a truth from Scripture, there is the danger of living by principles rather than by the living Word of God. One may follow a principle derived from Scripture and still be walking according to self-effort even though some of the principles reveal the uselessness of self-effort.

Whenever we expand on or even explain Scripture, we are at least once removed from Scripture itself. An example of this was the Pharisees' attempt to define the Sabbath Law, to the point of how much a person could lift, how far he could walk, and what exactly was or was not work. In an attempt to clarify the Law and give instructions and tools for living, the Pharisees burdened the people beyond the requirements of the Law.

BCF is correct in rejecting the psychological wisdom of men, but wrong in immodestly touting their Bible-plus 105 biblical principles for biblical counseling. The truth is that one need not study their principles in order to live victoriously or successfully minister godly counsel. To stress the 105 biblical principles and application in a "systematic manner to solve any problem of life" is both intimidating and biblically false. Such a declaration that these 105 principles are "to solve any problem of life" suggests a necessity to know those 105 principles if problems are to be solved. By implication, such a statement emphasizes those principles more than the rest of God's Word and inadvertently places the "systematic" manual in a superior position next to the Bible itself.

Part of the intimidation is involved in the 105 principles. The other intimidation comes from the five levels of training offered in the BCF program. (See Supplement 2.<sup>14</sup>) One supposedly must not only learn the principles to be a biblical counselor, but must also go through the five levels. While a person in the midst of working through the self-confrontation manual is encouraged to counsel others according to what he is learning, the implication is that the more levels of training one has, the more adequate one will become.

Throughout much of the manual is a case study called "Mary's Husband Has Left Her." The case study is first presented in Lesson 9 and subsequent counseling sessions follow in the later lessons. In Lesson 9 the student of the manual is to read the information about Mary and then answer questions. Unfortunately the information about Mary is too brief to be comprehensible. Mary has presumably come to "your house" with a marital problem. She is distraught because her husband left her after arguing all night. After only a brief description, the reader of the manual is asked questions regarding Mary and how one might help her. Throughout this "case study" the pronoun "you" is used to designate the person who is presumably doing the counseling. However, as we discuss aspects of this "case study" of Mary we will refer to the person to whom Mary came for help as the "woman" to avoid confusion among "you" the reader of this paper, "you" the reader of the manual, and "you" the "counselor" in the "case study."

In spite of the scarcity of information given regarding Mary and her situation, the reader of the manual is directed to answer specific questions. However to ask one to presume to give answers without sufficient information may cause one to "answereth a matter before he heareth it," and



that would be a “folly and shame unto him” (Proverbs 18:13). While one may pick up clues from the brief amount of information, the answers will involve some speculation. For instance Question 3 asks, “What additional problems could result if Mary continues responding in the same way (for example: depression, anxiety, suicide, murder, living as a recluse, physical or emotional breakdown, alcohol and drug use)? What else?”<sup>15</sup> But there simply is not enough information to give a definitive answer. How does one presume to deal with such sketchy information? Answer: one must **presume**. We are also concerned about BCF’s use of such psychological terminology as “emotional breakdown.”

Another question asks: “How would you give hope to Mary using **FACTS ABOUT BIBLICAL COUNSELING** (Supplement 12)?”<sup>16</sup> One would certainly want to find out about Mary’s spiritual condition at this point, because Jesus is our hope in every situation. However, if one turns to “Facts about Biblical Counseling,” one may not feel adequate to minister hope beyond arranging counseling appointments with trained counselors or counselors-in-training. In that case, Mary might look to counseling as her hope rather than Jesus Christ.

Lesson 10 includes the same event in the case history of Mary. Here, we see that the hope to be given **is** a counseling appointment. The “woman” who has been approached by Mary for help calls her pastor, who tells her to pray with Mary and to set up an appointment for the next day with some other counselors present. Of course, these are to be trained counselors or counselors-in-training, because that is what BCF is all about. The pastor directs the woman to: “Set a specific time and place for Mary to come tomorrow and discuss her problem with you and other biblical counselors.” Notice that BCF recommends that counselors counsel in teams. In other words, one Christian does not minister privately with one other Christian, but one designated as “counselee” is to be “counseled” by a group of “counselors.”

In Lesson 10 the four elements “to be emphasized in every counseling session” are presented. They are: “Understand the problem.” “There is hope.” “You must learn how to change.” “You must practice being a doer of God’s Word.”<sup>17</sup> Directions are given to ask Mary questions to “understand the problem.” But, the student of the manual cannot ask the questions of Mary, who is neither actually present nor fully presented. Then the student of the manual, who has not been given enough information even to begin to understand the problem, must proceed with the process of what to counsel.

The section “Understand the problem” directs the reader to ask questions to gain information regarding the problem. We agree that one must have the facts to avoid jumping to conclusions and thereby giving unwise counsel. However, in the section “Understand the problem” one is instructed: “Make biblical inquiry by asking ‘what, who, when, where, and how’ questions, but avoid ‘why’ questions; get all the facts (Proverbs 18:13, 17; James 1:19).”<sup>18</sup> These verses support the idea of listening to what is being said and gaining factual information, but they do not forbid anyone from asking “why?” The instruction “avoid ‘why’ questions” does not come from the verses cited. Instead, we see the influence of William Glasser’s *Reality Therapy* in which he says:

In Reality Therapy, therefore, we rarely ask why. Our usual question is *What? What* are you doing—not *why* are you doing it? Why implies that the reasons for the patient’s behavior make a difference in therapy, but they do not.<sup>19</sup> (Emphasis his.)

Directing counselors to “avoid ‘why’ questions” may help them avoid expeditions into subjectivity and rationalization for sin. However the direction to “avoid ‘why’ questions” is presented as if it is a biblical injunction.

The verses used by BCF to support “understand the problem” and “avoid ‘why’ questions” are: Proverbs 18:13, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him”; Proverbs 18:17, “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him”; and James 1:19, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” These verses direct a person to listen but say nothing about understanding the problem or about what kinds of questions to avoid. This is an example of the careless manner in which verses are sometimes used in this manual.

The most one can hope to gain by asking questions will be information and some subjective impressions, which may lead to accurate or inaccurate understanding. However, no matter how many facts one collects, only the Holy Spirit truly understands the problem and the people involved. Christians who come alongside other Christians who are experiencing problems of living need to know the Lord and His Word, may need a certain amount of factual information, but are not required to understand the person’s problem in order to minister.

The “case study” of Mary continues in Lesson 12. The dialogues in this “case study” are called “role plays” and are supposed to be demonstrations of how to do biblical counseling. Here in the “role play” dialogue, one of the counselors attempts to find out if Mary is saved. The counselor asks, “Mary, tell me how you came to know Jesus Christ.” Mary answers:

I accepted the Lord at a Christian summer camp when I was 16. I had real joy in the Lord. I regularly attended church and Sunday school for a couple of years after that. I also had plenty of Christian friends. (Pause) In college I started down a spiral. I met Tom who was not interested in the Christian life.<sup>20</sup>

Mary then proceeds to complain about her husband. After Mary states a few more complaints about Tom, the counselor asks, “When did the problems first start between you and your husband Tom?”<sup>21</sup>

The counselors are evidently satisfied with Mary’s testimony. However, one might well wonder whether Mary really heard the Gospel at the camp or if she simply had an emotional response to an emotional appeal. From what Mary says during the dialog, there is no evidence of repentance for sin or genuine conversion (beyond attending church and having some Christian friends for two years).

Here there is a great need to establish Mary’s position in Christ. Instead, the counselor proceeds with questions about the problems with the husband, when her spiritual life should have been the first direction of the counsel. Rather than pursuing the genuineness of Mary’s faith, the counselors give Mary a platform for talking about her husband behind his back.<sup>22</sup> We express our concern about the direction of this counseling session, because the dialogues in the “case study” are for the purpose of demonstrating how to counsel biblically.

In Lesson 13’s counseling session, “The counselor points out that Mary’s most serious problem is that she is not loving God.”<sup>23</sup> But, she is incapable of loving God if she has not been born again. Nowhere has it been established that she has been converted. Then, in the next session, described briefly in Lesson 14, Mary sounds as bad as or worse than at the first session. There is still no evidence that Mary has truly been regenerated, yet the counselors continue trying to help her change. Besides that, while this case may be based on a real one, it sounds phony, probably because the authors are trying to squeeze in what they want to teach and leave out most of the conversation that would have occurred.

In Lesson 15 Mary has suddenly changed. No change was revealed in any of the previous sessions. But here, glowing things are said about her being quite transformed, so much so that her husband, Tom, has now come to the counseling session with Mary. The assumption is that

her change is due to spiritual growth. Evidently the counselors were satisfied with her shallow testimony, because one counselor tells Tom that Mary has changed “because of her commitment to please the Lord and be obedient to God’s Word, which began with her spiritual new birth.”<sup>24</sup>

Lesson 15 gives a brief description of several counseling sessions where the counselor works with Mary while her husband only observes. However, when he does begin to participate, the couple is instructed to have a “conference table. . . to provide a structured environment for developing the habit of solving problems in a biblical fashion.”<sup>25</sup> At the conference table the husband is instructed to be the leader and the wife is told to be the “recorder.” While this format may be useful to some people, no such structure for family conferences can be found in the Bible. Such a structure is not in itself biblical communication, which is speaking the truth in love, forgiving one another, and following other biblical guidelines having to do with communication.

During this counseling session the couple practice the conference table approach. When they begin to argue the counselor raises his hand to demonstrate how to stop a fight. He then instructs Mary and Tom to raise their hands when they start arguing. This gimmick may work for some people, but during a later counseling session, presented in Lesson 18, one can see that the usefulness of the conference table and hand raising was of short duration. In fact, in this lesson everything seems worse.

In Lesson 18 Mary reports that she has been ill, her house is a mess, and Tom has refused to attend the counseling session. Mary tells her counselors that she was sick and in bed, and then, when she began to recover, she looked at the mess and went back to bed because she could not face it. This lesson proceeds with questions about how to help Mary see her “sinful self-focus,” with verses for hope, and with assigned homework. There is no suggestion that the counselors do anything practical, such as help clean up her house. With four counselors, at least one ought to be able to lend a hand and be a good example of loving one another in practical ways.

In Lesson 19 Mary and Tom are back on track asking and giving forgiveness, but in Lesson 21 we discover for the very first time that Mary’s husband has a drinking problem. How odd that this did not surface earlier. But, then when you have to concoct a prolonged “case study” and cover all the various problems at the right time in the manual, you are bound not to make sense.

In reading through the entire case, one sees that this is really contrived with all kinds of processes and record-keeping, etc., similar to psychological counseling. One wonders how the apostle Paul was able to minister without these added “helps.” Do believers need all of this to be able to minister biblically? With all the worksheets and procedures one wonders what Christians might do if they only had the Bible! While many of the teachings in the various lessons are biblical and worthy of study, we would discourage using this case study as a model for counseling.

Lesson 24 of *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship* says: “Those who counsel others in a biblical manner must have specific steps to follow just as a medical doctor must follow basic steps to accomplish his purposes.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, according to BCF, one must learn the “specific steps” before one can minister to another believer. This is not only intimidating; it puts biblical, Holy Spirit ministry into a straight jacket. Thus, that which is meant to be a help may become a hindrance.

Another point of intimidation regards the rigidity of the BCF sequence of training. A BCF leader once said that even Dr. Jay Adams would have to take the BCF level 1 before taking level 2, etc. So, the man who was instrumental in starting the biblical counseling movement (Adams) needs to complete the BCF level 1 before going to level 2, etc., even though some of the self-confrontation manual is based directly on material from Adams’ book *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*.<sup>27</sup> This only adds to the already existent intimidation in the manual itself.

Under these conditions of intimidation, a tool (the manual) becomes a burden (must learn the 105 principles to counsel). Individuals may get the idea that they must work on sanctification in a prescribed manner. The final result may be one of legalism. Though BCF preaches against a legalistic approach, the ingredients in the manual may result in the very thing BCF wishes to avoid.

### **The Holy Spirit in Counseling**

The *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship* does emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in counseling (Lesson 3). However, the manual also presents a methodology that could easily ignore the sovereign work of the Spirit. The manual states:

In counseling that is true to God's Word, a biblical counselor will collect enough information to enable him to recognize and understand the problem in order to formulate the biblical solution.<sup>28</sup>

And, of course, the manual provides a means of collecting "enough information to enable him to recognize and understand the problem in order to formulate the biblical solution."<sup>29</sup> This approach suggests that after gathering enough information, the counselor will indeed be able to "recognize and understand the problem in order to formulate the biblical solution." This assumes that through this process the right questions will be asked and the right information gathered. Even if this were possible, such as with a specific, limited superficial problem, the biblical solution formulated by the counselor may bypass the very thing the Lord is working in the person. Thus, the counselor may intrude his own evaluation and diagnosis, which may be erroneous. That is why one must stress the convicting and directing role of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. The counselor may indeed suggest passages of Scripture that **may** apply or **may** convict. But, he cannot assume that data gathering will necessarily "enable him to recognize and understand the problem in order to formulate the biblical solution." Moreover, his own bias from his own experience may drastically contaminate his evaluation and understanding.

Instead of a manual with 105 principles, the Word of God empowered by the Holy Spirit will bring understanding to the problem and provide a biblical solution. It is rare that a counselor understands a person or that person's problem beyond the most superficial layer. Moreover, it is rare for a counselor to know specifically how a person will change or even what Scriptures may lead to that understanding or change. The Holy Spirit is the true counselor and human counselors should not mess with the clay. The counselor does not decide how change will occur; that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Apart from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, a person cannot take the internal spiritual temperature of himself. Apart from what Scripture says generally about the heart, no one can know what is going on inside anyone else. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Furthermore, in attempting to analyze another person's inner life (feeling and heart levels) in addition to external behavior (doing level)<sup>30</sup>, a counselor is in danger of usurping the place of the Lord and of leading a person astray with his speculation.

The manual says: "Only God can accurately judge the entire spiritual condition of the heart."<sup>31</sup> This begs the question: Can a human thus judge an aspect of another's heart and conclude that the person is self-righteous, jealous, prideful, etc.? Even observing behavior may not result in accurate evaluation of another's heart or motivation. While this manual is for self-confrontation, one must keep in mind that it is the required preparation (Track 1, In-depth Biblical Counseling/

Discipleship) for the BCF counseling program. The idea throughout is that after an individual has confronted himself at the feeling, doing, and heart levels (Lesson 6, pages 4-5), that he can confront others at those same levels. The implication comes from BCF's use of Matthew 7:1,5—that after one has judged himself he may judge another at the feeling, doing, and heart levels. Thus the BCF manual appears to encourage Christians to evaluate one another's inner man regarding attitudes and motives.

For instance, the chart connecting the “Self-Centered Life” with “Self-Centered Deeds” indicates that “Arrogance” is “Demonstrated by: Saying unkind words, being critical.”<sup>32</sup> Is one to conclude that whenever an unkind-sounding or critical word is spoken the heart attitude is one of arrogance? While the Bible clearly teaches that our actions come from our inner attitudes, one cannot necessarily identify the inner attitude. For instance, what may appear to be an unkind or critical word may actually originate from an attitude of love and a desire to help. Or, it may come from a place of discouragement. Humans too often jump to conclusions. But the Lord knows the heart. That is why David cried out to the Lord: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23,24). While BCF discourages speculation and allowing one's own experience and opinions from intruding, such can easily occur when attempting to analyze and understand a problem at the heart and feeling levels, especially when it is someone else's heart.

The Christian life is lived both internally and externally. Man works out what God works within. “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12,13).

### **Personal History/Problem Evaluation**

Supplement 6 of the manual is titled “Personal History/Problem Evaluation.” Except for the Religious Background section, questions asked and information obtained in this section merely reflect the type of information sought by secular counselors. Even the Religious Background section parallels the types of questions secularists ask.

Prior to the rise of the biblical counseling movement, can you imagine a Christian, simply out of the blue, asking another Christian such questions as: “Have you ever felt people were watching you? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ When?” or “Are you afraid of being in a car? Airplane? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ When?”<sup>33</sup> Read through the information and questions in this Supplement and see if you can imagine anyone in the church using such a format prior to the current psychology craze. Until the rise of the biblical counseling movement, the church did not need such forms, because it ministered the Word to the individual and let the true Counselor direct the work of change.

### **Sharing Homework**

Studying the Bible, memorizing Scripture, writing out one's personal testimony of God's gracious work in one's life are all commendable activities and should be encouraged in all churches. BCF can be congratulated for encouraging such activities. The statement at the bottom of every homework page says: “The completion of assignments marked with an asterisk (\*) is a prerequisite for further biblical counseling training.” However, some of the homework, which is required if one is to continue training and hope to become a BCF certified counselor, may involve exposing the sins of others. If one completes the “Bible Study and Application Format”<sup>34</sup> with the specificity required by the examples, he might easily confess the sins of others as well

as his own. Additionally, an instructor who reads and evaluates the homework may see a particular student in the light of having confessed some private sinful attitude, such as the example of being selfish on Page 2 of Supplement 3. Without intending to look at that person as a selfish individual, the one who has read the homework may easily fall into the trap of continually viewing the student as selfish.

The “Discovering Problem Patterns Worksheet” asks people to observe and record patterns in their lives.<sup>35</sup> They are directed to write down instances of sinful behavior, such as all the times one is lazy during the week. While that may be useful for some people, there is something very contrived about it. Moreover, one could follow such a worksheet and improve the flesh without walking after the Spirit. Actually a person could faithfully complete this worksheet and never change. Worse, perhaps, would be “improving” the flesh and becoming prideful. New Creations in Christ do not attempt to fix up old Adam by looking at patterns and then changing those patterns. Each time one sins one must recognize that he is walking after the flesh rather than after the Spirit. He does not need to identify patterns, but sins, whether they follow particular patterns or not. The Bible calls for confessing sins, not writing them down and keeping track of them. Scripture says: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). But, where does it say, “If we write down patterns of sins for the week, we will overcome our sinful habit patterns and be cleansed from all unrighteousness”?

### **Limited Warning**

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezekiel 3:18-19).

A responsibility of every pastor and every teacher is to warn. *Self-Confrontation* does warn about the dangers of humanistic psychology and even contrasts four “common humanistic philosophies” with the Bible.<sup>36</sup> However, there is no warning against patently unbiblical ministries, practices, and doctrines within the professing church. It is doubtful that BCF will expose any individual or any false teaching that will lead to conflict. The BCF instructors manual says:

. . . your aim must be to teach your students to recognize the difference between truth and error. Your purpose here is to teach the students the error of the world’s philosophies, not to critique particular individuals.<sup>37</sup>

But, is it biblical not to do so? We contend that it is not only unbiblical, but naive. People who study biblical counseling do not necessarily limit themselves to the Bible. They often dip into numerous teachings by psychologically oriented individuals.

Rather than warn about those who attempt to integrate psychology and the Bible, BCF extols one of the leading founders of integrationist “Christian psychology,” Dr. Henry Brandt. Broger says in the 1990 edition of the *Self-Confrontation Syllabus*:

“We also owe a great debt to Dr. Jay E. Adams and Dr. Henry Brandt for their outstanding leadership and pioneering efforts in the area of authoritative biblical counseling. We thank God for their dedication and singleness of purpose in this important field of ministry.”

Strange acknowledgment since Brandt is an integrationist! Also, it is strange to link two such names (Brandt and Adams), when one is an integrationist and the other is not.

We provided evidence of Brandt’s integration to BCF some time prior to the Nelson printing of their syllabus. Nevertheless the 1992 BCF edition and the current edition include the following acknowledgment: “Dr. Brandt’s emphasis on Jesus Christ as the only source of true peace and joy greatly helped our focus in training.” While changed from the earlier acknowledgment, it still leaves the wrong impression. And, it is still strange, because Brandt is still an integrationist!

In addition, BCF is working together with a publisher of blatant psychoheresy. The BCF staff originally published the *Self-Confrontation Syllabus* themselves. However, they have given Thomas Nelson Publishers the rights to publish the syllabus “to expand the availability of *Self-Confrontation* to thousands of Christian bookstores.”<sup>38</sup> Nelson published it in early 1994 under the title *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship*. Nelson is one of the most blatantly psychological publishers in the Christian publishing field. Nelson has led large numbers of Christians astray with their psychological and recovery books. They ran a large, expensive eight-page insert for a special series of their recovery books in the June 1992 *New Age Journal* (a rank new-age publication). A Nelson representative even bragged about the fact that one New-Age distributor listed several of Nelson’s books among their top fifty best sellers. Why have the BCF Syllabus published by a publisher with such a visibly disreputable reputation for publishing books that are contrary to what BCF claims to stand for? Their explanation is “to expand the availability of *Self-Confrontation* to thousands of Christian bookstores.” However, if BCF had openly criticized Nelson authors who promote psychoheresy, it is doubtful that Nelson would have been interested.

Finally, BCF is clear about their own biblical position regarding charging money for counsel. They say: “Counselors associated with BCF provide their services as a ministry of the church without any charge or fee or any financial obligation, actual or implied.”<sup>39</sup> We commend BCF for that. Nevertheless, they are reluctant to openly criticize those who do.

## Conclusion

With all the problems related to biblical counseling training programs, we would recommend that all believers, including pastors, rely on Bible study and prayer for spiritual growth. Pastors should not send their sheep outside the church to psychological or biblical counseling shepherds. And, for all the reasons mentioned in our book, even a biblical counseling training program in the church, led by outsiders or even the pastor should be avoided.

The driving force behind the desire to be biblical counselors may often be the visibility, respect, and status that accompany the title of “counselor.” This has been conditioned by the secular psychological model. Nevertheless, biblical counsel should be a part of (not apart from) the biblically ordained ministries of the church. And, biblical counsel should be under, not over, the biblically ordained ministries.

Biblical counseling handbooks and training programs should be at best supplementary, just like lexicons, Bible dictionaries, etc. The following are questions we ask of pastors who teach their people by using a manual approach:

1. Are you attracting people to your biblical counseling class by intimidation, no matter how subtle?
2. Do your people regard the biblical counseling manual to be more exciting to study than the Bible, even if they and you would not admit it?
3. Do your people sense greater joy and confidence on your part when you use a counseling manual or handbook?
4. Is there an “in group” of people trained in biblical counseling and an “out group” of those who “only” go to church?
5. Is biblical counsel given in your church truly a part of or apart from the biblically ordained ministries of the church?

Depending on answers to the above questions, it may be that a biblical counseling manual or handbook could be used, provided it is used with discernment and only used as any other supplementary material and presented and received as such. However there is commonly a great misuse of these manuals to the detriment of Scripture. This is partly because of “oversell” on the part of various organizations, the idea of biblical counseling being an alternative to psychology, and the inherent nature of the problem-centered focus of many such manuals. A truly confidential survey in congregations that have a class in biblical counseling using a handbook or manual, particularly taught by the pastor, could be a shock.

The BCF manual is less than 20 years old. Its current version or nearly so is less than 3 years old. As indicated above, the latest version still has many problems that need correcting. Nevertheless, the statement on the cover has the audacity to present the manual as “The definitive resource for developing and assessing your faith and conduct.” The dictionary defines *definitive* as follows:

1. that decides or settles in a final way; decisive; conclusive
2. most nearly complete and accurate.

This type of puffing presents too positive a picture, which should embarrass even its most ardent promoters.

While we no longer recommend any manuals or training programs for biblical counseling, we would issue the following recommendations for changing the manual and for restraints if the BCF manual is to be used at all.

1. Use only as a supplement. Let those enrolled know that this is just one of many manuals, handbooks, lexicons, etc., that can be used to learn about the Bible.
2. Eliminate or restrict the type of sharing that is done in the assigned homework.
3. As much as possible, eliminate the use of such words as *counselor* and *counseling*, and do not use the word *counselor*.
4. In advertising the class, let the people know that one does not need the course in order to provide biblical counsel.
5. Speak out against the recovery and psychology books published by Nelson and other publishers, which are the antithesis of what BCF hopes to accomplish.
6. Eliminate all non-applicable or tangential verses in the manual.
7. The extended case study, “Mary’s Husband Has Left Her,” should be eliminated, modified, or, at minimum, read with caution.
8. Eliminate the oversell on the 105 biblical principles, reduce the hyperbolic presentation of the manual “to overcome any problem of life” and refrain from referring to it as “the definitive resource for developing and assessing your faith and conduct.”
9. Delete Supplement 6. It smacks of pure psychologizing.



10. Add warnings about charging money for counsel and operating counseling centers separated from the church. Become public about criticisms of those who compromise the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in counseling. Identify organizations and individuals where appropriate.

A church does not need to have a “counseling ministry” or a counselor training program for believers to minister to one another according to Scripture. After all, what did believers do for almost 2000 years without the biblical counseling movement? There has been some personal care among believers ministering to one another through encouragement, admonition, discernment, comfort, counsel, compassion, prayer, and discipleship. This happened among believers from the inception of the church, because people believed and acted according to the Word of God, by the very life of Christ living in and through them by the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

For years people have thought of biblical counseling as an alternative to psychological counseling. But, psychotherapy began as a religious alternative to Christianity. Therefore, rather than offering an alternative “look alike,” such as biblical counseling, we urge Christians to return to the Bible. Counsel from the Bible is not an alternative. It is God’s truth versus the counsel of the world. It is God’s light rather than the darkness of the wisdom of men. We call Christians back to the light of God’s Word and the life of Christ in the believer.

The biblical counseling movement as it currently exists must die. Is there any hope for the biblical counseling movement? Yes, but only resurrected in its proper place as a part of the biblically ordained ministries of the church. Instead of a “counseling” ministry Christians should follow the Bible regarding mutual care among believers, under biblically ordained leadership. The answer to problems of living is not biblical counseling, but ongoing biblical ministry in the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:13-16).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Martin and Deidre Bobgan. *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible*. Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate Publishers, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Letter on file.

<sup>3</sup>John C. Broger. *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994.

<sup>4</sup>“Equation for Effectiveness: Biblical Counseling = In-depth Discipleship,” *Insights from God’s Word from the staff of the Biblical Counseling Foundation*, 1994.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Broger. *op. cit.*, p. ix.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vi.

- 8*Ibid.*, Lesson 2, p. 2.
- 9*Ibid.*, Lesson 2, p. 6.
- 10William MacDonald. *Believer's Bible Commentary: New Testament*, Revised Edition. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990, pp. 43-44.
- 11Broger, *op. cit.*, p. x.
- 12*Ibid.*, Supplement 1, p. 1.
- 13*Ibid.*
- 14*Ibid.*, Supplement 2.
- 15*Ibid.*, Lesson 9, p. 13.
- 16*Ibid.*
- 17*Ibid.*, Lesson 10, pp. 13,14.
- 18*Ibid.*, Lesson 10, p. 13.
- 19William Glasser. *Reality Therapy*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965, p. 32.
- 20Broger, *op. cit.*, Lesson 12, p. 14.
- 21*Ibid.*
- 22*Ibid.*, Lesson 12, pp. 14,15.
- 23*Ibid.*, Lesson 13, p. 24.
- 24*Ibid.*, Lesson 15, p. 10.
- 25*Ibid.*, Lesson 15, p. 11.
- 26*Ibid.*, Lesson 24, p. 3.
- 27Jay E. Adams. *The Christian Counselor's Manual*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973.
- 28Broger, *op. cit.*, Supplement 1, p. 1.
- 29*Ibid.*
- 30See *ibid.* Lesson 6, p. 4.
- 31*Ibid.*, Lesson 6, p. 5.
- 32*Ibid.*, Lesson 6, pp. 4,5.
- 33*Ibid.*, Supplement 6, p. 3.
- 34*Ibid.*, Supplement 3, p. 1.
- 35*Ibid.*, Supplement 7, pp. 1-3.
- 36*Ibid.*, Lesson 4, p. 11.
- 37*Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship Instructors' Guide*, Lesson 4, p. 3.
- 38BCF *Counseling Notes*, 11/93.
- 39Broger, *Self-Confrontation: a manual for in-depth discipleship, op. cit.*, Supplement 2, p. 2.
- 40This paragraph to the end is excerpted from *Against Biblical Counseling: For the Bible, op. cit.*, pp. 190,191.