# Standards of Conduct

The Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling (1st Edition, October 2025)

---

**Preamble**

Biblical counseling ministry is an expression of our discipleship to the triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, offers salvation from sin and the wrath to come. This ministry is carried out by Christians who study the wonderful works and revelation of God in order to discern God's will for mankind, including their flourishing and ultimate redemption. Therefore, as ambassadors of the counsel of Christ, the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling and its certified counselors are committed to pursuing and upholding the highest standards of excellence, integrity, and transparency in pastoral care, discipleship, and counseling.

**Concerning the Gospel**

The Gospel of Jesus Christ provides the foundation for biblical counseling ministry. The Gospel provides mankind with the proper knowledge of God, man's fallen condition, and the salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:1–10). In this way, the Gospel is the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors are committed to "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). The Gospel enables Reformed biblical counselors to speak the truth to people about the world and their lives, including their shortcomings and troubles. They also speak about man's problems from the reference point of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5–6), who has accomplished salvation and secures for his people the benefits of adoption, justification, sanctification, and glorification (Rom 8:29–30). Following the Wonderful Counselor (Is 9:6), Reformed biblical counselors speak the truth of God's Word, confronting the wayward, admonishing the idle, encouraging the fainthearted, weeping with the mourning, helping the weak, restoring the lapsed, and encouraging the saints as God's people journey to a city prepared for them and await the return of Christ and the consummation of the Kingdom of God (Rom 12:15; Gal 6:1–2; 2 Thess 5:14; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Heb 11).

**Concerning Personal Discipleship**

As Jesus teaches that "no servant is greater than his master" (John 13:16), every biblical counselor is the sum of their discipleship to Christ. The foundation of a faithful biblical counseling ministry is a faithful life of walking in obedience to Christ as a disciple. This life must include seeking to honor and please God (2 Cor 5:9) in thought, word, deed, and conduct, seeking to do all things for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors are committed to visible progress (not perfection) in their discipleship to Christ, striving every day to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18) through personal devotions, mortification of sin, and striving for faithfulness in every sphere of life.

**Concerning the Local Church**

Biblical counseling is an extension of the ministry of the Word within local congregations. Faithful biblical counseling cannot be divorced from the context of the authority, ministries, and community of local congregations lawfully organized according to biblical principles (1 Tim 3:14–15). Biblical counseling, as a skillset of interpersonal tools for assisting the Spirit's work of accomplishing biblical change, recognizes the local church as the primary context for Christian discipleship and growth in godliness (Eph 4:11–16).

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors self-consciously submit their counseling practice to the governance and oversight of the local church. Reformed biblical counselors are faithful and supportive members of their local churches and their ministries. Reformed biblical counselors point their counselees to the importance of the local church and do not give the impression that God-glorifying change can be accomplished apart from membership and participation within a local congregation. While recognizing Christ as the head of the church (Col 1:18), Reformed biblical counselors work in cooperation with and, when necessary, submit to the spiritual authorities over their counselees, acknowledging and supporting their shepherding ministry, including their instruction, direction, care, and discipline (Heb 13:17). This recognition of the importance of submitting to spiritual authorities extends to their own spiritual supervision, including their competencies and credentials as a biblical counselor. If Reformed biblical counselors ever find themselves departing in conviction from Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, or their local church, they will communicate these developments promptly to both their church authorities and the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling.

**Concerning Personal Integrity**

Today's modern culture ignores and openly mocks many biblical virtues of godliness. As Scripture warns, there will be times when Christians confront men and women who are lovers of self, greedy, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient, ungrateful, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, reckless, conceited, quarrelsome, gossips, busybodies, ruthless, unappeasable, and malicious (Rom 1:28–31; 2 Tim 3:1–5). Christians, on the other hand, are called to pursue the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), as well as righteousness, faith, and integrity (2 Tim 2:22–26). Scripture also instructs Christians on the dangers of self-deception (1 Cor 10:12; Jas 1:22–27) and the need for watchfulness and accountability (Heb 3:7–13).

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors are committed to walking in integrity before God and man. They will live humble and transparent lifestyles before God and others, which prevent the development of incongruent patterns between their public image and private lifestyle and habits.

They will conduct themselves in a manner exemplary to all, fulfilling their responsibilities to their families, church community, and employers as a prerequisite for offering counsel to others. They will conduct themselves in all areas of life with dignity, honor, and respect, giving their opponents no reason or grounds for accusations of sin, misconduct, or impropriety (1 Pet 3:16). They will honor the dignity and reputation of all with which they come into contact, including other Christians and counselees. They will represent themselves in a dignified manner in all areas of life, including in public disputes and on social media.

**Concerning Personal Purity**

Christians are called to walk in a manner worthy of their calling as disciples of Christ (Phil 1:27), including their personal holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Although born in sin, Christians have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 6:11). This washing and sanctification include personal sexual sin, including adultery, homosexuality, immorality, and every other kind of sexual misconduct that occurs outside the context of the marriage covenant between a man and a woman (Gen 2:23–24; 1 Cor 6:9–10). Christians are called to flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18), so that sexual immorality and impurity are not even named among the people of God (Eph 5:3).

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors are committed to personal purity as an extension of their devotion to Christ and personal integrity. They believe as a biblical conviction that the marriage covenant is the only proper context for sexual expression and conjugal relations between a husband and a wife. They reject the psychological language that creates categories of identity and orientation that qualify biblical sexual ethics to excuse sexual immorality under the guise of “gender” and “sexual” orientation. They are convinced that God created man male and female, that marriage is the covenantal union of a man and a woman, and that Christians must confess and repent of any and all homosexual activity and desires, as well as any sexual expression outside the context of covenant marriage. Reformed biblical counselors abstain from any and all questionable media content, including songs, movies, and literature, in which these sins are celebrated. They abhor the destructive consequences of pornography, abuse, and sexual coercion, and oblige their counselees to do the same.

**Concerning Counseling Ministry**

It is one of life's greatest privileges to sit across from another person, made in God’s image, and hear their concerns, burdens, and struggles. As representatives of Christ (2 Cor 5:20), all Christians, biblical counselors included, are responsible for treating their counselees with honor, respect, and dignity (Rom 13:7). They are called to love their neighbors as themselves (Matt 22:39). They are commanded to be quick to hear and slow to speak (Jas 1:19) and conduct their counseling in a manner that is honorable in the sight of all (Rom 12:17).

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors are committed to offering compassionate, Christ-centered counseling, pastoral care, and discipleship. They pursue the opportunity to serve as biblical counselors not for selfish gain but out of love for God and their neighbor. They accurately present the exact nature of their counseling to the public in their advertisements, communications, and offerings, including their credentials, experience, and qualifications. They manage their scheduling, communication, environment, and counseling practice in a dignified, organized, and professional manner. They work laboriously to understand their counselees and the presenting issue(s) in counseling. They present their counselees with an orderly process of counseling, with a defined beginning and conclusion, as appropriate for the counseling need. Through research, reflection upon the Scriptures, and prayer, they commit to pursuing due diligence in deciding upon potential counsel for their counselees, including words of instruction, caution, comfort, and hope. As those equipped to counsel the Scriptures, they understand the context and limits of their counsel, deferring to other experts (medical, legal, psychiatric, etc.) when necessary. They are appropriately cautious in their assessment and communication of potential outcomes, not speaking rashly, overzealously, or pridefully about particular results of counseling. They respect the privacy of their counselees, upholding biblical standards of confidentiality in formal counseling relationships as they defend the dignity and honor of their counselees with utmost care. They study and self-regulate the requirements for confidentiality and reporting within their own states, including situations in which reporting evidence of the threat of harm and/or harm to the counselees and/or to others to proper authorities is required. They do not impede but submit to the work and sphere of secular authorities in the lives of their counselees. They protect their counselees, avoiding any and all evidence of improper interactions that would bring dishonor and shame to themselves, the Church, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Concerning Counseling Competency**

All Christians are called to conduct their work as unto the Lord (Gal 6:7). Those who teach the Word will be held to a higher account (Jas 3:1), and the Lord's servants are called to present themselves as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). While these passages are directed to ministers and office-bearers, they also extend to those who counsel the Word to others.

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors understand the importance of continually growing in their understanding of Scripture and in their counseling experience. They are continual learners, taking opportunities to read books and articles, attend trainings and seminars, observe seasoned biblical counselors, and pursue educational opportunities to grow and develop their counseling skills. Younger counselors strive to set an example of godliness and maturity in their speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tim 4:8). Older counselors present a model worthy of imitation to all in their life and counseling ministry.

**Concerning Conflict and Reconciliation**

Christians are called to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), striving for the unity of the faith and the bond of peace that should characterize the people of God who have received the Spirit of unity (Eph. 4:3, 13). All Christians face the perennial temptations to sinful conflict and quarrelsomeness because of the sinful passions which wage war within the sinful heart (2 Tim 2:23–26; Tit 3:9–11; Jas 4:1). Christians are called to be reconciled to their fellow brothers and sisters and live in harmony with one another (Matt 5:23–26, 18:33–35; Col 3:14). Sinful conflict brings disorder to the Church, who should stand as an example of love, unity, and charity to the watching world.

Therefore, Reformed biblical counselors make every effort to live at peace with all men, so far as it depends upon them (Rom 12:18). When necessary, they will follow the biblical principles for reconciliation outlined in Matt 18:15–20. They avoid unnecessary quarrels and conflicts over words, speculations, and opinions (1 Tim 1:4–7; 2 Tim 2:16–19). They are open to receiving correction in a spirit of humility. They speak only that which is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear (Eph 4:29). They avoid unnecessary conflicts and recognize the impact of their words in person, print, and in media upon the reputations of themselves, the Church, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion**

The Standards of Conduct allow the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling to maintain and enforce its expectations of excellence and competency in counseling, pastoral care, and discipleship among its certified counselors. The Standards of Conduct are informed by biblical principles and may be adjusted and/or edited by the leadership of the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling, if deemed necessary. Certified counselors of the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling are required to assent to the standards listed above in order to retain their certifications. By affirming these standards of conduct as part of the annual certification renewal process, certified counselors grant to the leadership of the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling, including the board of directors and its executive director, as well as the local church overseeing each counselor, the right, whether independently or jointly, to revoke a member’s certification without reimbursement and/or financial restitution. The Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling also reserves the right to investigate and respond to any reports or evidence of certified counselors violating these standards, including any activity that may bring unnecessary scandal and disrepute to the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling. Counselors also assent to using the counseling forms provided by the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling and/or take upon themselves personally and release the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling and the Shepherd's Way Counseling Ministry Network of any and all liability for the misuse or decision to use other forms in their counseling process.