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The Spiritual Act of Worship: A Government's

Duty to Protect a Biblical

Counselor's Purpose

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Abstract: This article explores the complex issue of state licensure for biblical counselors, shedding light on the potential implications of regulating this specific form of counseling. In a diverse landscape of counseling approaches and perspectives, state governments have increasingly sought to regulate the practice to ensure the well-being and safety of clients. However, such regulation raises concerns about religious freedom, ethical dilemmas, and the potential for overregulation and discrimination within the field of biblical counseling. How might state licensure of biblical counselors impact religious freedom, ethical practices, and the risk of overregulation, religious infringement, and discrimination in the field of biblical counseling? The thesis of this research article posits that given the principle of religious freedom in the United States, the state should not license biblical counselors, as doing so may impinge upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties. Achieving a balanced approach in counseling is crucial, one that honors the diversity of therapeutic methods while safeguarding the ability of individuals to access biblical counseling in harmony with their religious beliefs.

The article presents seven practical reasons why state licensure for biblical counselors may infringe upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties, followed by a biblically based apologetic for an eighth reason that is often overlooked. Drawing on Ed Wilde's insights, the article underscores the importance of freedom of religion in the United States. It also delves into the Reformed view from the Westminster Confession of Faith and the significance of Romans 12:1 and 12:2 in the context of surrender to God and the transformative process of renewing the believer's mind. This analysis highlights the biblical counselor's role in guiding individuals on this spiritual journey and the importance of protecting their right to do so without undue regulation or licensing.

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Introduction

The practice of counseling, with its diverse array of approaches and perspectives, has been the subject of increasing regulation and oversight by state governments. While the intention behind licensing counselors is to ensure the well-being and safety of clients, it also raises concerns about the potential infringement on religious freedom and the rights of biblical counselors, defined as those who counsel from a nouthetic standpoint and rely wholly on the sufficiency of Scripture in their practice. Achieving a balanced approach in counseling is crucial, one that honors the diversity of therapeutic methods while safeguarding the ability of individuals to access biblical counseling in harmony with their religious beliefs. How might state licensure for biblical counselors impact religious freedom, ethical practices, and the risk of overregulation, religious infringement, and discrimination in the field of biblical counseling? Given the principle of religious freedom in the United States, the state should not license biblical counselors, as doing so may impinge upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties. In this paper, seven practical reasons will be identified to support the thesis that the state should not license biblical counselors. Then, a biblically based apologetic will be offered for an eighth reason many do not consider.

Literature Review

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution enshrines the separation of Church and state, safeguarding the rights of individuals to practice their faith freely. This fundamental principle has been tested and shaped by historical, legal, and cultural developments, leading to a broader understanding of religious freedom. It encompasses more than merely the freedom to believe in a particular doctrine; it extends to practicing and expressing one's faith in diverse and meaningful ways. *Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling*, edited by Johnson and Wilde, is a

compendium of essays written “to encourage the church to engage responsibly in the ministry of biblical counseling while seeking to comply with governmental requirements that are not at odds with Scripture.”¹ Wilde underscores how religious freedom has grown to include a wide range of beliefs, religious practices, and rituals.² Further, he highlights the federal government's neutrality on doctrinal statements and the corresponding position of state governments. This neutrality underscores the principle that the state should not favor one religious doctrine over another. It is a fundamental tenet of religious freedom, ensuring that individuals and religious communities have the liberty to embrace their unique beliefs without state interference.³

The United States has a rich tapestry of religious diversity, with individuals and communities adhering to a myriad of doctrinal statements, interpretations, and traditions. This diversity is tolerated and celebrated, reflecting the nation's commitment to religious pluralism. It is at this crossroad that states will not interfere with biblical counselors and pastors. As such, the federal and state governments do not intervene in the specifics of religious doctrines, enabling individuals and groups to define their faith on their terms. Liturgical practices encompass the rituals, ceremonies, and modes of worship that are central to religious traditions. These practices span a broad spectrum in the United States, reflecting various religious communities' unique cultural and spiritual expressions.⁴

¹ Johnson and Wilde, *Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling: Direction and Help for Churches and Counselors*, 5, Kindle.

² *Ibid.*, 42-44.

³ *Ibid.*, 45. State neutrality in this regard ensures that individuals and religious organizations are free to conduct their religious ceremonies as they see fit, without state intervention or preference. This principle allows for various practices, from wearing vestments and facing directions during prayer to how religious symbols and sacraments are administered. In this sense, religious freedom goes beyond the realm of belief, extending to the manifestation of those beliefs in ritual and practice.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

The separation of church and state has its intentional specificities. In *Christian Counseling and the Law*, Levicoff seeks to help those in ministry understand where the law applies to ministry. Among a variety of topics, Levicoff reminds readers that pastors and biblical counselors have a responsibility in how they present themselves to the public.⁵ Although they biblically and spiritually counsel, they cannot mislead by touting credentials not earned. Levicoff argues, “Your best protection as a counselor is not to hold yourself out to be more than you’re qualified to be. If you are a trained lay Christian counselor, you should not be purporting to be a professional counselor. If you are a pastor, your business cards should not refer to you as a ‘professional counselor.’ The fact that counseling will be a significant part of your pastoral ministry is a given assumption.”⁶

Legal Issues and Religious Counseling by Bullis and Mazur is a handbook that “addresses issues of law for persons who have limited formal exposure to the principles and practice of American jurisprudence.”⁷ Bullis and Mazur state, “Religious exemption has its genesis in the free exercise clause and has created an autonomous area for clergy at courts, and legislators are reluctant to regulate.”⁸ Yet, while the principles of state neutrality and the expansive understanding of religious freedom serve as foundational ideals, they are not without challenges and conflicts. The diverse and evolving nature of religious beliefs and practices can sometimes lead to disputes and legal cases when they intersect with other societal interests or values. In some instances, these conflicts have raised questions about the boundaries of religious

⁵ Steve Levicoff, *Christian Counseling and the Law* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 33-41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷ Ronald K. Bullis and Cynthia S. Mazur, *Legal Issues and Religious Counseling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

freedom, particularly when they pertain to issues such as public health, civil rights, and discrimination.⁹ For example, when a biblical counselor or pastor counsels someone in an abusive situation, they must abide by their state law for reporting such cases. The responsibility of reporting is not moot because the biblical counselor is not state licensed.¹⁰

Seven Practical Reasons the State Should Not License Biblical Counselors

The literature review and lectures from the 2020 pre-conference of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference in Sun Valley, CA, provided background for reflection on the thesis. Seven practical reasons why state licensure for biblical counselors may infringe upon their religious convictions and restrict individual liberties and an eighth biblically based apologetic for a reason that is often overlooked, restriction to live in spiritual worship, follow:¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 49, 51. Bullis and Mazur discuss that the religious counselor must not ever counsel outside the “expectations of the cleric’s denominational standards.” Religious counselors need not seek state licensure because they should not represent themselves as “possessing counseling credentials they do not have.” However, religious counselors counsel, and they do with much to say on many matters and many responsibilities albeit from the biblical and spiritual viewpoint, i.e., denominational parameters.

¹⁰ Ibid.; “Alabama’s Mandatory Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Law: Code of Alabama. Title 26. Infants and Incompetents. Chapter 14. Reporting of Child Abuse or Neglect.” Lee County Schools. Accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.lee.k12.al.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=6208&dataid=304&FileName=AL_Reporting_Law.pdf.

¹¹ Johnson Jr. and Wilde; Bullis and Mazur; Levicoff; George Crawford, “Pre-Conference Session 2: Church Employment Law & Reporting” (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020); Deborah Dewart, “Pre-Conference Session 4: Biblical Counseling and Religious Liberty” (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020); Todd Sorell, “Pre-Conference Session 5: The Relationship Between the Local Church and a Local Lawyer” (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020); Steve Viars, “Pre-Conference Session 3: Shepherding the Flock through Legal Issues” (lecture, The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Conference, Sun Valley, CA, October 5-6, 2020).

1. Freedom of Religion

One of the fundamental principles underlying the opposition to state licensure for biblical counselors is the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion. Licensing biblical counselors could place undue restrictions on their ability to provide faith-based guidance. Though biblical counselors should be familiar with secular treatment modalities, since some counselees have been under the care of a licensed counselor and may use therapeutic language, biblical counselors may be compelled to adopt secular principles in their practice to meet state standards. This potential conflict can infringe upon their constitutional right to practice their faith freely.

2. Ethical Concerns

Biblical counselors adhere to ethical principles rooted in their religious beliefs, which may differ from secular counseling standards. Licensing these counselors by the state could force them to compromise their religious convictions by requiring adherence to guidelines that may contradict their beliefs. This ethical dilemma could undermine the integrity of their counseling and the well-being of their clients.

3. Diverse Religious Perspectives

There are numerous religious and spiritual belief systems, each with its own distinct counseling approach. Mandating state licensure of those who deliver spiritual counsel could result in a bias towards one religious perspective while overlooking the diverse array of belief systems. This type of government mandate risks marginalizing biblical counselors and restricting access to faith-based counseling services on which many individuals and communities rely.

4. Overregulation

Proponents of licensing argue that it ensures a certain level of competence and safeguards clients from unqualified practitioners. However, excessive regulation may lead to a shortage of qualified counselors, as many biblical counselors may choose not to undergo the state licensure process due to their deeply held religious convictions. This shortage could negatively impact individuals seeking faith-based counseling.

5. Client Autonomy

State licensure for biblical counselors may also undermine the autonomy of clients who willingly seek counseling from faith-based practitioners. By imposing state standards, the government may interfere with clients' choices and limit their access to counselors who align with their religious beliefs and values.

6. Interference with Ministry

Many biblical counselors consider their work an extension of their ministry, and state licensure can be perceived as governmental interference in religious practices.¹² The government

¹² It should be noted this is based upon the First Amendment, and Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1 rights of the U.S. Constitution Bill of Rights: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (“The Bill of Rights: A Transcription,” National Archives, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>) and “nor shall any State . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of laws” (“The Constitution: Amendments 11-27,” National Archives, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27>). In the case, *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 1940, the Supreme Court ruled that “freedom of conscience and freedom to adhere to such religious organization or form of worship as the individual may choose cannot be restricted by law” (“*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296 (1940),” Justia: U.S. Supreme Court, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/310/296/>). In this author’s state of South Carolina, state code 40-75-190 exempts clergy from exercising ministerial responsibilities including counseling that protects confidences (“South Carolina Code of Laws Unannotated,” South Carolina Legislature, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t40c075.php>). Invariably, there are Federal and State laws in place to protect one’s means of religious practices.

may inadvertently stifle religious institutions' role in addressing their congregants' nouthetic health needs by requiring licensure.

7. Potential for Discrimination

State licensure can lead to discrimination against certain religious groups or counseling approaches. It tends to create a hierarchical system that places secular counseling above faith-based counseling. Such a system may lead to unequal access to mental health services and prejudice against specific religious beliefs.

The above are sound reasons for the state not to regulate biblical counselors through licensure. However, an eighth reason why the state should not license biblical counselors is often missed, and the literature provides no good biblically based apologetic, at least not one this researcher has come across: restriction to live in spiritual worship.

A Biblically-Based Eighth Reason the State Should Not License Biblical Counselors

8. Restriction to Live in Spiritual Worship

Wilde highlights the enduring principle of religious liberty and underscores the challenges that emerge when defining the practical scope of this fundamental right. For example, he explains, “But you also must understand that in this welter of laws and regulations, the people making the laws think they are doing something useful. Even when a government official has a personal aim of stopping the public practice of the Christian religion, that official thinks he is doing something good (John 16:2).”¹³

¹³ Johnson and Wilde, 37.

Throughout history, the United States has upheld religious freedom as a core tenet, recognizing the inherent worth of each individual's beliefs and the principle that the state shall not establish or interfere with religious institutions. This commitment has resulted in an intricate legal framework accommodating an astonishing array of religious practices, beliefs, and diversity, creating a nation known for its religious pluralism.

Though the church must operate under the laws of the nation, it also has doctrinal statements to consider. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* supports the state's responsibility to protect religious worship without interference, though it would limit that worship to the one, true God. In addition, Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1-2 refers to the content of the biblical counselor's essential work—discipleship. An analysis of these two works will demonstrate that a restriction to live in spiritual worship poses another reason the state should not license biblical counselors.

Reformed View of State Protection

Chapter 23 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* is titled “Of the Civil Magistrate” and deals with the state's role concerning religious worship, particularly the civil magistrate. This chapter underscores the importance of government in safeguarding and protecting the freedom of religious worship. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, a foundational document in Reformed Christian theology, emphasizes that the state, represented by the civil magistrate, has a divinely ordained duty to protect the true worship of God.¹⁴ It asserts that the civil magistrates' authority is derived from God and that they are accountable to Him for their actions.¹⁵ Therefore, the civil

¹⁴ “The WCF Chapter 23: Of the Civil Magistrate,” The Westminster Standards with Video and Audio Teaching Resources, accessed January 26, 2024, <https://thewestminsterstandards.com/wcf-chapter-23-of-the-civil-magistrate/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

magistrates should use their authority to uphold and promote true religion, protect religious worship from any form of interference, and prevent false worship and idolatry. Likewise, a biblical counselor should be exempt from interference as well.

This chapter articulates that the state should ensure that religious assemblies are held peacefully and without hindrance.¹⁶ It also addresses the importance of preserving and promoting unity in the faith, while respecting the conscience of individual believers. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* acknowledges that the state's involvement in religious matters should not entail infringing on the jurisdiction of the Church, which maintains its spiritual authority.

In summary, chapter 23 of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* underscores the importance of the state in safeguarding religious worship and ensuring that it is conducted without interference or persecution. It recognizes the civil magistrates' responsibility to protect true religion, uphold the peace, and prevent idolatry, while respecting the Church's spiritual jurisdiction, which extends to the biblical counselor. This chapter emphasizes the need for a harmonious relationship between the state and the Church to promote religious freedom and the purity of worship. What does that “worship” include? It will be the apologetic of the continuation of this article that one's worship is one's daily living.

Romans 12:1-2 – Your Spiritual Act of Worship

Although the state views the Christian's worship as what may happen within the four walls of the church building and includes the liturgy, vestments, and aesthetics, Paul makes the point in Romans 12:1-2 that the Christian's worship is one's life. The Christian's daily worship is spiritual.

^{12:1} *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* ² *Do not be conformed to*

¹⁶ Ibid.

*this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*¹⁷

Goal

In Romans 12:1, the Apostle Paul delivers a compelling call to the believers in Rome, marked by the words, “Therefore I urge you.” These two words in the original language carry profound significance in the context of Paul's message, as they emphasize the necessity of a complete surrender to God. The profound theological and practical implications of Paul's exhortation shed light on the significance of presenting one's body as a living sacrifice. Paul's exhortation is the biblical counselor's essential work—discipleship.

Paul's challenge to present one's body as a living sacrifice underlines the essence of the victorious Christian life. The biblical counselor's message extends outside the four walls of the church building, worship service, and yes, even the counseling room because it is not enough to possess theoretical knowledge of the truths expounded in Romans 6-8, which deal with the freedom from sin's penalty and power through faith in Christ. The practical outworking of this transformation hinges on surrendering one's body so that Christ's life can manifest in everyday living.

Surrendering one's body is a deliberate act of worship, a response to God's unmerited mercy and grace. It entails acknowledging that our lives are not our own but are now devoted to the service of the Creator. This act of consecration is the ultimate key to living the Christian life victoriously.

Paul's choice of words in “I urge you” highlights the character of God's invitation to believers. God does not compel or coerce individuals into presenting their bodies as living

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version. “Romans 12:1–2 ESV,” Biblia by Logos, <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/romans/12/1-2>.

sacrifices. He does not treat them as unruly horses that require bridling and forced obedience. Instead, God beseeches them, calling them to make this offering willingly. The appeal carries an inherent respect for human free will and a desire for unbridled devotion, where surrender is a heartfelt response to God's love and grace.

The critical link between the word “therefore” and the phrase “I urge you” cannot be understated. Paul's plea emerges from a profound consideration of the “mercies of God” that he has elaborated in the preceding chapters of Romans. These mercies encompass God's grand work of salvation—redeeming humanity from sin, sanctifying believers to become set apart for His purposes, and ultimately promising glorification.

God's mercies besiege the believer with unmerited favor, a ceaseless “cannonade of kindness” that overflows into the believer's life.¹⁸ The “therefore” serves as a bridge, connecting the magnificent work of God with the believer's appropriate response. It affirms that presenting one's body to God is the right and fitting thing to do, an inevitable and heartwarming response to a love that is both amazing and divine.

Paul's appeal in Romans 12:1 is not a one-time event but the first step in a lifelong journey of surrender and sanctification. While deeper levels of submission may follow, the initial presentation of the body is essential. It marks the starting point for Christians to live in obedience and devotion to God. Biblical counselors disciple others in two areas for daily obedience and devotion to God: thinking and behaving.

¹⁸ John Phillips, *Exploring Romans: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), Romans 12:1, Logos Electronic Software.

Teaching People How to Behave

Romans 12:1 begins with the compelling exhortation, “Therefore I urge you,” before unveiling the significance of presenting one's body as a “living and holy sacrifice” to God. A common misconception that plagues some believers is the separation of doctrine from duty in the Christian life. This dichotomy arises when individuals express a desire to live their faith without grounding themselves in a deep understanding of God's Word. However, the Apostle Paul presents a different perspective. He emphasizes that the Christian life is fundamentally rooted in knowledge and understanding, and the better one comprehends biblical doctrine, the easier it becomes to fulfill Christian duties (Romans 1-11 and Romans 12-16).

Paul's assertion serves as a reminder that knowledge and practice are intrinsically connected in the Christian life. Doctrine informs duty, and theology shapes ethics. Understanding the depths of God's mercies and His divine plan provides the foundation for the outworking of faith through practical Christian living. John Stott states:

All true worship is a response to the self-revelation of God in Christ and Scripture, and arises from our reflection on Who He is and what He has done. . . . The worship of God is evoked, informed and inspired by the vision of God. Worship without theology is bound to degenerate into idolatry. Hence the indispensable place of Scripture in both public and private devotion. It is the Word of God which calls forth the worship of God. On the other hand, there should be no theology without doxology. There is something fundamentally flawed about a purely academic interest in God. God is not an appropriate object for cool, critical, detached, scientific observation and evaluation. No, the true knowledge of God will always lead us to worship, as it did Paul. Our place is on our faces before him in adoration.¹⁹

Presenting one's body to God goes beyond mere intellectual assent; it involves a deliberate and decisive commitment. The term “present” (παρίστημι) conveys the idea of placing something at someone's disposal.²⁰ In this case, believers place their entire being at God's disposal. It is an act

¹⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, ed. J.A. Motyer, John R. W. Stott, and Derek Tidball (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 320-324.

²⁰ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 55, Logos Electronic Software.

of unreserved devotion, acknowledging that their lives are now wholly devoted to the service of the Creator.

The “living and holy sacrifice” presented to God starkly contrasts the lifeless and profane sacrifices of the Old Testament. In this New Covenant era, God desires sacrifices not made on an altar of stone but on the altar of the believer's heart. The Christian's sacrifice is living, reflecting the vitality and transformation that come through faith in Christ.

The phrase “spiritual service of worship” underscores the spiritual nature of this offering. It signifies that the devotion presented to God is deeply rooted in the spiritual realm and transcends mere external acts. Worship is not confined to a specific time or place but is interwoven into the fabric of daily living.

Teaching People How to Think

Romans 12:2 encapsulates a pivotal concept in Christian living: the transformation of believers through the renewal of their minds. In contrast to conforming to the patterns of the world, this verse emphasizes the radical change that occurs within the Christian's inner life. The profound meaning of Romans 12:2 highlights this transformative process's theological significance and practical implications.

The Apostle Paul commands believers: “Do not be conformed to this world.” The Greek term “conform” (συσχηματίζω) denotes a process of molding or shaping according to an external pattern.²¹ It carries the sense of adapting to the world's prevailing culture, mindset, or behavior. Conformity to the world results in a mindset contrary to God's will and righteousness.

²¹ Strong, 70.

Paul follows his prohibition of conformity with a positive injunction: “But be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” The term “transform” (μεταμορφόω) denotes a profound, qualitative change, as seen in the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly.²² It signifies a radical transformation of one's inner nature, character, and worldview.

The transformation process is initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who operates from within the believer. It is not a self-effort but a divine work. As believers yield to God and meditate on His Word, the Holy Spirit gradually renews their minds. This renewal involves a profound and fundamental change in thinking, values, and perspectives.

The purpose of the renewed mind is multifaceted. The verse highlights that it enables believers to discern “what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). A renewed mind equips believers to understand and align with God's perfect plan for their lives.

Again, John Stott explains how transformation takes place, noting that

although Paul does not here tell us how our mind becomes renewed, we know from his other writings that it is by a combination of the Spirit and the Word of God. Certainly, regeneration by the Holy Spirit involves the renewal of every part of our humanness, which has been tainted and twisted by the fall, and this includes our mind. But in addition, we need the Word of God, which is the Spirit's ‘sword,’ and which acts as an objective revelation of God's will. Here then are the stages of Christian moral transformation: first our mind is renewed by the Word and Spirit of God; then we are able to discern and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it.²³

Romans 12:2 underscores the vital connection between the renewal of the mind and discerning God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. This ongoing transformative process marks the path to a life that pleases God. As believers yield to God and engage in mind renewal, they discover the beauty of God's will and grow in their ability to discern His perfect plan for their lives.

²² Strong, 47.

²³ Stott, 320-324.

Ultimately, obedience to God's will is the key to unlocking spiritual knowledge and experiencing the goodness of His perfect will. As noted above, the state may view the Christian's worship as what may happen within the four walls of the church building, but Paul makes the point in Romans 12:1-2 that the Christian's worship is one's life.

Conclusion

While regulating counseling services aims to protect clients, it is essential to recognize the potential consequences of licensing biblical counselors. Imposing state licensure on these practitioners raises concerns about religious freedom, ethical dilemmas, and the potential for overregulation and discrimination. A balanced approach, striking a balance between the protection of the public and the preservation of religious freedom, is necessary to respect the diversity of counseling approaches and ensure that individuals can seek guidance that aligns with their deeply held beliefs. Any consideration of state licensure for biblical counselors should be considered carefully, weighing the rights and liberties of both counselors and clients.

Wilde's statement sheds light on the enduring importance of freedom of religion in the United States and the evolution of this concept to include an array of beliefs, doctrines, and liturgical practices.²⁴ The nation's commitment to state neutrality in religious matters has allowed for a rich tapestry of religious diversity and expression. However, it is essential to recognize that the practical application of religious freedom is not devoid of challenges, and legal debates persist about the boundaries and intersections of religious freedom with other societal values.

Romans 12:1 serves as a clarion call to all believers, urging them to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God. In the context of God's incredible mercies—His saving, sanctifying, and

²⁴ Johnson and Wilde, 42-44.

glorifying work—this surrender is not a compulsory act but a heartfelt response to the love and grace of the Creator. It is the ultimate key to living a victorious Christian life, where faith in Christ transforms every aspect of daily living. While additional steps of surrender may follow, this initial presentation of the body is essential, setting believers on a path of deepening fellowship and devotion to the One who beseeches them with unfathomable love.

This living and holy sacrifice represents a radical transformation, reflecting the vitality and holiness that come through faith in Christ. The concept of worship extends beyond formal rituals, encompassing every facet of the believer's life. In the end, Romans 12:1 calls for a holistic approach to worship, where every moment and every action becomes an act of devotion to the Creator, responding to His immense love and grace.

Romans 12:2 calls believers to embrace the transformative process of renewing their minds. This process, initiated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, sets believers on a journey to discern God's will, experience His goodness, align with His moral standards, and embrace His perfect plan for their lives.

Resisting conformity to the world is a conscious decision to yield to God's transformative work. A renewed mind enables believers to navigate life with wisdom, integrity, and purpose, consistently making choices that reflect God's desires. Romans 12:2 serves as a blueprint for living a life distinct from the world and deeply connected to the divine will. It is the biblical counselor's duty to disciple individuals with this spiritual living as their goal, and the state must protect the biblical counselor's right to do so without undue regulation or licensing.

What Is Next?

Based on the conclusions above, the next steps for research in this area could focus on several key aspects:

1. **Impact Assessment of State Licensure on Biblical Counseling:** Further research could conduct empirical studies to assess the impact of state licensure on the practice of biblical counseling. This research could explore how licensure affects the availability, accessibility, and quality of biblical counseling services. It would be particularly useful to study the experiences of states that have already implemented such licensure requirements, comparing them with states that have not.
2. **Balancing Religious Freedom and Public Protection:** In addition, future research could investigate the legal and ethical dimensions of balancing religious freedom with the need to protect the public in the context of counseling services. This research could involve analyzing existing legal frameworks and court cases that have addressed similar issues. It could also explore potential models for regulation that respect religious freedom while ensuring client safety and ethical practice.
3. **Comparative Studies of Counseling Approaches:** Another focus could be to conduct comparative studies between biblical counseling and other forms of counseling (e.g., secular, spiritual but non-Christian). This research could aim to understand the unique benefits and challenges of each approach, as well as their effectiveness in different contexts.
4. **Policy Development and Recommendations:** Finally, future research could develop policy recommendations based on research findings that address the concerns raised

about religious freedom, ethical dilemmas, and the potential for overregulation and discrimination in the licensure of biblical counselors.

In summary, the next steps for research in this area should aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of state licensure for biblical counselors, exploring legal, ethical, social, and religious dimensions, and should aim to develop balanced solutions that respect both religious freedom and the need for public protection in the counseling domain.

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