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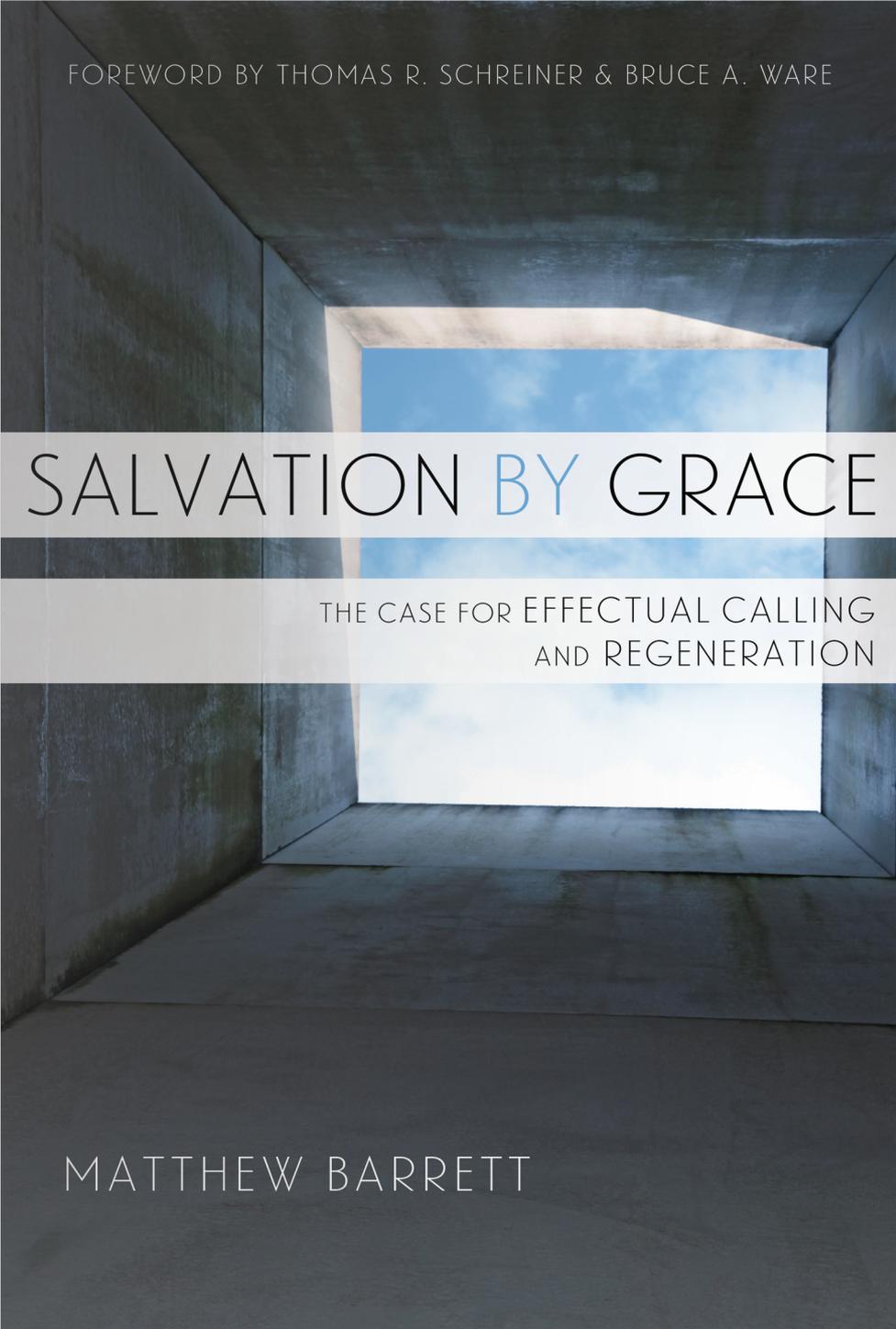
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FOREWORD BY THOMAS R. SCHREINER & BRUCE A. WARE

SALVATION BY GRACE

THE CASE FOR EFFECTUAL CALLING
AND REGENERATION

MATTHEW BARRETT

"This is quite simply the most thorough and convincing account of divine sovereignty, both over the new birth and over effectual calling, that I've ever read. It is historically informed, lucidly written, eminently practical, and, most important of all, biblically faithful. This book, and Matthew Barrett in particular, renews my confidence that the so-called young, restless, and Reformed are in good hands and moving in the right direction. *Salvation by Grace* merits a wide reading and will undoubtedly prove to be an indispensable resource for the serious student of God's Word. I cannot recommend it too highly."

-**Sam Storms**, Lead
Pastor for Preaching and
Vision, Bridgeway
Church, Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma

Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration presents a magisterial case that God's grace is monergistic--that God acts alone, apart from human cooperation, to effectually call and sovereignly regenerate sinners. Thus effectual calling and regeneration logically precede conversion in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), thereby ensuring that all of the glory in salvation belongs to God, not to man. Matthew Barrett also evaluates Arminian and modified views of the nature of God's grace in salvation, finding them unbiblical because they fail to do justice to the scriptural portrayal of God's sovereignty and glory in salvation.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

**24. BITS-N-BOBS OR WHOLE PIECES?
HOW TO BECOME A BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN**

by Darian R. Lockett

**30. WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?
ORIGINS AND CONTEMPORARY TYPES**

by Edward W. Klink III

**40. GOING ON A JOURNEY? DON'T FORGET THE MAP:
THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
FOR SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY**

by Stephen Dempster

50. THE BIG PICTURE JESUS

by David Murray

**56. PUTTING THE WHOLE BIBLE TOGETHER:
FIVE BIBLICAL THEOLOGIANS SHARE WHAT THEY
HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE STORYLINE OF THE BIBLE**

*Matthew Barrett with Thomas Schreiner, T. Desmond Alexander,
Gregory K. Beale, Peter J. Gentry, and Stephen J. Wellum*

**74. GOING DEEPER WITH RICHARD GAFFIN: GAFFIN INTRODUCES
ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BIBLICAL
THEOLOGIANS OF THE PAST, GEERHARDUS VOS**

5. FROM THE EDITOR by Matthew Barrett

7. TEN QUESTIONS with Justin Taylor

12. FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

What is Your Favorite Book of the Bible to Preach From and Why?

14. ON A SCALE FROM 1-10

How Important is the Discipline of Biblical Theology to Healthy Local Church Ministry?

16. EXPLORING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

An Interview with James Hamilton

**84. THE REFORMED PASTOR: THE GOD WHO
BECAME HUMAN** by Graham Cole

87. BOOK REVIEWS

**108. FIRST PRINCIPLES: HOW TO
AVOID BIBLICAL ILLITERACY**

by Matthew Barrett

FROM THE EDITOR

When the sixteenth-century Reformation erupted, one of the alarming dangers that became blatantly obvious to reformers like Martin Luther was the pervasiveness of biblical illiteracy among the laity. It may be tempting to think that this problem has been solved almost five hundred years later. However, in our own day biblical illiteracy in the pew continues to present a challenge. Many Christians in our post-Christian context simply are not acquainted with the storyline of the Bible and God's actions in redemptive history from Adam to the second Adam.

With this concern in mind, the current issue of *Credo Magazine* strives to take a step forward, in the right direction, by emphasizing the importance of "biblical theology." Therefore, we have brought together some of the best and brightest minds to explain what biblical theology is, why it is so important, and how each and every Christian can become a biblical theologian.

Our hope in doing so is that every Christian will return to the text of Scripture with an unquenchable appetite to not only read the Bible, but comprehend God's unfolding plan of salvation. 

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Executive Editor



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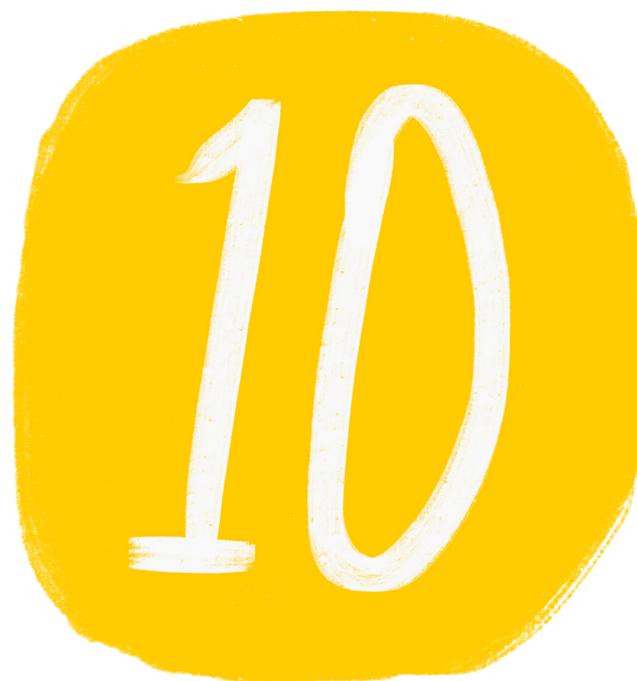
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10 Questions for Justin Taylor

Interview by Gary Steward



I first met Justin Taylor in 1998 when we both became “apprentices” at The Bethlehem Institute, an internship program at Bethlehem Baptist Church (which has since grown into Bethlehem College and Seminary.) Justin’s [Between Two Worlds](#) blog at The Gospel Coalition is well-known and full of good stuff. Justin is Senior VP and Publisher for Books at Crossway and a Ph.D. student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

that I wanted to pray with him to become a Christian. I prayed the “Sinner’s Prayer” and re-invited Jesus into my heart countless times while growing up (by which time we belonged to a United Methodist church). Between my freshman and sophomore years of high school, at an FCA camp in Estes Park, Colorado, the Lord used the Evangelism Explosion questions to reorient my heart and mind toward the freedom and beauty of justification by grace alone through faith alone.

1 Normally you’re the one conducting interviews. But since we are asking the questions this time, can you tell us about where you’re from and how you became a Christian?

I was born and raised in Sioux City, Iowa. My first demonstrable response to the gospel was as a very young boy, listening to a sermon by an Assemblies of God pastor and telling my mom

2 Tell us, how did God work in your life as a Christian while a college student at the University of Northern Iowa?

During my freshmen year there were perhaps a few dozen students involved in various Christian ministries. The Lord brought several key leaders together to begin a weekly event where the various organizations—Campus Crusade, FCA, Navigators, InterVarsity—could

gather on campus for a time of worship, testimony, and teaching. It was an easy way to invite unbelievers, especially as the size increased. By the time I graduated there were over 900 students—out of a campus of 13,000 total—each week. My commitment to the local church was more as an attender (consumer?) and less as an active member, which I regret. On the other hand, my experience of Christian friendship grew deeper, as well as my understanding of Christian theology. I was a religion major at a public university, with a liberal Harvard-trained advisor who wanted Christians to rethink the coherence, historicity, and plausibility of the Christian faith in a relativistic and pluralistic world. This led to a crisis of faith, which the Lord used in my life. It also meant that I had to read a steady diet of apologetics books just to survive intellectually.

3 While at Bethlehem Baptist Church, John Piper asked you to work closely with him at Desiring God Ministries. What are a few of the most significant things you took away from your time in Minneapolis?

There are so many things that could be said here. But three things come to mind, especially as exemplified by John Piper. First, God really matters. He does

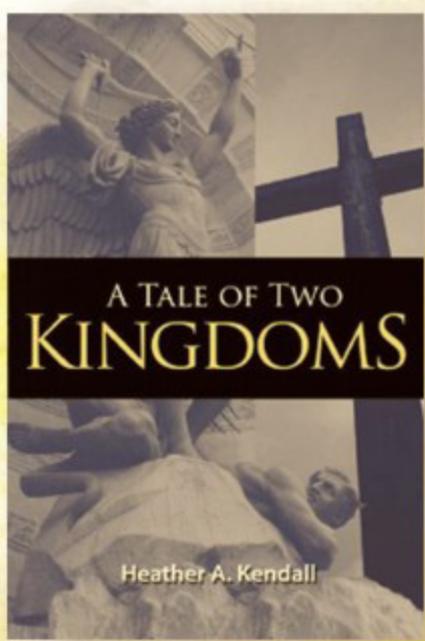
not like being assumed. He likes being pursued with informed affection. Second, exegesis should not be assumed. I did not see in Minneapolis a naïve biblicism that eschews history or systematic theology. But there was a constant desire to test all things according to the Word. Digging into the text, rather than just raking over the surface, was modeled and constantly commended. Third, humility must be pursued. This was less “taught” than “caught,” and it’s really an overflow of allegiance to God’s supremacy and the priority of his Word. Authoritarianism and arrogance are both undermined when we are mutually submitting to a higher Authority.

4 Overall, what individuals or authors would you say have been the most influential on your theology and Christian worldview?

Historically, probably Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, and Herman Bavinck. In terms of contemporary Christian thinkers, J. I. Packer, John Piper, and John Frame.

5 What is it that you do at Crossway and what upcoming projects are you particularly excited about?

Discovering The Big Picture in the Bible



We live in a day when it is vital for Christians to communicate the big picture of what our faith is all about...A Tale of Two Kingdoms is a helpful tool in doing just this. It sets forth this big picture, with God at it centre, in a non-technical way but one that is faithful to the Bible.

Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

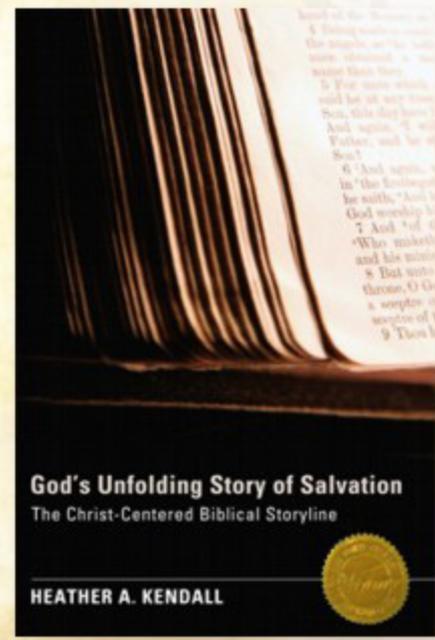
- A history of God's Plan of Salvation
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"God's Unfolding Story of Salvation" is a biblical complement to Heather Kendall's earlier work...It is highly recommended for study groups as well as individuals who desire a clearly written, biblically accurate, spiritually encouraging treasure that lucidly documents with Scripture the Christ-centered message revealed in the progressive unfolding of redemptive history.

Gary D. Long, Th.D. Faculty President, Providence Theological Seminary

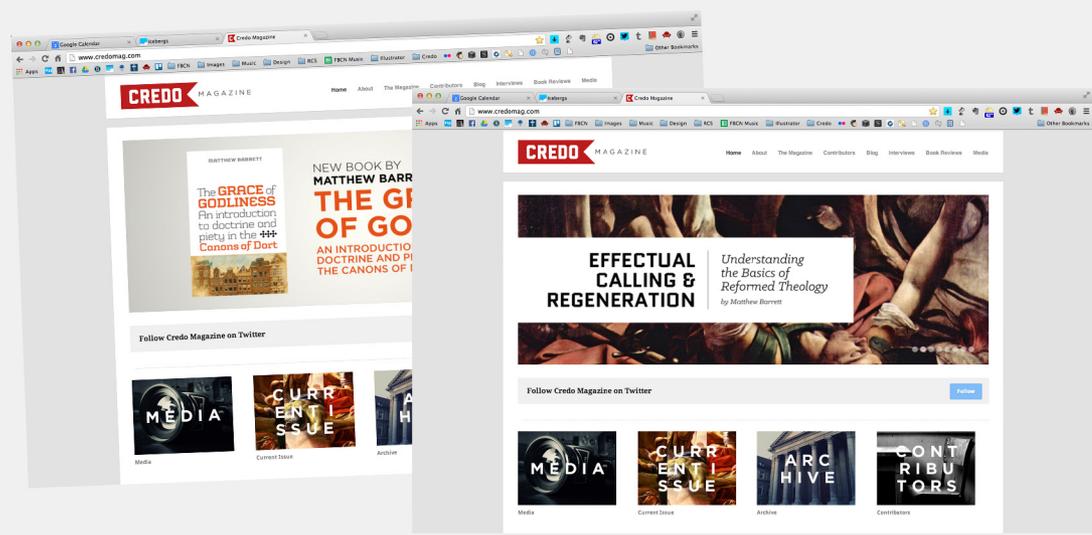


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Crossway is a publisher of books, Bibles, and tracts. I oversee the book division side of the company. Here are a few of the books I am particularly looking forward to:

Jason Meyer's *Preaching: A Biblical Theology*

David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson's edited volume, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*

James Hamilton's *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns*

James Anderson's *What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions*

David Wells's *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World.*

6 Where does the work of publishers like Crossway fit in with the needs of the Church, particularly in light of the state of twenty-first century evangelicalism?

Christian publishers invest in, partner with,

and promote authors who have a message they would like codified and disseminated. This is for good or for ill—the result is either instruction and edification, or undermining and confusion. My hope and prayer is that God will keep publishers like Crossway faithful in its mission to publish gospel-centered materials that serve the Church and glorify the Lord.

7 Blogging at Between Two Worlds is a major part of your life. How did you get involved in blogging and why do you do it?

I started, I believe, in the fall of 2004. Through email I would trade items of interest around the web with friends of mine, and I thought it might be helpful to do this more widely. It's become a way to share things I find interesting and edifying with the hope that others will find them the same. I really do hope that it serves people.

8 How is the digital age changing the Christian publishing industry? Will I still be able to buy printed books in twenty years?

Yes, you will still be able to buy printed books twenty years from now, even if it is a bit harder for publishers to make them as profitable. Obviously digital is here to stay. It continues to increase, but has plateaued

somewhat. The utopians—or are they dystopians?—are almost certainly wrong when they envision an entirely digital future. At the same time, the publishing industry will need to continue to adjust to changing market realities and trends. No one knows precisely how the balance will land between print and digital, so it's something we all continue to monitor.

9 You were intensively involved in the production of the ESV Study Bible. Why is a study Bible such an important tool for lay people?

God has given the Church the gift of teachers (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11), and this is a gift we should gratefully receive and not reject. A tool like the *ESV Study Bible* collects the concise commentary of such godly teachers as an aid for our own understanding of the Word. It's not meant to replace inductive study, but provides insight, perspective, teaching, and counsel from those who have devoted themselves to years of intensive study of particular books in God's Word. Study Bibles can be misused, but when appropriated properly, they can be a meaningful means of instruction for God's people.

10 What wisdom, insight, and advice can you give to young, aspiring writers?

Frederick Buechner once wrote “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” Find that place. A good book is one where the author's competency meets the author's passion meets the audience's real (not just felt) needs. God does not call everyone to publish the written word. But if he has, work hard at it. It is a craft, not a project. If God gives you the gifts and the opportunities to write, seek to improve a little bit each day as you depend on him and seek to serve his people.

Justin Taylor is Senior VP and Publisher for Books at Crossway and a Ph.D. student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. He blogs at *Between Two Worlds at the Gospel Coalition*. 

FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

“What is Your Favorite Book of the Bible to Preach From and Why?”

Steve DeWitt

My straight up answer is that my favorite book to preach is whatever one I am currently preaching! That would make 1 John my current favorite book to preach. My favorite book in memory would probably be Ruth. It tells a wonderful story of love and hope that highlights God's sovereignty and Christ's loving redemption.

***Steve DeWitt** is Senior Pastor of Bethel Church, Crown Point, IN, and author of Eyes Wide Open: Enjoying God in Everything.*

Greg Gilbert

I have loved preaching through the book of Matthew over the past four Autumns. Jesus' kingship in that book is so glorious and so compelling, and it is often surprising, too. I am constantly amazed at what I learn and see in Matthew's story—things I have never seen before, even though I've read the book dozens of times. God's Word is inexhaustible, and the deeper you dig, the more that becomes apparent.

***Greg Gilbert** is Senior Pastor of Third Avenue Baptist Church and author of What is the Gospel?*

Terry Johnson

I have followed Calvin's example of preaching from the gospels and Acts on Sunday morning. Because of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, with beatitudes, exposition of the Law, Lord's Prayer, etc., it is my favorite of the gospels.

Terry Johnson is Senior Minister of Independent Presbyterian Church, Savannah, Georgia and author of *Galatians: A Mentor Expository Commentary*

Todd Wilson

A year ago I would have said Galatians because I love Paul's letters and find myself at home in his thought-world. But having recently preached the Gospel of John, I have a new appreciation for the gospel stories and their accessible yet exalted vision of Jesus.

Todd Wilson is Senior Pastor of Calvary Memorial Church and author of *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living* 

ON A SCALE FROM 1-10

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE DISCIPLINE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY TO HEALTHY LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY?

10

James M. Hamilton Jr., author of *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*:

What could be more important to followers of Jesus than learning to read the Bible the way that he did, learning to read the Bible the way that he taught his Apostles to read it, the way they taught the earliest churches to read it? Being a disciple of Jesus means learning to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors. That's what Biblical Theology is.

5

Mike Stallard, Dean, *The Baptist Bible Seminary of PA*:

If my own definition of biblical theology is allowed, I would put a '10.' However, while possessing some good interpretive qualities, there are several problems with the redemptive historical (biblical theological) approach that lowers my evaluation: (1) it tends to bring too much theological baggage into the exegetical process, especially, but not limited to, the reading of Old Testament promises in light of New Testament theology; (2) it tends to focus too much on unity to the exclusion of diversity in the biblical texts sometimes causing a forced unity that the various texts really do not yield; (3) it sometimes misapplies through overstatement the Christocentric nature of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44).

10

Carl Trueman, *Paul Woolley Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary:*

Biblical theology is vitally important for being able to preach the whole of the Bible as Christian Scripture and as telling one coherent story focused on Christ. Nevertheless, this answer must not be understood as claiming that redemptive history is all that is needed: to say that the importance of a hammer for building a house is 10/10 is not to say that it is the only thing necessary, and that nails, wood, bricks, mortar, etc. do not play their part. Redemptive history is a vital tool for the preacher, perhaps one of the most important, but it must not be allowed to control preaching to the point where it drives out practical application, blunt imperatives, finds Jesus just a little too quickly in certain texts, or simply reduces the act of preaching to that of lecturing.

9

Jonathan Leeman, *Director of Communications, 9Marks Ministries:*

I don't say 10 because much healthy church ministry

has been done by people who don't have a good grasp of the discipline of biblical theology. I don't say 1 to 8 because the discipline is critical to rightly understanding the gospel, rightly interpreting the Scripture for preaching, and rightly understanding what God intends for the Christian life in this era of redemptive history.

8

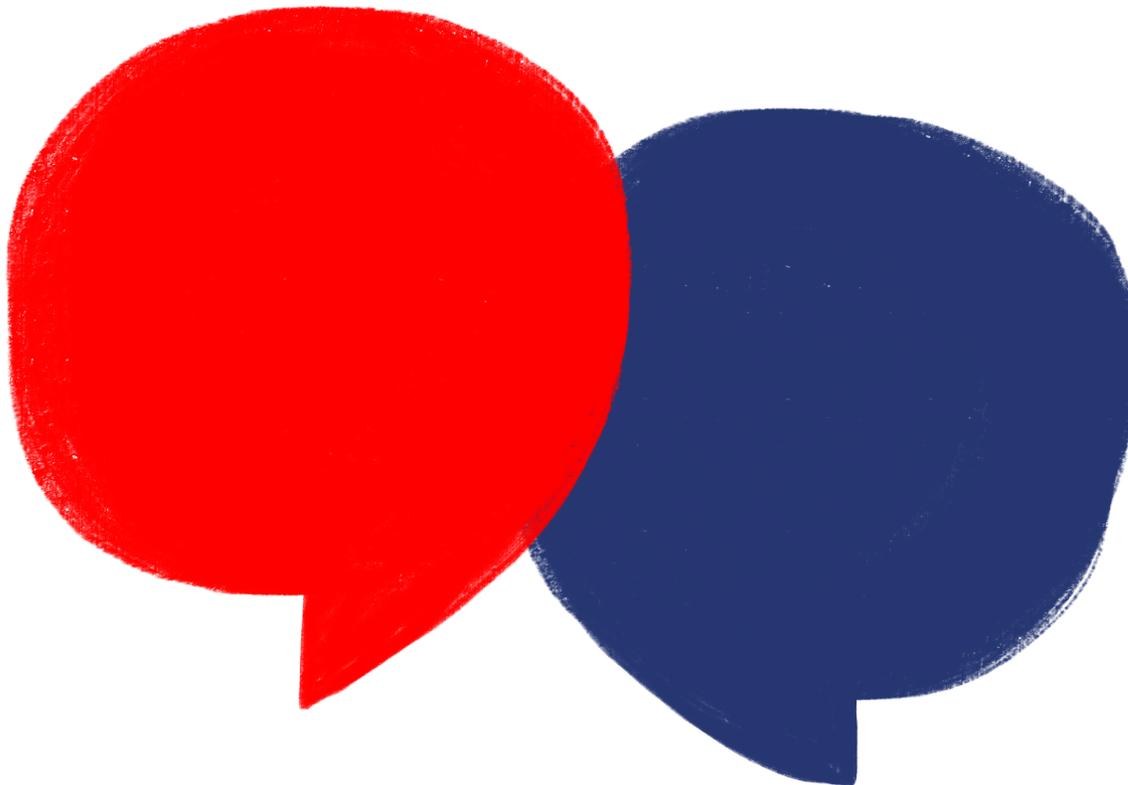
Tony Payne, *Publishing Director, Matthias Media; editor of The Briefing:*

If the Bible should be the constant content of our church life—in our pulpits, in our smaller groups, in our one-to-one encouragement of each other, around our family dinner tables—then biblical theology is really just a commitment to understand the Bible as God has given it to us—that is, as the unfolding revelation of himself, his purposes and his will, centered on and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We should model biblical theology in our preaching (whether or not we use the term), and train our people in it as the normal framework for all our Bible reading and study.

Exploring Biblical Theology

James Hamilton walks us through the basics of the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns

Interview by Joshua Greever



James Hamilton is Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also the author of *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*. In this interview, Joshua Greever talks with Hamilton about his new book, *What is Biblical Theology?*

So let's begin with the most obvious question: What Is Biblical Theology?

I define biblical theology as the attempt to understand and embrace the interpretive

perspective of the biblical authors.

It's not systematic theology, which organizes what the Bible teaches by topics (and can be more philosophical, depending on who is doing it). It's not Theological Interpretation of Scripture, which, it seems to me, is the attempt to read every passage of Scripture from the perspective of one's Systematic conclusions (in some ways TIS seems to be a move toward Biblical Theology from the Systematic wing).

The attempt to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors is the attempt to understand the hermeneutical world-view the biblical authors used to interpret earlier Scripture and their own circumstances. It is based squarely on the inspired intention of the human authors (authorial intent), and it cannot be divorced from understanding the grammatical meaning that the human authors communicated in their historical contexts (grammatical-historical exegesis).

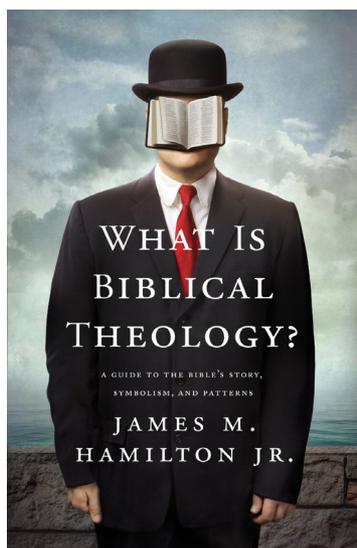
In the last few decades there has been a growing field of literature on biblical theology, including your own whole Bible biblical theology, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* [2010]. How does your

approach to biblical theology differ from that of other recent biblical theologians?

I think what I'm doing is very similar to the methodology pursued by Schreiner, Beale, Dempster, Alexander, and others. We don't all have to write the same book in the same way discussing the same topics. In broad terms, we're moving in the same stream, even if—like rafters running the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon—we're pulled by different currents in the water. The guys listed above were my first guides through the river. Every run will be different, and those who love the Canyon never tire of exploring it, and always see new things.

I want to be carried downriver as much as possible by the demonstrable intentions of the biblical authors. So in a discussion of the kinds of

schematic breakdowns of salvation history, along the lines of what Goldsworthy discusses in *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, I would want to find the current fed by the passages where the biblical authors have summarized salvation history, such as Nehemiah 9 or Acts 7. Or, if we're looking for the relationships between the covenants, I'm scouting the waves for a confluence of passages like Hebrews 8–9 and Galatians 3 and other texts that



are going to make for a rollicking rapids run that will have us so splashed with the intentions of the biblical authors we'll come out soaked, smiling, and exhilarated. The life-giving word of God is better than a wonder of the world.

You note that there have been a variety of reactions to the Enlightenment's impact on biblical interpretation, and that even many of the conservative responses to these challenges have begun with the same assumptions found in the more liberal camps. You respond by distancing yourself from these reactions, claiming that biblical theology should be a bridge into another world, namely, the world of the biblical writers. Why is it so important for us to cross that bridge and to breathe the air of the biblical writers?

I'm trying to say in different words what John is after in 2 John 9 when he speaks of abiding in the teaching of Jesus Christ: "Whoever abides in the teaching has

both the Father and the Son." How do we conceptualize living in the teaching?

The biblical authors are building a symbolic universe in which they intend believers to live. They're trying to move people into that world, and help them inhabit it. We want to live in the world as conceived by the biblical authors, not the fake-world invented by the evolutionists and secularists and rebels of other stripes.

WE WANT TO LIVE IN THE WORLD AS CONCEIVED BY THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS, NOT THE FAKE-WORLD INVENTED BY THE EVOLUTIONISTS AND SECULARISTS AND REBELS OF OTHER STRIPES.

At that point in my book I am also responding to what Hans Frei demonstrated in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. Frei shows how conservative interpreters surrendered the presuppositions necessary for typological interpretation to make sense when they tried to prove historicity and authenticity in response to historical-critical objections. Demonstrating historicity and authenticity is a good thing to do, but if we step onto that playing field we have to play within

the lines drawn by those umpires. When Frei titled his book *Eclipse* of biblical narrative, what he depicted was the way that the typological function of the biblical

narratives had been eclipsed by the concerns of historical-critical discussions. So to change the metaphor, what I'm saying is that we need to stop trying to play baseball in the basketball gym. We need to get out of the closed system into the open air.

There are certain things that have to be taken for granted in order for us to understand the interpretive moves the biblical authors make. If we're not willing to allow those assumptions to stand, if we're constantly trying to demonstrate historicity or authenticity, we'll never be free to think the way the biblical authors thought. The pop-ups will keep ricocheting off the ceiling of the gym.

I think it's important to play baseball on the baseball field, that is, to cross the bridge into the world of the biblical authors, because unless we do so we won't begin to understand the thick richness of the Bible's interconnectedness and meaning.

You mention that, since the Bible is a story, it has a setting, characters, and a plot. The five central episodes in the plot of Scripture you focus on are the exile from Eden, the exodus from Egypt, the exile from the land, the death of Jesus on the cross, and the second coming of Jesus. Why do

you focus on these five episodes as the main points on the plotline?

I focus on these because they seem to me to be the ones that most impact the biblical authors. Moses narrates the exile from Eden and the exodus in the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), and he prophesies the exile from the land and the glorious eschatological restoration. Then in the Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings) the people take and are exiled from the land. In the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets), the prophets are warning of the exile and pointing to a new exodus, and it sounds like the new exodus will be not merely a return to the land but a return to Eden. Jesus dies as the new Passover Lamb in the new exodus, and at his return he brings his people into the new Eden of the new heaven and new earth.

This is a short book, and it can't retell the whole Bible. It's like a three-day trip down the Canyon. In keeping with what I said about authorial intent above, I focus on these five because I think they're the five the biblical authors focus on. Obviously there are other significant features of the story. If we spent the summer in the Canyon, we wouldn't run out of stuff to look at.

The second of the three main

sections of your book is devoted to some of the major symbols found in the Bible, including the Bible's images, types, and patterns. Why is it imperative for Christians to understand and rightly interpret these symbols?

I happen to have on my desk a copy of *Baseball's Greatest Quotations*. Trying to understand the Bible without understanding the symbolism employed by the biblical authors would be like trying to understand *Baseball's Greatest Quotations* with no knowledge of the game of baseball.

Even someone with no knowledge of baseball can appreciate Yogi Berra saying "Ninety percent of this game is half mental."

But what about when Yogi, a catcher, comments on the manager experimenting with playing him at third base: "Third ain't so bad if nothin' is hit to you."

If you know baseball you get it. If you don't know baseball, as Yogi said: "In baseball, you don't know nothing."

Yogi Berra aside, the point is that the biblical authors, borne along as they were by the Holy Spirit, intended the symbolism they employed to convey more than the bare words would bear.

You use John 19:36 as an example of how the New Testament can apply a type (in this case, the Passover lamb) to Jesus. In this example, John makes it clear that the Scripture (Exod. 12:46; Ps. 34:20) is being fulfilled in the death of Christ, thus providing the biblical interpreter warrant for unpacking the intertextual connections. Would you say that believers should seek to discover types only when and where the New Testament writers make such explicit statements? Or should believers feel more freedom to find types in the Old Testament, even if the New Testament does not explicitly make such connections?

If we're trying to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors, our interpretations should be like theirs. I don't think it's wise to interpret an Old Testament text in a way that is different from the way the biblical authors interpreted that text or others like it.

There are of course many OT passages that are similar to the ones the NT authors treat as types, so I would have no problem seeing those as pointing in the same direction as the ones the NT authors use.

There are also a lot of places in the Old Testament where later OT authors are operating typologically, and not every instance of this is identified in the New Testament. The water imagery in the Psalms, for instance, should in my view be read against earlier texts in the Bible that have to do with water (the flood, the Red Sea, the Jordan River) rather than against extra-biblical ideas from ANE backgrounds that reflect understandings of reality foreign not just to the nation of Israel but to biblical theology. I don't think we need an NT author to tell us that the flood became a type of God's judgment (though Peter does!), and that when later biblical authors spoke of God's judgment in the form of human armies they used flood imagery (see Ps. 124).

I DON'T THINK IT'S WISE TO INTERPRET AN OLD TESTAMENT TEXT IN A WAY THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS INTERPRETED THAT TEXT OR OTHERS LIKE IT.

What we need to do is keep reading the Bible. There are lots of subtle things there awaiting examination and consideration.

Does any biblical author treat the stick that sweetened the waters (Exod. 15:25) typologically? I can't think of one, but that doesn't mean there isn't one. Until I find a

place, though, where a biblical author sets a precedent for me, I wouldn't venture to declare that twig a type.

You try to show at various points how encouraging and comforting it is for believers when they recognize that the story of the world they live in is a story larger than they are. Tease this out for us, for instance, in the case of death itself: How does knowing biblical theology comfort us in the face of death?

Did you read that article about Bryce Harper spending time with Gavin Rupp, a [13 year old boy who has terminal cancer?](#) As a father of young sons, I can't imagine going

through something like that without an understanding of where the world came from, why people die, and where hope can

be found. We need biblical theology to survive the death of loved ones, and we need biblical theology so we can rehearse it to and with loved ones in hospice. The Truth is our only hope as we weep through dying days in this vale of tears.

What Bryce Harper did for Gavin Rupp

was magnificent. I hope that Gavin's dad has been able to explain to him how God is good, how there was no cancer in Eden, how through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin. We all face death, and we all need to know how death came through the first Adam, but in Christ will come the resurrection of the dead—resurrection to a new heaven and new earth. Like Sam Storms, I hope there's baseball in that happy land, but even if not I have no doubt that what is there will be better than baseball.

The kind of comfort I'm describing is basic to Christianity, whether described as biblical or systematic theology. The narrative setting of these truths and the practice of tracing out the back-story that informs what the biblical authors say is what biblical theology enables us see.

You make the point that the best way to learn biblical theology is to study the Bible itself, and that one method you have found particularly helpful in studying the Bible is to read large sections of Scripture in one sitting. Why do you recommend this as a particularly advantageous way to study the Bible?

Authorial intent again! When John wrote Revelation, it's most likely that he conceived of it being read aloud to a gathered congregation all at one sitting. We can say the same about Hebrews—it was probably a sermon meant to be heard all at once.

I'm not suggesting, however, that the authors

of the biblical books would have *required* that their books be read all at once, nor that they would have frowned on a piecemeal approach to working through them. It is a historical reality, though, that these books weren't given chapter/verse divisions by their authors.

Aside from my somewhat tongue in cheek authorial intent exclamation above, reading big chunks is just being a good reader. In *How to Read a Book* Mortimer Adler advises that, if possible, every book should be read all at one sitting. Whether you're reading philosophy, history, or literature, reading the whole thing all at once would give you a fuller appreciation of the way an author uses words and the big picture he's painting than chipping away in little bits over a longer period of time could provide.

We want to live in the Bible and thereby abide in Christ. The Bible is better than the Grand Canyon, better than baseball, and we have the freedom to read it. We have access to it.

Ah! You want to read it now? I was hoping you would. Enjoy!

You can follow Hamilton's blog at jimhamilton.com and read about his trip to the Grand Canyon [here](#). 

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The **GRACE** of
GODLINESS
An introduction
to doctrine and
piety in the ❖❖❖
Canons of Dort



The **GRACE** of **GODLINESS**

An introduction to doctrine and piety in the Canons of Dort

When the pastors and theologians who comprised the Synod of Dort met in 1618 and 1619 to frame a response to the rise of Arminian theology in Dutch churches, they were concerned to provide not just theological argument but pastoral vision. They considered seriously the implications of right theology on both growth in grace and holiness and the spiritual comfort of believers.

Keenly aware of this vital link between theology and practice, they drew up the Canons of Dort in a manner that astutely rebutted from Scripture the Arminian Remonstrants, point by point, arguing the veracity of the doctrines of predestination, particular atonement, total depravity, effectual grace and the perseverance of the saints—the five points that have come to be known as “the doctrines of grace.”

Matthew Barrett opens a window on the synod’s deliberations with the Remonstrants and examines the main emphases of the canons, with special attention on their relationship to biblical piety and spirituality.

“Wow! I really like this book. Matthew Barrett has given us history, theology, ministerial counsel and impetus to true piety in this treatment of the Synod and Canons of Dort. The brief but vibrant historical accounts are informative, his guidance in some thick theological discussion is expert, and his focus on piety leads us to the true purpose of all theology—the production of a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.... This is an excellent account of a vitally important subject.”

Tom J. Nettles—Professor of Historical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

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BITS-N-BOBS OR WHOLE PIECES?

How to Become a Biblical Theologian

by
Darian R. Lockett

When I lived in Scotland I passed by an odd storefront most days as I walked to my university office. The marquee on the storefront read “Bits and Bobs” and the store was full of the most random collection of goods for sale. One day I saw an electric drill, nappies (diapers), and various food items all haphazardly arranged in the front window. Unwittingly we often read the Bible in a similarly jumbled way. Growing up memorizing bits of Scripture like John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...”; Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me”; or Proverbs 3:5, “trust in the Lord with all your heart...”, we carry around with us a haphazard collection of Bible verses with the intention or hope that Scripture will shape our thoughts and actions. Yet when we absorb the Bible this way there is a great risk of taking passages that belong to the unbroken, overarching narrative shape of Scripture and unintentionally reconfiguring them into the narrative of our lives. Rather than being confronted by the canonical shape of God’s story of redemption, we bend the text into the shape of our own lives and make the Bible to be a story more about us—our fulfillment, our sanctification, our “best life now.” Like taking sticky notes and pasting them to ourselves, reading the

Bible this way is like taking bits and bobs of Scripture and rearranging them after the shape or image of the reader, rather than the image of Christ.

So how do we read Scripture without distorting its overarching shape? Well, here is where reading Scripture with an eye toward biblical theology will help. Before I suggest a few ways of reading Scripture as the unfolding story of God’s redemptive purposes and then offering some observations regarding what kind of people we ought to be in this reading endeavor, let me make two opening comments.

WHAT THE BIBLE IS NOT

First it is important to note that the Bible is not primarily a book about human ethics. Though Scripture has a lot to say about how we live and act it is not a manual for moral living—I have yet to find the book of First Troubleshootings. Thinking of the Bible as God’s owner’s manual for life would be to place the emphasis on the wrong syllable. Rather, the Bible is foremost about God. Likely you already know that, but it bears repeating for emphasis—the Bible is about God. God is the hero of the story. It is his story of creation, fall, and ultimate redemption. Creation, fall and redemption become the

major topographical landmarks that help us travel along Scripture's big idea, which is God's story of creation and redemption—the Garden to Gethsemane and, ultimately, the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Because the subject of the Bible is God, we need to ask secondly, how does Scripture, then, apply to us? A Christian reading of Scripture will always have an eye toward obedient response. How shall we then live in response to what God has said? This is the receptive reading of a disciple. But again, because the story of Scripture is first and foremost about God, how might we understand our place in that story? Rather than thinking about how God's reality might fit into my own—stuffing God's big story into my small story—it is best to think about how my life's narrative is taken up into that of God's. My story now must be reconfigured within God's story of redemption if my life or my actions are to make any sense at all. Seeing my life's story within God's transforms how I understand my past (the ultimate beginning is creation) and my future (the ultimate end is God's eschatological redemption of all things). And, reinscribed within this new storyline, I come to understand my actions, attitudes, goals, and desires as reordered by a new and larger (and much more compelling) purpose now narrated by Scripture.

So, the Bible is about God—his story of

creation and redemption—and application of the Bible within the Christian life is a matter of living out our part in that larger storyline.

READING THE WHOLE STORY

But how do we read the Bible as the unfolding story of God? First it is helpful to note that modern readers are not the first ones to ask this question. Jesus, after his resurrection, made it very clear to his disciples that all of Scripture fits together because in some way it relates to himself. In Luke 24, Jesus opened the eyes of his disciples so they could see that the law and the prophets (the Old Testament) were about him and thus demonstrated the importance of reading the Old and New Testaments as the unfolding story of God's work in Christ. In the same vein, Christian interpreters such as Irenaeus, Augustine, Calvin, and Edwards all wrote about the unified structure of Scripture using some form of what might be described as biblical theology.

So we can see that reading Scripture with a “big picture” framework has a convincing pedigree. But to get down to practical steps, how do we do it? Here are a few suggestions to get started as an aspiring biblical theologian reading Scripture with the “big picture” in mind.

A fundamental issue is to keep a balance between the parts and the whole. This is actually more difficult than it might seem at first. For instance, where do you start? Should one start with the big picture, some kind of summary of how the entire Bible goes, or should one rather start by studying the individual books, chapters, and passages that make up that larger story? Whereas I am unsure of the right starting place—I might say it does not matter at which point you jump on a merry-go-round because you will eventually come around to the other side—these two access points must always be in view.

With respect to the smaller parts, it is clear that doing biblical theology is not less than grammatical-historical exegesis. The skills of reading biblical texts carefully with the tools of language, culture, and history are essential for the task. Perhaps we could summarize an entire list of exegetical skills necessary for good interpretation under the twin headings of historical and literary context. Situating a passage in its context, using history and literature (i.e., grammar and genre) constitute a primary task in biblical theology. Though as important as historical

and literary context are, this is not the sum of biblical theology. We might say that historical and literary analysis is necessary but not sufficient. Maintaining a balance between parts and whole, doing biblical theology, requires more, not less, than grammatical-historical exegesis.

Keeping the big picture in view requires that the parts be read in light of the whole. That is, any one passage must be read not

only in its specific context (history and literature), but also as the next episode in God's grand story of redemption. Each word of Scripture must be understood within its own verse, and

each verse within its own chapter, and each chapter within its own book, and each book within the final (and ultimate) context of the Christian canon. It is at the latter end of this succession of contexts where keeping all the details together and in order becomes a challenge. How might one keep the big picture in view without doing a disservice to the details? With this challenge in mind, a common element in biblical theology has been to identify a common theme running through the canon—from Genesis to Revelation—that

READING THE BIBLE THIS WAY IS LIKE TAKING BITS AND BOBS OF SCRIPTURE AND REARRANGING THEM AFTER THE SHAPE OR IMAGE OF THE READER, RATHER THAN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST.

acts as an overarching plumb line around which the particular details of the Bible can be situated. Perennial contenders for the organizing theme of Scripture have included: covenant, kingdom, promise and fulfillment, and the glory of God, among others. The strength of such an approach lies in the ability to move from parts (inductive study of individual passages where the theme appears) to the whole (an appreciation of how each individual passage fills out the bigger picture of Scripture). The problem with the approach, of course, is deciding which theme is the central or primary theme that unifies the whole.

Another way of seeing the big picture of Scripture is to read the Bible from a “systems” approach. The unity of Scripture comes into focus when read with a system of Covenant Theology or a system of Dispensationalism (or perhaps some other system) in mind. Though such “systems” are up and running as a hermeneutical lens through which to read the Bible, they actually find warrant in and are constructed from Scripture itself. Arguably these systems do not only guide reading, but are in fact derived from study of Scripture. Whether from covenant to covenant or dispensation to dispensation, the conviction is that God, the ultimate author of Scripture, has revealed his redemptive purposes in the context of the entire Christian canon. Each movement in the unfolding story of God’s

redemption reveals true aspects of God’s character, the fallen condition of humanity, and God’s ultimate plan of rescue. This is to insist that every stage in revelation is a discrete moment in the redemptive story that is both irreducible and necessary within the movement of God’s progressive communication. The question for biblical theology, as we have seen above, is how to discern this progressive communication (via either a theme or a “system”).

Furthermore, keeping the big picture in mind requires seeing the Bible as a coherent unity. This is to reinforce the point made above concerning the narrative or story shape of Scripture. Though made up of historically and culturally discrete texts, the entire canon constitutes a single, coherent narrative and therefore the Bible must be interpreted in light of the overarching biblical story. Any individual text cannot exist as a free-floating moral story or theological principle (“bits and bobs”), but must be interpreted as a discernable segment of a forward-moving narrative whole. Thus one could say that the whole—the overarching story—is greater than the sum of the parts—the individual stories themselves. So, when we read Scripture we must place each text not only into its historical-cultural context but also in the overarching context of God’s story of redemption. Another way of saying this is that each text must be read in light of its macro-context (whole-Bible,

or canonical context). Each passage fits within the Bible's overarching story that has as its purpose the revelation of Christ as the climax of all God's redeeming activity. So when we read Romans we must not only place it within the larger corpus of Paul's writings but also the entire Genesis-to-Revelation story of Scripture.

SKILLS AND SENSIBILITIES

Because Christian Scripture is not a disconnected collection of axioms to be rearranged according to the perspective of the reader, the imperative "to search the Scriptures" implies the need for continuously reading and rereading the storyline in order to discern God's redemptive purposes. Actively hearing, reading, and praying are required, indeed mandated by the Scripture itself if such discernment is to be successful. This is to emphasize not a particular skill, or approach to biblical theology, but to highlight the need to be a particular kind of person. Becoming a biblical theologian is more than skill and approach (method), but also entails a particular set of sensibilities. Becoming a biblical theologian is set within the context of allowing one's mind to be shaped or nurtured on the overarching narrative of God's redemption in Scripture. And this canonical shaping is nothing less than growing into the image of Christ.

In the book, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, Kevin Vanhoozer argues for discipleship shaped by canonical rhythms: "We acquire canonical competence—a mind nurtured on the Christ-centered canon—when we learn how to make the same kind of judgments about God, the world, and ourselves as those embedded in Scripture" (94). Thus the goal of biblical theology is not merely to generate data about the contents of the Bible; rather, it is to be made wise unto salvation, to understand the redemptive purposes of God. Here Augustine's warning is apt: "So if it seems to you that you have understood the divine scriptures...in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbor then you have not yet understood them" (*Teaching Christianity*, 1.36). Thus becoming sensitive to reading the Bible in the context of biblical theology finds its ultimate end by hearing the proclamation of Christ the Savior King and responding in Christian discipleship.

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WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

Origins and Contemporary Types

by

Edward W. Klink III

To the average person in the church “biblical theology” might sound like a tautology: no different than saying “round circle.” How can theology be anything other than “biblical?” And how can the Bible, the *Word of God*, not also be immediately theological? While such intuitions are correct, every Christian can understand that all forms of Christian theology and practice can rightly be called “biblical,” for this sense of “biblical” simply means that one considers the Bible to be authoritative and directive for Christian faith and life. But biblical theology as it is currently used is the title of a more precise practice or discipline of the study of the Bible and its theology.

THE ORIGINS OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

For several centuries “biblical theology” stood for a particular and specialized sub-discipline of the study of the Bible and theology. While a biblical theology in the sense of the search for an “inner unity” of the Bible goes back to the early church, the practice of biblical theology as a distinct discipline within the larger field of biblical and theological studies

began sometime after the Protestant Reformation. While the exact history of its origin is difficult to define, it appears that biblical theology is a response to the kind of biblical study practiced by the early and especially the medieval church, where the Bible functioned almost entirely within a dogmatic and ecclesiastical framework and was forced into a subservient role in order to support various traditional theological systems. The Reformation offered a large-scale challenge to this framework, demanding that the Bible be given full authority in matters of Christian doctrine and practice. By the sixteenth century the dogmatic framework had been morphed by Protestants to a “dogmatic biblicism,” and by the seventeenth century the actual term “biblical theology” was used, primarily in the polemical context out of which a renewed understanding of the Bible and its authority was emerging. Even then, though, the term “biblical theology” was being used differently: German pietists, responding to academic scholasticism, used the term in order to promote a theology based solely on the Bible; while rationalists, responding to ecclesiastical dogmatism, used the term in order to promote a return to the simple and “historical religion” of the Bible apart from the controlling framework of the church.

It was not until the eighteenth century in the now famous lecture of Johann Philip Gabler

in 1787 that the burgeoning discipline of “biblical theology” was given definition and a more established methodological clarity. The title of Gabler’s lecture explains clearly his goal: “A discourse on the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology and the correct delimitation of their boundaries.” For Gabler dogmatic theology is didactic and was changing all the time as the church moved forward in time. In sharp contrast, however, is biblical theology, which is historical and therefore remains the same. In a real way Gabler separated the discipline of biblical theology from the traditional (and ecclesial) discipline

**BIBLICAL
THEOLOGY
WENT FROM
THE ANSWER
TO ITS OWN
SET OF
QUESTIONS**

of theology – a related and similar distinction now exists between biblical studies and (systematic) theology: the former interprets the Bible by attending primarily to its historical context, whereas the latter interprets the Bible by attending primarily to the contemporary context. According to Gabler, biblical and dogmatic theology should not be mixed, or not at least until biblical

theology was ready to submit its findings on to theology. For biblical theology, the Bible was to be studied and classified according to his historical period(s) and authorship so that the biblical material could be filtered and the temporal material could be separated from the material that was universally true. It was only then that this material, this “pure biblical theology,” was deemed suitable to be passed along for reflection by dogmatic theology.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the numerous effects of the separation of the discipline of biblical theology from the church and its doctrinal framework. The early church’s concern to find and establish the “inner unity” of the Bible had been changed into a concern for separation and reframing. Two primary effects can be briefly summarized. First, with few exceptions the discipline divided into two fields of study: Old Testament theology and New Testament theology. In contrast to dogmatic theology which was allowed to be prescriptive, biblical theology was expected to be descriptive, and therefore confined to the historical authors and epochs out of which the biblical books were created. As we will discuss below, it has only been in the last few decades that some scholars have even begun to do a two-Testament or whole-Bible biblical theology. Second, with the absence

of a dogmatic or ecclesial framework for reading the Bible, biblical theology had to find a new philosophical framework upon which to establish a coherent and integrated biblical – as in descriptive and historical – theology. Various systems and frameworks were presented, with few (if any) able to balance well the demands of both historical and theological coherence.

By the end of the twentieth century practitioners of the discipline of biblical theology began to raise their own concerns about the disparity between definitions and methods. Various movements were initiated to provide definition and to move beyond the impasse, like the Biblical Theology Movement located primarily in the United States (ca. 1945-1961), but none seemed to be able to find a universally-agreeable “inner unity” of the Bible that could meet the demands of the modern, Gabler-defined, and broadly-widening discipline of biblical theology. At the start of the twenty-first century biblical theology must be defined and identified by means of various expressions or “schools,” different “types” of biblical theology. This diversity means that the discipline of biblical theology went from the *answer* to its own set of *questions* regarding the “the proper distinction” and “correct delimitation of [the] boundaries” between history and theology, the sciences of the academy and the doctrine of the

CONTEMPORARY TYPES OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Since the modern discipline of biblical theology expanded into several different expressions or “types,” any contemporary definition of “biblical theology” requires one to consider the five types of biblical theology as practiced today. Having recently co-authored a book-length summary of the five predominant “types” in *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Zondervan), here I will explain how each defines biblical theology differently. These five approaches to biblical theology offer different definitions to the following issues related to the Bible and its theology: the role of history and its integration with theology (and the doctrinal framework of the church), the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the scope and sources of the discipline, and the subject matter of biblical theology. For each type of biblical theology a primary category or a defining tool can be uncovered which dictates how and why that particular expression of biblical theology is able to perform and handle the Biblical material. As we discussed above, once the church and its doctrinal framework was no longer allowed to express the theology of the Bible, a new framework or

superstructure was required. The following is a map or heuristic lens through which one can perceive the multiform nature of the contemporary discipline of biblical theology and appropriated.

**BT1: HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION
[CATEGORY: THE HISTORICAL
SCIENCES]**

The first type is the most historical because it is strongly framed by the category of history and the task of the historian. Thus, BT1 is entirely descriptive: concern for present-day religion and meaning is intentionally kept out of sight. While theologians are concerned with “what it means,” BT1 is only concerned with “what it meant.” This approach to biblical theology desires to free itself from the anachronistic interpretations of its dogmatic predecessors, and force itself to accept the hiatus between the time and ideas of the Bible and the time and ideas of the modern world. Thus, BT1 makes certain that history – the specific biblical history – is the sole, mediating category. The theology of the Bible is the theology believed by the people back then, the theology of the Bible as it existed within the time, languages, and cultures of

the Bible itself. This expression of biblical theology is nearly identical to Gabler’s version of biblical theology.

For this reason there can be no whole-Bible theology since the theology of the different authors, let alone the different testaments, is hardly uniform or unified. To connect the Old Testament with the New Testament is to do a disservice to them both, for while the New Testament belongs to Christians, the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) belongs to Judaism. BT1 is dependent, therefore, on contemporary research done entirely by the academy (not the church), is in no way bound to the so-called biblical “canon,” and is primarily an exegetical task (discovering what the text meant). The “theology” of the confessing church, in the opinion of BT1, has already moved beyond the Bible by translating its theology into its own social-

**WHILE THE HISTORICAL NATURE OF BT2
IS DIRECTLY PARALLEL TO THE WORK OF
THE ACADEMY, THE GOAL IS A BIBLICAL
THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH.**

historical context. This expression of biblical theology is not to be found among evangelicals, though it is the predominate type of biblical theology practiced in the broader, academic world, including many mainline Protestant seminaries. Some of its

well-known practitioners include the late Krister Stendahl and James Barr, and can be seen in the contemporary practices of John J. Collins and John Barton.

BT2: HISTORY OF REDEMPTION [CATEGORY: A “SPECIAL HISTORY”]

The second type is also strongly historical and is similarly framed by history and the task of the historian, but its primary category is thematic-typology. One step removed from BT1, BT2 is concerned to establish a whole-Bible theology, but similar to BT1, BT2 demands that the whole-Bible connections be made with the historical sciences. What holds the Bible together is still history, but a “special history” that is derived by theological criteria. The Bible reveals a History of Redemption progressing in a chronological manner. This History of Redemption is visible through tracing the major themes and overarching structural ideals (e.g., covenant, kingdom, promise and fulfillment) as they develop along a sequential and historical timeline. This biblical “theology” is only accessible through the lens of God’s (historical) progressive revelation.

In this way biblical theology is theological primarily in the manner it defines and

utilizes history and is supported by the various themes running through the biblical narrative that serve as the connecting fibers between the biblical parts, including the Old Testament and New Testament. While the historical nature of BT2 is directly parallel to the work of the academy, the goal is a biblical theology for the church. For this reason BT2 is a strongly exegetical task with an eye to God’s unfolding purposes throughout the ages. Such a bifocal hermeneutic tends to bend between a “what it meant/what it means” hermeneutic of Scripture.

This interconnected expression of biblical theology has developed into different strands rooted in different ecclesial and academic traditions. Three can be identified. The first is the “Dallas school” (i.e. Dallas Theological Seminary), which is rooted in a dispensational and progressive dispensational framework for reading Scripture. Some of its well-known practitioners include the late Roy Zuck and John Walvoord, and in the contemporary work of scholars like Darrell Bock and Robert Saucy. The second is the “Chicago school” (i.e. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), which is rooted in a framework close to covenant theology, specifically progressive covenantalism. Some of its well-known practitioners include D. A. Carson, Scott Hafemann, Brian Rosner, and

John Piper. The third is the “Philadelphia school” (i.e. Westminster Theological Seminary), which is rooted in traditional, reformed covenant theology. Some of its well-known practitioners include the late Geerhardus Vos, and can be seen in the contemporary work of scholars like Greg Beale and Graeme Goldsworthy.

**BT3: WORLDVIEW-STORY
[CATEGORY: “NARRATIVE” AND A
PHILOSOPHICAL “WORLDVIEW”]**

The third type represents the middle of the spectrum, a notoriously difficult position to nail down, and is strongly framed by the category of narrative, which is both a literary and philosophical category. In an attempt to balance historical and theological concerns, BT3 discerns the overarching “story shape” or narrative connection between the Old Testament

**[BT3] OFFERS A THICK, INTERTEXTUAL
READING OF THE WHOLE BIBLE THAT SERVES TO
COALESCE THE DIVERSE PARTS OF THE BIBLE
WITH THE WHOLE, AS WELL AS THE STORY OF
GOD WITH THE STORY OF ITS READERS.**

and New Testament as constitutive of the Bible’s “theology.” Read as a continuous

and interconnected narrative this approach discerns the narrative continuity running throughout the whole Bible. Many working with this narrative structure of the Bible’s unity would not consider this approach as “biblical theology” *per se*; rather, the concerns that shape this type of reading originate from a desire to read Scripture without the historical sciences historical-criticism functioning as the primary methodology. Like BT2, the interconnectedness of this approach lends itself to several different trajectories; yet at its center is the category of narrative which seeks to balance literary, historical, and theological elements in Scripture.

As a middle position, BT3 does not begin with front-loaded theological propositions or purely descriptive historical reconstruction, yet uses a measure of both history and theology – under the larger category of narrative – to assist the construction of the biblical worldview-story. While its

historical approach to the biblical narrative is directly parallel to the work of the academy, the guidance provided by theology has much to commend it

to the church. The complexity of BT3, like any story, has numerous versions. But this

approach to biblical theology offers a thick, intertextual reading of the whole Bible that serves to coalesce the diverse parts of the Bible with the whole, as well as the story of God with the story of its readers. This expression of biblical theology can be found among evangelicals, but is also common in the wider evangelical world. Some of its well-known practitioners include the N. T. Wright, John Goldingay, Richard Hays, and Richard Bauckham.

BT4: CANONICAL APPROACH [CATEGORY: THE BIBLICAL CANON]

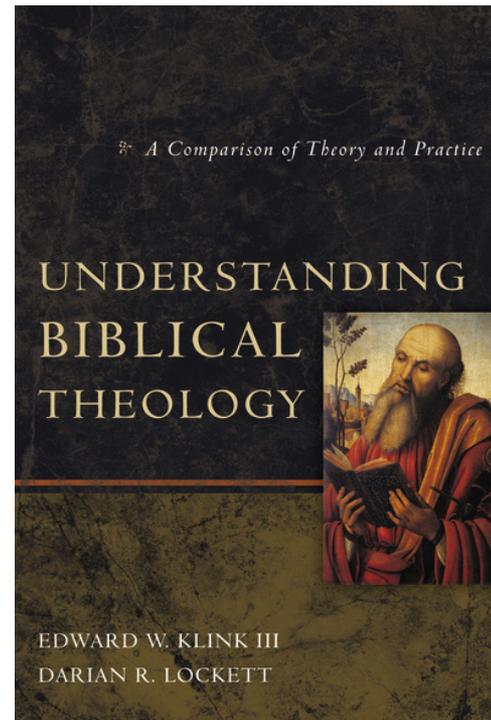
The fourth type is strongly framed by the category of canon, which is both a historical and theological category. Working hard to articulate a perspective on the relationship between biblical studies and theology, “canon” for BT4 serves to conjoin the historical meaning of the ancient text with the contemporary meaning of Christian Scripture. A canonical interpretation of Scripture assumes some operational convictions regarding the identity, character, and literary sources of revelation or truth. While a canonical approach is difficult to define and variously applied, what is uniform is the focus on the canon’s ability to reflect the diverse uses and applications of Scripture.

The canon is a path that has been traversed by many travelers, each of whom has left many footprints. The final form of the canon, therefore, is a collection of tradition “handlings,” with the final form being the last shaping of the tradition. In this way the canon preserves a collection of “tradition shapings,” which maintain fidelity to the original material and simultaneously promote the adaptation of the material for a new setting and situation. For this reason the canon itself becomes the overarching context for handling history and theology and for determining the meaning of the Bible. Such an approach allows the biblical “theology” to be both descriptive and prescriptive. Similar to BT3, BT4 contains elements of both academy and church: the academy is needed to explore the textual traditions that have been received, collected, transmitted, and shaped throughout different times, cultures, and languages; the confessing church is needed as the applied audience for whom the texts serve as their life for identity and obedience. Ultimately the canon establishes Scripture as a witness that presents the Bible’s true subject matter: the gospel of Jesus Christ. This expression of biblical theology can be found among evangelicals, but is also common in the wider evangelical world. Some of its well-known practitioners include the late Brevard Childs, and contemporary practitioners like Christopher Seitz and James Sanders.

BT5: THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION [CATEGORY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND THEOLOGY]

The fifth type is strongly framed by the category of theology as it is defined and used by the confessing church. After presenting a critique of the abuses of historical criticism, BT5 positions itself within the confines of the confessing church. BT5 is associated with a growing interest in a theological interpretation of Scripture, which intentionally positions itself outside the academy's "departmentalization" of biblical studies and systematic theology with its bifurcation between ancient text and contemporary Scripture. This leads to the conviction that the Bible properly belongs to the church, and that for Christians the Bible is *their* Bible, not the Bible of foreign people in a foreign time and land. For this reason the task of biblical theology is an integrated exegetical-hermeneutical discipline with overriding theological concerns, incorporating biblical scholarship into the larger enterprise of Christian theology. This expression of biblical theology is what Gabler would define as dogmatic theology.

Such a starting point demands that the only home for such a method is the church,



not the academy. BT5 must incorporate and be ruled (e.g. the Rule of Faith) by faith commitments, that is, theological presuppositions. This is no public discussion, for biblical theology is the sole practice of the church, the confessing community. This is not to say that such a use of biblical theology is uncritical, but only to claim that the concern is less with secular models of truth and more with in-house models defined entirely by the confessing church. While this approach has a variety of nuances, the central tenet is that it requires a theological hermeneutic that leads to the formation of a "theological construct," allowing the Bible to function as God's Word for the church. This expression

of biblical theology can be found among evangelicals, but is also common in the wider evangelical world. Some of its well-known practitioners include the Kevin Vanhoozer, Stephen Fowl, Walter Moberly, and Francis Watson.

competing) frameworks are now commonly utilized to establish the theology of the Bible. Such diverse approaches reveal not only the divided discipline of biblical theology, but also how pregnant biblical theology is for directing the life of the church.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH

In many ways the contemporary types of biblical theology have returned to the days of Gabler, with each type defining and appropriating differently the relationship between history and theology, the academic sciences and the doctrine of the church, and even the Old and New Testaments. For the pastor, or even the informed lay person, biblical theology is simply not as straightforward as some would prefer. At the same time, however, its variety of expressions serves to show how important the discipline of biblical theology is for Christian faith and practice. Unlike the early and medieval church, different (and

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GOING ON
A JOURNEY?
DON'T FORGET
THE MAP

The Importance of
Biblical Theology for
Systematic Theology

by

Stephen Dempster

Theology as far as many Christians are concerned leaves them cold. For after all, theology requires thinking about God and this is definitely not an age of thinking but one primarily of feeling. And this has affected the church just as well as the society at large. People are interested in “feel good worship,” “feel good sermons,” “feel good prayers” and “feel good stories.” Western culture is thus a therapeutic culture and so unfortunately the church within it has been largely captivated by its sirens.

As anyone knows, however, feelings by themselves cannot be relied on for sound knowledge of anything never mind knowledge of God. Just ask our children about Dad’s feelings about shortcuts and directions in the absence of maps and a GPS. The upward direction of their eyeballs would express their sentiments entirely. The novice who enters the chemistry lab feeling that two different chemicals will produce a good reaction may not survive long enough to get lucky. The jet pilot who relies on her feelings instead of her instrument panel will not get many opportunities to continue to fly.

THEOLOGY MATTERS...BIG TIME

Thus good thinking about God—theology—is a necessity in a mindless age. If the hazards of relying on feelings are clear in many other areas, how much more dangerous is it to rely on feelings in the area of the soul? Just ask Nadab and Abihu who felt they could offer strange fire to Yahweh in Leviticus 10. They never got a second chance to repeat their mistake. Or ask Uzzah who acted on impulse to steady the ark (2 Sam. 6:1-

Clive Staples Lewis,

Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 154–155.

10)? Or ask the Israelites of Hosea’s generation who suffered a stunted theological education because of the priests’ failure to teach the Torah. As the prophet considered the moral and political chaos of his land, he cried out in anguish: “My people die for lack of knowledge!” (Hos. 4:1-6).

So theology is important for the Christian and absolutely important for the church. Without sound theology Christians will remain captive to their experiences and their feelings, groping about in the dark. C.S. Lewis once used the idea of map making to describe the purpose of theology.¹ He makes the important point that those who rely solely on their feelings or experience do not get very far in their knowledge of God. What they need is a map. He cites as an example the individual who goes down to the beach for a swim in the ocean, and then who wishes to enjoy more of the ocean by taking a journey. What is needed is a map for guidance. The map will show the great expanse, the currents, the land masses, the depths, the shallows, and where the dangers are. The map will help one see new vistas which a swim on one particular beach would never afford. More importantly it will give perspective—it will show where exactly that one particular beach is on the map and what is needed to get to another place, to move out into the great depths of the ocean, to explore new worlds.

Lewis observes that one has to move from the more real to the less real to get a greater experience of the more real: to be more in touch with reality. Thus the individual moves from the swim—his or her experience—to study a piece of colored paper, to get his or her bearings in order to get back to a greater experience of the ocean, than any individual swim in one location could provide. Thus good theology does not rely on one limited experience of God but many generations of the faithful, which have had genuine encounters with God and

whose records are produced in the Bible.

THEOLOGY ASKS THE BIG QUESTIONS

Theology has to do with proper thinking about God and so any Christian theology worthy of the name will have to do with this source of God's revelation in the Bible. Oftentimes theology which tries to think about God apart from Scripture is called Natural Theology. This describes what can be known about God through revelation in nature. This deals with questions such as the evidences for divine design in the natural world, such as is found in the evidence for regularity in nature, etc. Recently a renowned atheist gave up his atheism because he was convinced that recent scientific evidence for design in nature led to the inescapable conclusion that this could not be attributed to chance but to a Supreme Intelligence. This did not lead him to become a Christian but a deist. Natural theology can only take one so far but it does not necessarily lead to the Christian idea of a transcendent personal God.

Theology asks the big questions. What does the Bible teach us about God? What is God like? What is God's relationship to the world, to human beings? Does God have any ultimate purpose? In asking these questions it inevitably has to deal with other questions as well. Sometimes there are special areas of theology like Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology. A systematic attempt to answer all these questions is what scholars describe as a systematic theology. Systematic theologies try to provide a concise description of the various topics taught in the Bible so that believers can be enlightened with truth. Rather than depending on their feelings, believers can have true knowledge about God and the world. Moreover,

many systematic theologies try to uphold particular truths, or doctrines, against particular errors of their culture. Thus in a recent systematic theology the author stresses his culture's propensity to domesticate God, and he thus accentuates those divine attributes in Scripture which resist such domestication. As an example of how systematic theology works, consider, for example, the doctrine of God. Systematic theologians study all the biblical passages where information is presented about God and divide it into categories: Creator God, All Knowing God, All Powerful God, All Encompassing God, God's love, justice, mercy, provision, immutability, dependability, etc. Next, the teaching of the biblical passages is summarized and the texts proving them are listed in footnotes. Finally, conclusions are made and these conclusions address the culture of the theologian in order to show their relevance.

BLIND SPOTS AND CHERRY PICK'N

One can see why this is important. The comprehensive nature of systematic theology helps eliminate theological blind spots. Thus the systematic theologian because of his or her comprehensive check of all the texts realizes that not only is God depicted as a Waiting Father, and Nursing Mother, but also as a Roaring Lion, who can send the earthquake and the fire.² Not only does God speak with a still small voice but also in the thunderstorm (1 Kings 18-19). Not only does he give life and resurrect but he also kills and destroys (1 Sam. 2:1-10). We all have theological blind spots but the systematic character of systematic theology helps to minimize them.

A related danger that systematic theology helps us avoid is "Cherry picking based on our own tastes." The Bible can

See **James Limburg**, *Hosea - Micah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 93.

easily become a repository of our own favourite texts which we select (cherry pick) from all the biblical passages, many of which may stubbornly resist our predilections. For example, a recent best seller can virtually ignore the prophets' many words of judgment from the Old Testament in its attempt to show that a Christianity with a focus on judgment is "misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus's message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear..."³ While it is clear something is wrong when the biblical message has a total focus on judgment, to ignore those texts in a cavalier manner to prove a particular point distorts the Bible. A good systematic theological method helps avoid such caricatures of the biblical message.

Systematic theology is also helpful because it can lead to new insights about the nature of God. Thus, the Trinity was developed as the church wrestled with how to understand the texts which clearly spoke of the unity of God, and those which spoke of God's plurality. The Trinitarian nature of God also helps one see in a new light the truth that God is love. A solitary being that would be eternally in solitude could hardly be described as love. Love by its nature must have an object to extend that love. Thus the nature of the Trinity shows that the divine love is self-giving rather than self-centred.⁴ This Trinitarian understanding of God can help shed light on passages of the Bible, which before were mysteries.⁵

Systematic theology is absolutely essential for believers if they seek to live their Christian life. They just can't repeat the Bible when someone asks them a question about the essence of their faith. They must reduce it to a manageable size for convenience sake. Thus in some ways, Christian creeds or church statements of faith are just that—mini systematic theologies, which try to present the truth about the Bible in a

• **Rob Bell**, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, First Edition. (New York: HarperOne, 2011), viii.

• **Miroslav Volf**, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010).

• Personally, this systematic theological doctrine helps shed light on passages which speak of the mystery of the plurality of God in the Old Testament. The passages do not testify to a full blown doctrine of the Trinity but they point in that direction (Gen. 1:26-28, 3:22, 11:7, Isa. 6:8).

concise summary form.

Since it engages the culture directly, systematic theology needs to think about how to apply the biblical teaching to the modern world. How does one deal with pressing contemporary issues like cloning, abortion, immigration, gun control, Medicare? The Bible does not directly address such issues but it is the task of systematic theology to reflect on the biblical message and the relevant texts in order to determine how the biblical message connects to the pressing issues of the contemporary culture.

DANGER AHEAD

If there are strengths to the use of systematic theology for the Christian life, there are dangers as well. For example, systematic theologies may have doctrines that are built on sand—e.g. a faulty exegesis of a passage of Scripture. Recently a colleague in the field of Old Testament studies made a surprising discovery about the Hebrew concept of holiness in the Bible because of his own exegetical investigations. Peter Gentry observed that studies over a century ago had made the conclusion that the root meaning of holiness was “to cut” and thus led to a stress on separation and distance.⁶ Theologians had picked up this meaning and perpetuated in it in their systematic theologies. Thus God was the wholly Other, the transcendent One without any analogy. Now all of this is no doubt true, but it was based on a misunderstanding of the Hebrew word, and also the systematic theologies were not alert to later studies, one of which had corrected this error.⁷ The primary meaning of the word is to be totally devoted or consecrated and thus the meaning of separation is a consequence of the primary meaning. Thus if an instrument is holy it is because it is absolutely devoted to God first, and then it is separate from everything else. One wonders if all the fundamentalist

Peter Gentry, “Sizemore Lectures Part II: No One Holy Like the Lord,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12.1 (2013): 17-38.

Claude-Bernard Costecalde, *La Racine QDŠ aux origines du sacré biblique* (Paris: Dissertation, 1983).

concern for “separation” from unbelievers and a pagan culture over the last century may have been reinforced by an exegetical mistake. A fundamentally positive concept ends up being negative.

Another danger of systematic theology may be its failure to assign the appropriate theological weight to particular texts. Although each scriptural text is inspired, it is not the case that each is created equal. Jesus reacted to such a situation in his own day when he criticized the religious leaders for neglecting the “weightier matters of the law,” while being preoccupied with its more minor matters (Matt. 23:23). The weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy and faith—assume that there is a different theological weight and importance assigned to biblical texts. Just counting texts and citing them does not take into consideration this significance.

Another related danger of systematic theology is the failure to discern the biblical priorities for certain themes. For example, in a description of the character qualities of God, which ones will be assigned priority? Will the incommunicable characteristics be prioritized or the communicable ones? Why or why not?

HEAVEN'S SEARCH LIGHTS

Systematic Theology can largely avoid these dangers by being provided with a better set of lenses to see the accents of the biblical data itself and Biblical Theology can help provide such lenses. While there are many definitions of Biblical Theology, it is a discipline that tries to work with the theology of the Bible itself, the structure of the Bible and the historical/linguistic/cultural dimension of the text. It seeks to describe the Bible not in terms of topics which can be communicated to a contemporary audience, but in terms of its own categories and development—a sort of global exegesis of the

Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002).

Bible. Biblical Theology essentially tries to work with the historical development of the message of Scripture as it moves from Creation to Consummation, from the beginning of Scripture to its end. Thus a biblical theological description will be alert to major and minor themes in the development of Scripture, and it will give the reader a sense of the Big Picture of Scripture.

Vaughn Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002), 20.

For example, a recent popular biblical theology is named just that: *God's Big Picture*, and it is a popularization of Graeme Goldsworthy's book, *According to Plan*.⁸ One of the points that Vaughn Roberts makes in his small volume is that readers of the Bible often get lost when they begin the daunting task of trying to understand the Bible. It's almost as if they have been dropped into a vast foreign country. What they need is some type of map to get their bearings, to see the lay of the land as it were. He uses a military analogy to illustrate his point: When British Special Services officers parachute into unknown territory, they consult a map which quickly enables them to get their bearings so that they can determine exactly where they are in relation to their destination.⁹

Cited in **Michael Williams,** "Systematic Theology as a Biblical Discipline," in *All for Jesus: A Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary*, ed. Robert A. Peterson and Sean Michael Lucas (Fearn, Tain, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 172.

Thus by being able to see the overall structure of the biblical map, the big picture as it were, believers are able to make better sense of how each part fits and sense everything in its proper portion. Karl Barth once remarked about the scholastic systematic theologians that "they sought to lighten heaven with earth's searchlights rather than "let the light of heaven be seen and understood here on earth."¹⁰ Biblical theology keeps heaven's search light shining here on earth, by giving systematic theology its proper perspective.

One has to remind oneself that the Bible is not organized like a systematic theology. But simply to repeat the Bible is not practical in order to find out its major teachings to transmit to others and to use them as a guide for one's own life. Biblical theology works with the actual structure of the biblical message over time in a condensed

way in order to provide an important guide for systematic theology to understand the biblical text accurately.

GET BACK IN THE WATER

Perhaps one last illustration is in order. In many systematic theologies, God’s autobiographical statements—statements he makes about his own character do not usually have a more important theological profile than other statements about God’s being and essence. They are all grouped together and relativized. It would seem that the revelation of the divine name, and God’s very own definition of the divine character in Exodus 34:5-7, should be front and centre in any theological description of God, and the ultimate manifestation of this revelation in Christ (John 1:1-18). This is God’s own analysis of the situation. Any systematic theology must take its cue first from the theological prominence assigned to a particular text within the Bible, which is the result of understanding it within the larger context, which is a result of a rigorous use of a biblical theological method.¹¹

When C.S. Lewis remarked that it is important to understand your swim in the beach (spiritual experience) by studying a map, he was not at all inhibiting that experience or stifling it. In fact, he was opening it up, and wanting the individual to enjoy it more. My hope in writing this short article is that your use of the maps provided by systematic theology and biblical theology would encourage you not to stay on the shore to enjoy the view but rather to get back into the water, and swim out into the depths of God (Rom. 11:33)!

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For further reflection, see **Graham A. Cole**, “Exodus 34, The Mid-doth and the Doctrine of God: The Importance of Biblical Theology to Evangelical Systematic Theology,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 3 (2008): 24-37.

THE BIG PICTURE JESUS

by
David Murray

Most biographies start with a person's past. Presidential biographies not only go back to the president's first job, or where he went to school, or even where he was born. No, the author usually starts with the president's parents, or grandparents. In fact, usually he goes as far back as records allow.

Why? Why so much interest in people and places that existed and lived hundreds of years before the president?

Partly it's because we want to trace the important influences on the president's ancestors. We recognize that a president's genes, characteristics, interests, personality, etc., were all shaped by his family history and even geography.

But it's also because we want to see a plan. We want to be able to look back many years and sense the guiding hand of Providence in a person's story, even before they were part of the story. Biographers look for decisions, events, and characters, both big and small, that demonstrate the Divine Hand preparing the way for this remarkable person's arrival on earth. He's looking for evidence of a plan, a pattern, or a sense of destiny that can be traced way back, through centuries, perhaps.

Presidential candidates often attempt this in their own autobiographies. They want us to connect them with the past, because they all want us to see that they were "predestined" to this, that this was part of a higher plan they had little or no say in. They're saying, "I'm not just an accident or a coincidence! I have a story, a long and important story, that Someone else is writing for me."

THE GOSPELS

That’s why the first chapter of the first Gospel starts with a summary genealogy of Jesus’ ancestors. Although most people just skip over the first seventeen verses of Matthew and go straight to the baby scene, Matthew is saying: “Hey, this is important. Here’s a thumbnail sketch of this baby’s past. Now, go back, read the details, and see how this birthday is not just a combination of good luck and probability. Under God’s direction, many people, places, and events have prepared the way for this day. And if you really want to figure out who this baby is, what his purpose is, and what you should do with him, you have to go back and read about all that led up to this event.”

But not many do. Some might dip into the Psalms and Proverbs here and there, and

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO FIGURE OUT WHO THIS BABY IS, WHAT HIS PURPOSE IS, AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DO WITH HIM, YOU HAVE TO GO BACK AND READ ABOUT ALL THAT LED UP TO THIS EVENT.

perhaps read a couple of inspiring chapters in Isaiah from time to time, etc. But it’s

like picking up the odd piece of a jigsaw puzzle, admiring it for a few minutes, then throwing it back in the box again. There’s rarely much attempt to put it all together, see the bigger picture, and identify the way that the Old Testament connects with the New, prepares for the New, sheds light on the New, and even makes sense of the New.

As this disjointed and fragmentary approach to the Bible leads to a disjointed and fragmentary spirituality, let me give you four reasons to study the Big Picture of both Testaments.

UNDERSTANDING JESUS BETTER

First, *the Big Picture helps us understand Jesus better*. Whenever a President is asked what books have influenced them, his

answer immediately propels that book to the top of the best seller list. People want to understand what went into the making of such a successful person, and also to see if the

book will have a similar powerful effect on their lives.

The biggest influence on Jesus' beliefs, language, decisions, spirituality, morality, and actions was the Old Testament. Brought up in a devout Jewish home by a godly mother and father, he was immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures. He heard them, read them, memorized them, sang them, obeyed them, quoted them, consciously and deliberately fulfilled them, and regularly taught them to others. No other book had anything like this influence upon him. It's so hard, if not impossible, to understand much of what Jesus said and did without reading the book that shaped him more than anything else in the world. It's like putting a few central pieces of the jigsaw together but not even trying to complete the rest. If you complete the rest, you will see Jesus in a whole new light, you'll see how each piece of the jigsaw connects so beautifully and necessarily with all the other pieces, even some of the oldest pieces.

REVEALING MORE OF JESUS

Second, *the Big Picture reveals more of Jesus to us*. What if I told you that I'd found

39 "Bonus" Gospels, 39 books that not only describe how the world and church were prepared for Christ, but are actually full of Christ? Yes, in the Old Testament, the Son of God was present and active long before his incarnation, revealing himself to needy sinners via prophecies, pictures, precepts, and especially by his personal presence.

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT I'D FOUND 39 "BONUS" GOSPELS, 39 BOOKS THAT NOT ONLY DESCRIBE HOW THE WORLD AND CHURCH WERE PREPARED FOR CHRIST, BUT ARE ACTUALLY FULL OF CHRIST?

This is where Christ's biography differs radically from every other biography. When we read about his past in the Old Testament we are not just reading about his background or his ancestors; we are reading about him. When he was encouraging the Pharisees to read the Old Testament, the reason he gave was, "They testify of me" (John 5:29). These books were speaking about him, telling people about him, drawing people to put faith in him, even before he was born. "Moses wrote of me" said Jesus (John 5:46). That's almost 1500 years before Bethlehem! Traveling even further back to 2000 BC, Abraham "saw" Christ's day way down the road of faith and rejoiced (John 8:56).

But Christ was not just seen by forward-looking faith. He was actually there in the Old Testament and seen with human eyes. He frequently came to earth to minister to his people as the Angel (or Messenger) of the Lord, a divine person who often appeared in human form to bring messages of grace and merciful help to needy sinners. 39 Bonus Gospels!

TRUSTING IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Third, *the Big Picture builds confidence in God's Sovereignty*. The more you see the all-encompassing and unchanging redemptive plan of God, the more you will trust in God's sovereignty. When you see that no event was accidental, that every event was planned and part of the preparation for the Christ, that God has only a Plan A and it's being perfectly accomplished, we can begin to trust him better with *our* past, *our* present, and *our* future. If all I see are disconnected fragments, faith fails, especially in trial. But if I see that God has every piece in his hand and he knows exactly where to put it and when, and that it's forming a beautiful big picture of Christ, that buttresses faith in a God who is in total and utter control of the world and of *my world*.

MAKING SENSE OF OUR STORIES

Fourth, *the Big Picture helps us make sense of our stories*. In *Christ-centered Biblical Counseling*, counselor John Henderson corrects Reggie who tried to help Maggie's suffering by quoting scattered Bible verses from here and there. He argues that we must always counsel within the grand narrative of Scripture, that these individual verses will never make sense to Maggie unless she gets *The Story* behind the verses. He compares Reggie's approach to his own with this illustration:

I'm guessing you're trying to get her downriver to a good place. I just can't figure out how you'll help her along by standing at the banks, drawing out buckets of water, and throwing them on her feet. They're good buckets of water and all, but they have no current by themselves. Just like the rest of us, Maggie needs to be swept into the river.

As Henderson says, everybody has a story that they use to explain the world and their world. But "God's revelation is *The Story* meant to help us see clearly and interpret everything else....God's story interprets,

confronts, reshapes, and even redeems or condemns all our stories.”

When we are swept into God’s Story, God becomes the center of the story; and when God is the center of the story, it’s much easier to see how every part of my story is connected to his, how everything harmonizes, as Henderson again illustrates:

The Word acts like a mass symphony of instruments working in harmony and building to something grand, more than a phone book of musical soloists up for hire. All the stories and poems and letters and oracles and wisdom verses of God’s Word, like individual instruments in a great orchestra, serve *the whole story*. You served Mrs. Maggie a beautiful but single note from a single instrument in the orchestra. No doubt there are solos and duos all around, and each of these comfort and convict us in their

way and time, but they aren’t strumming and blowing on their own. In His time, I think the Lord wants us to hear and appreciate the way they harmonize.

If you see the Big Picture, you’ll increasingly hear the beautiful harmony of God’s Story, and you’ll sense your life’s many fragments coming together with grand purpose, new unity, and comforting cohesiveness.

David Murray is Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. He blogs at [HeadHeartHand](#) and his most recent book is *Jesus On Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament*. He lives in Grand Rapids with his wife, Shona, and five children. ■

PUTTING THE WHOLE BIBLE TOGETHER

Five Biblical Theologians
Share What They Have Learned
About the Storyline of the Bible

*Matthew Barrett with
Thomas Schreiner
T. Desmond Alexander
Gregorey K. Beale
Peter J. Gentry
Stephen J. Wellum*

In this roundtable discussion, Matthew Barrett, executive editor of *Credo Magazine*, talks with some of the best biblical theologians today and asks some penetrating questions in order to better understand how biblical theology should impact the way we read, interpret, and even preach the Bible.

Thomas Schreiner is the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the author of *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*.

In your new book, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, you structure your treatment book-by-book, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation, rather than topically or thematically. Nevertheless, in your estimation, what are some of the most important themes that characterize the story of redemptive history from the Old Testament to the New Testament?

You will not be surprised to learn that I think one of the most important themes is kingdom! God is the king and sovereign of

the world, and human beings are to rule the world by trusting and obeying him for his glory. Of course, Adam and Eve failed to trust and obey God and hence sin and death entered into the world. One of the major themes of Scripture, then, is how God reclaims his rule over the world through human beings. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is programmatic. God's victory, God's reign, will become a reality through the offspring of the woman who will crush the serpent.

Another central theme is "seed" or "offspring." The Lord will triumph through the offspring of the woman (Gen. 3:15). From the beginning of Genesis we see a conflict between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. Everyone enters the world as the offspring of the serpent, but God promises (the promise is another major theme!) that the offspring of the woman will triumph. We see the conflict between Abel and Cain and between Noah and the flood generation. Clearly, the offspring of the woman are few

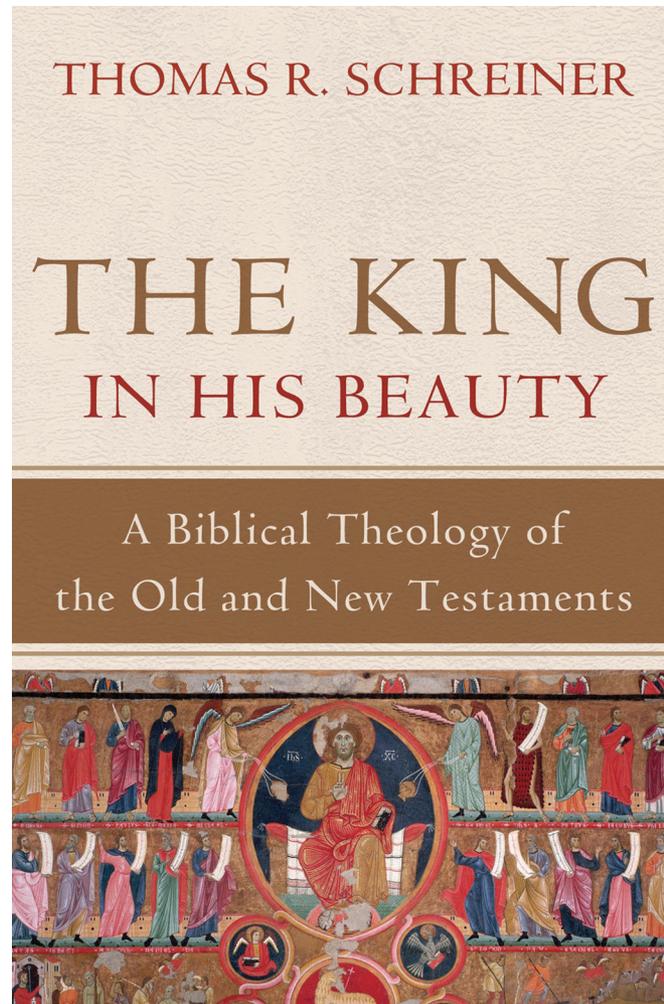
and far between. After the flood the Lord promises that the promise of Genesis 3:15 will be fulfilled through a child of Abraham. The promise narrows even more as the story unfolds, for it is revealed that the promise will be fulfilled through a son of David, through a king. Here we pick up the theme of the Messiah, the Anointed one, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the offspring of the woman, the true son of Abraham, the true son of David, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. The people of God, then, are those who are the offspring of the woman, or as the New Testament puts it they are the church, the body of Christ. Those who belong to Christ are the true Israel of God and the true children of Abraham.

Another prominent theme is the land. God's

rule over the world begins in the garden, which many have rightly said is a garden temple. Adam's role is to extend God's rule over the entire world. He fails, of course, but as the story unfolds we see God's plan for

blessing the entire world. The land of Canaan is, so to speak (though still corrupted by the fall), a new Eden. Israel, however, can't even rule this small piece of real estate, for they constantly give themselves to other gods and fail to trust him as they should. Indeed, we see here another major theme in the Scriptures: the sinfulness and corruption of human beings. Under Jesus Christ, however, the promise of the land becomes

expanded to the entire world, even the entire universe. All of creation will be God's temple and his dwelling place.



I mentioned in passing in the last paragraph the notion of sin. Certainly one of the major themes of Scripture is salvation, the rescue of God's people. Israel's exodus from Egypt, her redemption, certifies that God will deliver those who belong to him. The theme of the exodus is picked up in the prophets, and they promise that a new exodus is coming. In the NT the salvation promised is described in multifaceted ways: salvation, redemption, justification, sanctification, triumph over evil powers, adoption, etc. No one term can do justice to the great salvation God accomplishes for his people.

As I said previously, God's triumph over his enemies would come through the offspring of a woman, who would be the offspring of Abraham and a son of David. He would be a king. But how will this king bring victory? How will he triumph over his enemies? Many texts in the Old Testament teach that he will destroy his foes, but as the story unfolds it is slowly revealed that this king will triumph through suffering. As the Servant of the Lord he will suffer for the sake of his people and atone for their sins. Israel and Judah were cast into exile because of their sin, and Israel was under the thumb of the Romans because of their sin. Hence, the fundamental need for Israel and for all people is the forgiveness of sins. Such forgiveness of sins is promised in the

new covenant, and the NT emphasizes in a multitude of ways that such forgiveness is achieved through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I will mention one last theme here. What is the goal of the biblical story? It is to see the King in his beauty. Knowing God, delighting in God, and loving God are the heart and soul of the story. Adam and Eve delighted in God in the garden before the Fall, and we will delight in God in the heavenly city in the new creation. God has saved us through Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit so that we will find our joy and delight in him.

You have devoted much of your research to the apostle Paul and his articulation of justification by faith alone. But is such a doctrine in the Old Testament as well? And if so, how important is it to understand justification in light of its development from Adam to Christ?

Let me answer the second question first. If Paul's teaching on justification by faith doesn't accord with the OT, then it is suspect. There is only one way of salvation, so if the OT teaches that salvation and justification aren't by faith, then Paul is idiosyncratic and contradicts his own message, for he insists

that his teaching fulfills the OT Scriptures. Hence, it is crucial that what Paul teaches accords with the OT.

Obviously, the OT doesn't use Pauline terminology or develop the notion of justification by faith as clearly as Paul does. When we look at the broad storyline, however, the notion of justification by faith is present. God redeems and delivers a sinful people as he enters into covenant with them by his grace. The OT consistently teaches that God poured his love and mercy upon Israel in saving them (Deut. 7:7ff). It nowhere claims that Israel was saved by the Lord because its obedience merited the Lord's favor. Indeed, the Lord repeatedly delivers and saves Israel despite its sin and rebellion. For instance, in the new covenant the Lord promises by his grace to plant a new heart in his people and to forgive their sins. In other words, the theme of God's saving grace points to justification by faith.

Genesis 15:6, of course, declares that Abraham was righteous by his faith. Certainly he wasn't righteous by virtue of his works, for he was previously an idolater (Josh. 24:2). In the great faith chapter of Hebrews (chapter 11), we are told repeatedly that the obedience of OT saints flowed from their faith. Such a reading doesn't impose an alien narrative upon the OT, for we always obey what we believe. If you

think Tylenol will cure your headache, your faith translates into the action of taking the Tylenol. So, the obedience of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and so on stemmed from their faith. Hence, even though Genesis 12 doesn't say that Abraham left his homeland and traveled to the land of promise by faith, the writer of Hebrews rightly says "by faith Abraham obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). He left his homeland because he trusted that God would fulfill his promises to him. In the same way, as Numbers 13-14 indicate, Israel failed to enter the land of promise (they failed to obey) because of their lack of faith.

But doesn't the inextricable relationship between faith and obedience in the OT demonstrate that OT saints were justified by faith *and* obedience? Faith and obedience are inseparable, for all those who truly believe will also obey. If you believe that taking a particular prescription will cure you of pneumonia, you will obey the doctor and take the prescription. But just because faith and obedience are inseparable, it doesn't follow that they are indistinguishable. They are not the same entity. Faith is the root and obedience is the fruit. And obedience can't be ground of righteousness in the OT since the Lord always saves sinners, for salvation is given to those who trust him for his mercy. The OT sacrificial system, the Day of Atonement, and the prophecy regarding

the Servant of the Lord demonstrate that forgiveness is granted to those who are trusting God for his grace.

Some may be surprised to discover that you are not only a professor but a pastor and preacher as well. Tell us, what role should biblical theology play in a pastor's sermon each week as he is working his way through both the Old and New Testaments.

We always have to beware of formulas. Every sermon should be informed by biblical theology but it would be tiresome to emphasize the storyline of Scripture in every sermon. Preaching texts well is an art we all work at, and yet we never attain the goal. We want to hear the text in Genesis or Leviticus or Proverbs in its own historical context. But at the same time we have to preach those texts as Christians, and thus we need to be informed by the whole of Scripture in proclaiming any passage of the Bible. To take an obvious example: we don't preach Leviticus as if Christ has not come, as if animal sacrifices are still the will of God for us today.

Proverbs, on the other hand, is part of the wisdom literature. Still, we don't preach Proverbs as if the Christ has not come. We sit in a different place from the

original recipients. We aren't Israelites but Christians. We know that all of God's promises are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. We recognize that Jesus is the wisdom of God. The promises of riches and inheriting the land in Proverbs can't be limited to Israel or to the old creation. We know from the NT that these promises are fully and finally fulfilled in the new creation.

We don't want to be pedantic in our sermons, but we always preach in light of the whole story, recognizing that the Law, Prophets, and Writings all speak of Christ Jesus.

T. Desmond Alexander is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Union Theological College in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and he is the author of *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*.

One of the advantages of utilizing biblical theology is the ability to see how types and promises in the Old Testament come to fulfillment in the New Testament. Tell us, when do we first begin to see hints of the gospel in the Old Testament and how do these instances build up to the coming of Christ in the New Testament?

I am fully convinced that the OT points forward to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many Christians assume that this occurs through proof texts that are found scattered throughout the Old Testament. While this is partially correct, it is more helpful to observe that certain themes run throughout the whole of the Bible linking together its different parts.

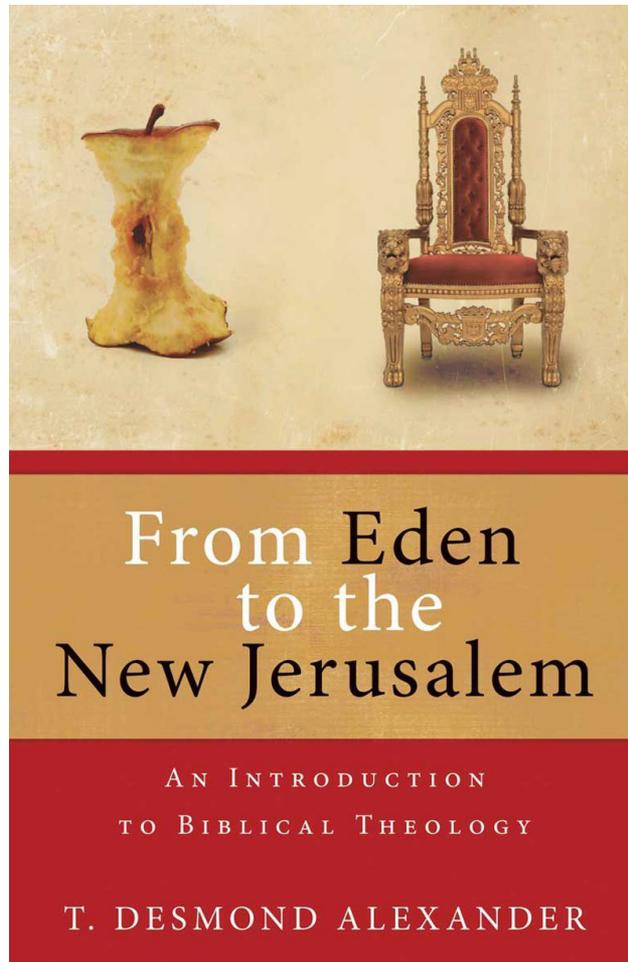
One of these concerns the coming of a king, who will bring blessing to all the nations of the world. In the NT we see this fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The NT builds upon promises already found in the OT. With good reason, Matthew's Gospel begins by linking Jesus backwards to David and Abraham.

When we turn to the Old Testament, the promise of a king may be traced to the opening chapters of Genesis. This promise comes in Genesis 3:15, where God promises

that the woman's offspring will overcome the serpent. Read on its own, this verse can be interpreted in different ways. However, when we read it in the light of Genesis as a whole, we see that Genesis traces a special

line of descendants that takes us from Adam to Noah and later Abraham, eventually leading us to Joseph and Judah. As we read through Genesis, we discover more and more about the promised King, and a full picture builds up slowly. It is important to appreciate that no single verse provides a full picture of the promised King. The portrait of the King develops as we keep reading. From Genesis we move on in the biblical story to King David, with

whom God establishes a special dynasty. From David we eventually come to Jesus Christ. Seeing the big picture is important for understanding who Jesus Christ is.



Christians are often excited to read through the Bible, but begin to struggle when they come to Moses and Sinai, especially in regards to the Mosaic Law. But if we look carefully, would you say that Passover and the sacrificial system are enormously important to properly understanding the death of Christ as the Lamb of God who is slain?

The Bible is fascinating because it contains all kinds of shorter books that enrich our understanding of God's purposes in the world. At first sight some of this material may seem obscure, especially for those who have had little background teaching about the Bible. This is especially so for the Old Testament books of Exodus and Leviticus. It is not easy to make sense of the instructions for the building of the tabernacle and the making of sacrifices.

Yet, in differing ways all of this material helps us comprehend better why Jesus Christ died on the cross for our salvation. We can see this perhaps more clearly when we look at the Passover. In Exodus 12 we read of how the Israelite firstborn males were saved from death by the sprinkling of blood on the door frames of the houses. The death of the Passover lambs brought life to those who faced death.

With this in view, the apostle John presents Jesus as a Passover lamb, whose death brings eternal life to those who believe in him. To draw out the many parallels that exist between Jesus and Passover, John describes not one Passover, but three in his gospel. Like all the other gospel writers, John places the death of Jesus at the time of Passover. He even records that Jesus' bones were not broken, like those of the Passover lamb (see Exod. 12:46). To underline that Jesus is the source of life, John places at the heart of his gospel the account of Lazarus being raised to life. In this context Jesus proclaims to Martha that he is the resurrection and the life. When we see the connection between Jesus and the Passover everything points to Jesus bringing about a greater Exodus. This is only part of the picture, but hopefully it helps illustrate the importance of what is told in the Old Testament.

Gregory K. Beale is Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and he is author of *A New Testament Biblical Theology*.

Much of your research has been devoted to the New Testament's use of the Old. What are some

of the major ways the New Testament's authors utilize the Old Testament?

Most of the time the uses of the OT in the NT that predominate include:

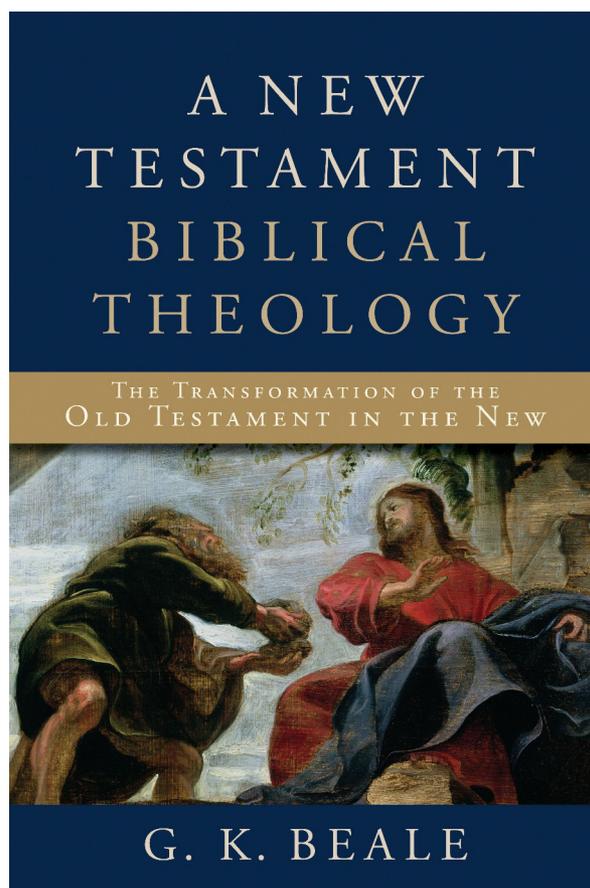
- (1) Fulfillment of direct verbal prophecy.
- (2) Fulfillment of indirect typological prophecy: This occurs when an OT event is viewed to have a foreshadowing pattern that finds its culmination and fulfillment in a NT event. For example, the past historical reflection of Israel's first exodus as God's son in Hosea 11:1 is viewed by Matthew 2:15 as foreshadowing prophetically Jesus, the Son, coming out of Egypt.
- (3) Analogical use of the OT in the NT. For example, note the false teacher(s) in Revelation 2:20 being compared to Jezebel from the OT. In my *A Handbook on the NT Use of the OT* (pp. 71-93), I list further kinds of uses as well.

If we take just one example, i.e., God dwelling amidst his people via the Temple in the Old Testament, how do the New Testament authors understand God's presence in light of the coming of Christ and the new covenant?

Sometimes the NT writers see that the OT temple as an institution is a prophetic typological foreshadowing of God's presence in Christ and his people as the end-temple (e.g., see Heb. 8:1-6; 9:11-14, 24), just as the sacrifices of the temple were a prophetic foreshadowing of Christ's once for all sacrifice. Sometimes direct verbal prophecies of the end-time temple are viewed as being fulfilled in the church, since the church is identified with Christ as the end-time temple (e.g., see 2 Cor. 6:16). It is in Christ and those who identify with him that all the prophecies of the end-time temple find fulfillment (now and consummately at the very end of time). Likewise, all the references to the OT temple find their typological foreshadowing fulfillment. No longer is God's special revelatory presence sequestered in a back room of a physical building (i.e., the temple), but with the coming of Christ, that tabernacling presence resides in Christ and all who trust in and identify with Him. Thus Christ and the church are not merely compared to being a temple, but they really are the true fulfillment of all that the OT temples pointed towards and the direct fulfillment of the explicit prophecies of the end-time temple. For discussion of many more examples of these two kinds of fulfillments, see my book, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*.

In your book, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, you zero in on what you call the “Inaugurated End-Time Resurrection.” Would you explain what this is, as well as its significance for understanding the flow of redemptive history and the kingdom of God?

In my book I try to explain that “eschatology” is not mere futurology but also a reality that has begun with the first coming of Christ. But what is the heart of the concept of the “already and not yet latter days”? We should think of Christ’s life, and especially his death and resurrection as the central events which launched the latter days. These pivotal events of Christ’s life, death, and especially resurrection are eschatological because they launched the formal beginning of Christ’s reign in the new creation. The end-time new creational kingdom has not



been recognized sufficiently heretofore as the basis of a biblical theology of the NT, and it is this concept which I believe has the potential to refine significantly the general view of the eschatological “already and not yet.” In other words, at the heart of eschatology is resurrection and, thus, new creation and kingdom.

The OT prophesied that the destruction of the first creation and the re-creation of a new heavens and earth were to happen at the very end of time. Christ’s work reveals that the end of the world and the coming new creation have begun in his death and resurrection: 2 Corinthians 5:15 and 17 says Christ “died and rose again . . . so that if any

are in Christ, they are a new creation, the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” Revelation 1:5 refers to Christ as “the first-born from the dead” and then Revelation 3:14 defines “first-born”

as “the beginning of the [new] creation of God.” Likewise, Colossians 1:18 says that Christ is “the first-born from the dead” and “the beginning” so that “he himself might come to have first place in everything.” In Galatians 6:14-15 Paul says that his identification with Christ’s death (and implicitly his resurrection) means that he is a “new creation.”

Indeed, the resurrection was predicted by the OT to occur at the end of the world as part of the new creation. God would make redeemed humanity a part of the new creation by recreating their bodies through resurrection (cf. Dan. 12:1-2). Of course, we still look forward to the time when our bodies will be raised at Christ’s final parousia, and we will become part of the consummated new creation. Christ’s resurrection, however, placed him as the foundation stone of the new creation, i.e., the beginning of the eschatological new creation. The resurrected Christ is not merely spiritually the inauguration of the new cosmos, but he is literally its beginning, since he was resurrected with a physically resurrected, newly created body.

New creation is in mind wherever the mention of resurrection or the concept occurs, since it is essentially the new creation of humanity. The only way true believers will become a part of the final

new eternal new creation is by having their bodies resurrected. Thus resurrection is new creation. The equivalence of resurrection with new creation is apparent also from noticing that three of the four most explicit new creation texts in the NT (mentioned just above) refer to Christ’s resurrection (2 Cor. 5:14-17; Rev. 1:5 and 3:14; Col. 1:15-18), while the fourth refers to his death (Gal. 6:14-15; 2 Cor. 5:14-17 likely also include both the death and resurrection as a part of the new creation). These are significant observations, since the idea of resurrection occurs so much throughout the NT; likewise Christ’s death can be seen as part of the process of new creation, as hinted at just above in the Galatians 6:14-15. Likewise, mention of Christ’s death throughout the NT probably carries connotations of the beginning destruction of the old world which paves the way for the new. In light of these observations, new creation also can be seen as a more dominant notion than one might at first think.

In the light of what we have said so far, we can state the overriding idea of NT theology, especially in Paul and the Apocalypse but also in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. The idea is this: *Christ’s life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit launched the glorious end-time new creation and kingdom of God for his glory.*

How does Christ's resurrection and the end-time new creation fit into the overall storyline of the Bible?

The first Adam should have been faithful and obeyed and subdued the entire earth, but he did not. After the flood, Noah was commissioned to subdue the earth, but he had his own “fall” in a garden-like environment, also in connection with the image of nakedness. Subsequently, God creates a corporate Adam, Israel, who was to be obedient to God in the promised land, which the OT refers to repeatedly as “like the garden of Eden.” They were to go out from the promised land and subdue the rest of the earth. Appropriately, Israel was called by Adamic names, like “Son of Adam (Man)” and “Son of God.” Israel had her “fall” at the golden calf episode, the effects of which were devastating for the nation’s destiny. Instead of subduing the earth, she was subdued by it. Lastly, God raises up another individual Adamic figure, Jesus Christ, who finally does what Adam and Israel (the corporate Adam) should have done (i.e., rule over evil), and so he inaugurates a new creation which will not be corrupted but find its culmination in a new heavens and earth. And his names of “Son of God” and “Son of Man” also allude to him, not only as the kingly Last Adam, *but also as true Israel*. And Jesus does all this for his father’s glory.

Therefore, the main storyline of the Old Testament, as I have formulated it, is as follows:

The Old Testament is the story of God who progressively reestablishes his *eschatological* new creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory.

How does this OT storyline relate to that of the New Testament? How should the NT storyline be stated in light of its relation to the OT’s? I propose the following:

Jesus’ life of covenantal obedience, trials, death for sinners, and resurrection by the Spirit has launched the fulfillment of the eschatological already and not yet new creation reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment for the unfaithful, unto God’s glory.

The fulcrum or hinge of this storyline

is Christ's resurrection that formally launched his rule in a new creation. This statement of the NT's narrative line is to be understood from two angles. First, it is the principal generative concept from which the rest of the other major notions in the New Testament are derived; therefore, second, this idea is the overarching concept or organizing structure of thought within which the others are best understood. I try throughout my *NT Biblical Theology* to show how the major theological notions of the NT are really facets of an "already and not yet" end-time new creational rule. We may view Christ's death and especially his resurrection as the diamond of Christ's new creational reign, and all the facets (other major NT theological ideas) of the diamond are organically part of that diamond. It is also important to note that the major theological notions of the NT all have their roots in the OT, so that one must understand the OT to appreciate the various facets of NT theology. This is why I subtitled my *NT Biblical Theology* with "The Unfolding of the OT in the NT."

Peter J. Gentry is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the*

Covenants.

In your opinion, how can a wrong understanding of how the covenants relate to one another negatively influence one's whole Bible theology?

Since I consider metanarrative to be a key ingredient of one's worldview, and have argued that the progression of the covenants throughout the narrative of Scripture represent the key to its plot structure, failure to see how the covenants relate to each other will affect one's view of that plot structure. This will distort in some way one's Bible theology. Covenant theology and dispensationalism represent ways to put the whole Bible together; they are not just about eschatology.

In light of your book with Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, how should one interpret the Abrahamic covenant, especially in light of the new covenant?

When the covenant with creation was violated, God renewed it through the covenant with Noah.

This demonstrated to the whole world that even if we were given

a brand new start, we would all blow it. So God begins to work with one man and his family and through them to restore his whole creation. Out of the covenant with Abraham flows the Old Covenant at Sinai, the Davidic Covenant, and eventually, even the New Covenant. The NT clearly shows that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God was keeping his promises to Abraham (Acts 2).

Perhaps one covenant that is often forgotten is God's covenant with King David. Why is the Davidic covenant important and does it have any impact on the inauguration and consummation of the new covenant?

God's purpose is to use Israel, the family of Abraham, and to bring blessing to the nations. This seems completely doomed to failure since Israel is as headed for chaos and destruction as the nations. She is not a faithful covenant partner. In biblical language, she is not an obedient son or even servant king. So God makes promises to David. This covenant shows that what God intended for the nation of Israel will be fulfilled solely by her king as the one who stands for the nation as a whole. This has a great impact on the inauguration of the new covenant: it will only be fulfilled by Israel's King. The remnant boils down to one person who

becomes head of the new humanity.

Stephen J. Wellum is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*.

Currently you are writing a systematic theology. Of what value is biblical theology to the task of systematic theology?

People define biblical theology in a variety of ways and underneath those definitions are entire theologies, particularly a doctrine of Scripture. To answer the question of what value biblical theology is to the task of systematic theology, one must first define what is meant by biblical theology. In this regard, my understanding of biblical theology is that it is a *hermeneutical* discipline which seeks to do justice to what the Bible claims to be and what it actually is, i.e., it seeks to interpret the Bible *on its own terms*. In regards to the former, Scripture claims to be nothing less than God's Word written through the agency of human authors and is thus fully authoritative, reliable, and true as it discloses our triune God's *one* eternal plan enacted in human

history. In terms of the latter, Scripture, as God’s Word written, does not come to us all at once but over time, as our covenant Lord brings to pass his eternal plan first in creation and then after the fall in re-creation. Given that this is what Scripture is *and* how it comes to us, then it is crucial that we read and apply Scripture accordingly, which is precisely what biblical theology attempts to do as a *hermeneutical* discipline.

Biblical theology, then, seeks to unpack God’s unfolding redemptive plan, doing justice to the diversity of it, while always remembering that despite the diversity it is *one* plan which reaches its fulfillment in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Biblical theology is concerned to discover how the parts of Scripture fit in terms of the whole, according to God’s intention and purposes, not our own imaginative constructions. Biblical theology is utterly essential to rightly interpreting and “putting together” the whole counsel of God and thus learning to “think God’s thoughts after him.”

Unless we do justice to how God has unfolded his plan over time and see how later portions build on earlier portions and discover how all of it is fulfilled in Christ, we will fundamentally misunderstand Scripture. That is why biblical theology is keenly interested in reading Scripture *on its*

own terms, which is another way of saying, reading it across a redemptive-historical timeline (since that is how it has come to us), seeing how earlier Scripture leads to later Scripture and interpreting *all* of Scripture according to the Bible’s own categories, structure, and framework. It is only when we interpret Scripture this way that we are reading it according to God’s intent and thus rightly *doing* biblical theology.

What does this have to do with systematic theology? Everything! Let me describe the relationship in at least two ways. First, systematic theology is the discipline which *applies* the “whole counsel of God” to every area of life. Its motto is best described as “faith seeking understanding” as believers seek to formulate what we ought to believe about God, self, and the world in a comprehensive and coherent manner, rooted, grounded, and warranted by the biblical text. Systematic theology, in applying all of Scripture to all of life, is the culminating discipline which constructively formulates, defends, and proclaims biblical truth (in light of historical theology), in all of its beauty, depth, and breadth. As a discipline it seeks to bring our lives and thought captive to Christ and his Word and it helps believers live faithfully in the world. However, systematic theology is not done properly without first being grounded in the conclusions of biblical theology. In

fact, before one can rightly *apply* God's Word to our lives, we must first understand Scripture correctly which is the warranting task of biblical theology. Systematic theology is not correctly done without biblical theology and biblical theology is the first step in knowing how to "put together" God's revelation and redemptive plan which systematic theology builds on. Second, systematic theology builds on biblical theology, not merely in terms of content and data, but also in *how* Scripture unpacks various truths across the canon. Theological conclusions must not only be true to what specific texts say, but also to *how* those texts are developed canonically. Let me state this point in another way: the Bible cannot be appealed to in any way we desire. The Bible is not a "wax nose" which can be bent at will. Rather, Scripture comes to us *in its own way*; its categories and presentation is authoritative in how we draw conclusions from Scripture and "put together" our systematic theology. We must appeal to biblical texts the way they are presented in the entire canonical presentation.

So, for example, it is illegitimate to appeal to the Exodus to ground a larger Liberation theology since in Scripture the Exodus event becomes part of a larger typological pattern which culminates in the cross-work of Christ. Instead of serving as a proof-text

for a Marxist social analysis, God intends it to be part of the larger storyline which helps us understand the need for and the accomplishment of our Lord's redemptive work.

Or, one cannot appeal to the "health and wealth" promises of the old covenant without first wrestling with the place of those promises in their OT covenantal context and then applying those promises to us today only in and through the reality of the new covenant which we now live under as God's people. Biblical theology provides the underpinning for systematic theology in both of these ways and it is for this reason that the two disciplines are organically related and must never be separated.

Many Christians struggle to understand whether or not the Mosaic covenant at Sinai applies to them today. How should we, as those in the new covenant, view the Mosaic Law and its covenant stipulations today?

This is a very important question and obviously it is not easy to answer in such a short space. Throughout the ages, Christians have wrestled with this question and even major divisions within the church are due to different answers to this question.

For example, consider how one views the Sabbath command and its application to Christians today.

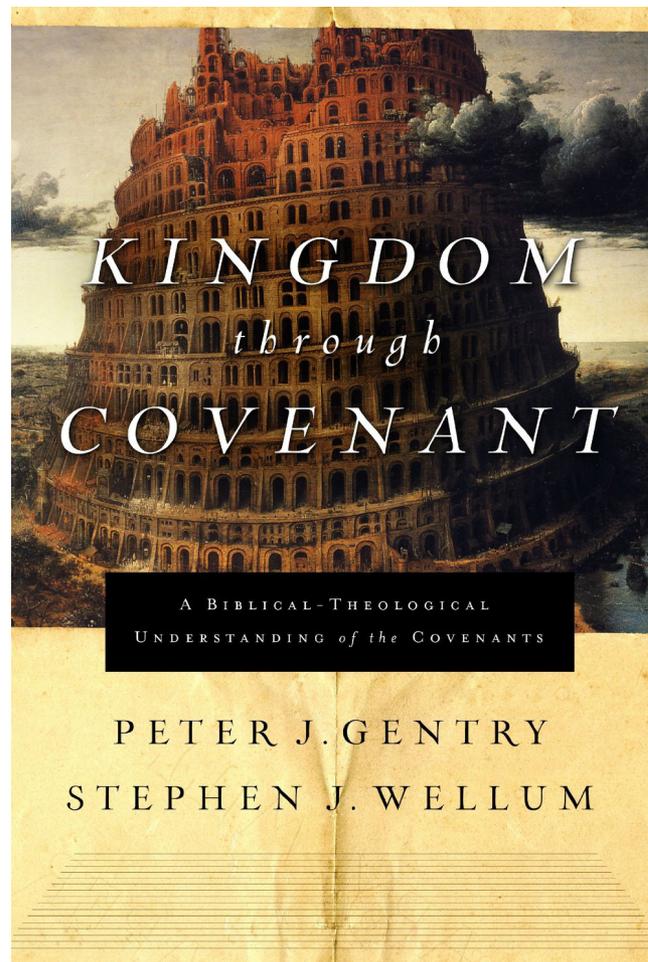
Let me answer this question in five brief points which hopefully will capture my overall view, while quickly acknowledging that I am only scratching the surface and that more specifics would have to be developed.

1. It is crucial that we place ourselves in our correct location in redemptive-history. As Christians, we live under the new covenant in faith-union with our covenant head, our Lord Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, and as a result we now begin to live out the realities of the new covenant as we await the second coming of our Lord. Furthermore, since I believe it is best to view all the previous covenants as find-

ing their fulfillment, *telos*, and *terminus* in Christ, it is important to say that we are *not* under the previous covenants *as covenants*, but we are under the new covenant and all that it demands.

2. Yet with that said, 2 Timothy 3:15-17 is very important in this regard. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the OT (and by extension the NT) is God's authoritative Word, that it leads us to salvation in Christ Jesus, and that it is profitable for our lives in every way. We may not be under the previous covenants *as covenants*, but we are to obey all that God has commanded and taught us in the

entire canon as Scripture. We have no warrant to think that the OT can be jettisoned or that we are not to obey all that it teaches and demands. *All Scripture is*



- for us and for our instruction and it is binding upon us.
3. However, this obviously raises an important question: What exactly is to be obeyed from previous covenants in redemptive-history? Since, for example, the old covenant has reached its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant, we know from Scripture that not all old covenant obligations are binding upon new covenant believers. For example, the food laws are no longer in force, nor is circumcision required under the new covenant (Mark 7:19; 1 Cor. 7:19). Under the old covenant, Israelites had no choice but to obey these commands, yet this is no longer true for us. In fact, as Paul stresses in Galatians and elsewhere, if we demand that Christians come under the old covenant in this way *as part of their covenantal obligation* it is tantamount to denying the gospel! This is an important reminder that even though we are to obey *all* Scripture, given changes in redemptive-history and the unfolding of the biblical covenants, not *all* of God's covenant demands are binding upon us depending upon the covenant we live under. So, how do we decide what is still in force and what is not in force given that Christ has come and we live in the new covenant era? The short answer is: we must apply the OT, and specifically the Mosaic covenant, in and through Christ and the lens of the new covenant.
 4. Hermeneutically, some have tried to argue one of two ways of doing this. On the one hand, some argue that unless the NT explicitly abolishes the OT, it is still in force. On the other hand, others contend that unless the NT explicitly commands something, we are under no obligation to do it. In my view, both of these options are insufficient. As stated, *all* Scripture is for our instruction, obedience, and application, yet we apply *all* Scripture to us, including the old covenant, in and through the unfolding of the biblical covenants culminating in Christ and the new covenant. The old covenant is a unitary package given to Israel in the OT. It is part of the unfolding covenants which do a number of things: reveal who our covenant God is, tell us who we are and what God demands of us, reveal to us our sin, unpack for us the great plan of redemption in various typological patterns, and anticipate and point forward to the coming of our Lord who brings to fulfillment all of the previous covenants. Since the new covenant, and more specifically our Lord Jesus, is the fulfillment of the old covenant (Matt. 5:17-20), that old covenant now reaches its intended completion in him. The old covenant remains relevant and valid for us *as it is fulfilled by and*

in him. In Christ, the old covenant is not *merely* confirmed, extended, or intensified (even though it is all of those things); rather in him, we now see more clearly where it pointed and how it has now come to fulfillment in him.

5. The implication of this, then, is that the entire Bible, including the OT, including the old covenant, must be viewed, read, and applied *in light of Christ and the new covenant*. This includes the 10 commandments and the entire old covenant law. So, whether we are reading about food laws, circumcision, the year of Jubilee, sexual ethics, and so on, we must ask how those instructions and demands function under the old covenant and how they are brought to fulfillment in Christ. Furthermore, we must ask in what ways each of those demands is grounded in creation, takes into consideration the fall, functions in their redemptive-historical location, and ultimately find their *telos* and *terminus* in Christ. It is only when we do this that we learn how to apply “the whole counsel of God” to our lives, as new covenant believers, living between the first and second advent of our Lord Jesus. The end result of this procedure will *not* be as some charge, a form of anti-nomianism, rather it will be a consistent application of God’s entire revelation to our lives, which, in the end, leads to a

greater demand upon us as God’s new covenant people, born of the Spirit and united to Christ.

In your book with Peter Gentry, *Kingdom through Covenant*, you title your view “Progressive Covenantalism.” For those interested in picking up your book, would you briefly explain how your position views the new covenant in a way that is different from covenant theology and dispensational theology?

Let me first answer this question by describing the term, “progressive covenantalism” and then setting it over against covenant and dispensational theology. Obviously all three positions agree on more than we disagree as those who are committed to historic, biblical Christianity. Sometimes our differences are so highlighted that we forget where we agree in matters related to the gospel. But with that said, throughout the ages, Christians have disagreed over some of the specifics of how to “put together” their Bibles, specifically in how the biblical covenants unfold and relate to each other, and this has led to covenant and dispensational theology as two major biblical-theological systems. Let me now describe why we use the term “progressive covenantalism” and

how it differs from these other dominant viewpoints at some key points.

First, our view is called “covenantalism” because we are convinced that the biblical covenants are the Bible’s own way, better, God’s own way of structuring redemptive-history and unfolding his glorious redemptive plan centered in Christ Jesus. We do not argue that “covenants” are the central theme of Scripture; rather we argue that the biblical covenants provide the backbone to the storyline of Scripture and it is *through* the covenants that God reveals himself and acts to redeem a people for himself. Apart from thinking through the biblical covenants and all that they disclose to us, we will not grasp correctly God’s eternal plan.

In addition, the adjective, “progressive,” stresses the fact that God’s revelation and redemption does not take place all at once. Instead, it comes to us over time, step-by-step, beginning in creation and culminating in the new creation. By “progressive” we do *not* mean that early parts of God’s plan are inferior vis-à-vis what comes later. Instead, we mean that earlier parts of God’s plan are purposefully incomplete, fragmentary, intended to point forward in an eschatological sense to something greater, namely the coming of Jesus Christ and all that he accomplishes for us in his life, death, and resurrection. So, putting these two terms to-

gether, we argue that it is *through* the step-by-step unfolding of the biblical covenants that God’s *one* eternal plan is made known, and that all of the biblical covenants are part of that one plan which Christ brings to fulfillment and completion. Furthermore, we are contending that to read and apply Scripture correctly, to draw theological conclusions properly from the entire canon, we must not only think carefully about each biblical covenant in its own redemptive-historical context, we must also wrestle with how each covenant builds on what is previous and thus unfolds God’s glorious plan to us, now fulfilled in Christ.

Second, how does our view differ from covenant and dispensational theology? The overall difference is that we disagree with how these two biblical-theological systems “put together” the biblical covenants and think of their fulfillment in Christ. Specifically, in terms of our covenantal disagreements, we depart from both systems in how they understand the relationship between Israel and the Church. Even though it may sound strange, we disagree with both views in that they are not sufficiently Christological enough! I realize that this needs a bit more explanation so in the next points let me explain what I mean in regard to each viewpoint.

Third, in regard to covenant theology, it is

well known that their view of the nature and structure of the church is patterned on Israel of old. In Israel, the old covenant community is a “mixed” community of believers and unbelievers, who are marked by the covenant sign of circumcision, and who are hierarchically led by various prophets, priests, and kings. As this comes over to the church, covenant theology emphasizes that the Church is this same mixed community comprised of believers and their children who are part of the church due to faith and specifically receiving the covenant sign, which is now baptism. It is due to this covenantal similarity between Israel and the Church that covenant theology has a transfer theology of circumcision to baptism and the view that the church is comprised of the elect and non-elect simultaneously, hence the distinction between the invisible and visible church.

However, we have argued that this view is not correct because it fails to see that: (a) the new covenant community is not exactly the same as the old covenant community. What the OT anticipates is a new covenant community, i.e., the Church, which is a regenerate community born of the Spirit and united to Christ; and (b) as we move from the old to the new covenant, the way fulfillment works is from Israel *to Christ* to the church. On the surface, no covenant theologian disagrees with this but when it comes

to talking about the nature of the church, too often covenant theology moves too fast from Israel to the Church, without first going through Christ.

What difference does it make? We believe it makes all the difference in the world. As we move through the various biblical covenants and covenant mediators, *all* of those covenants and mediators find their fulfillment in Christ. Our Lord is the last Adam, Abraham’s seed, the true Israel, David’s greater Son, and in his fulfilling *all* of the covenants along with their mediators, he brings with him massive change. In terms of his people, i.e., the people of the new covenant who have been joined to him, we are only those people if we have experienced the realities of the new covenant, namely the forgiveness of sin, new birth by the Spirit, adoption, eternal salvation, and so on, which can only be true of a regenerate, believing people. It is for this reason that the sign of the covenant—baptism—is only applied to those who profess that they are in faith-union with Christ, born of the Spirit, and forgiven of their sins.

Fourth, in a similar yet different way, dispensational theology also fails to move from Israel *to Christ* to the Church properly. Due to their appeal to the Abrahamic covenant and the ontological distinction they make between Israel and the Church,

dispensationalists argue that ethnic Israel is given specific promises which will only be fulfilled in the future millennial age to ethnic Israel. Specifically those promises are centered in the land promise with the Davidic king ruling in the nation of Israel, which is still awaiting its fulfillment in the millennial age. In our view, dispensationalism is right to distinguish Israel and the Church but not ontologically. Instead, we would distinguish the two communities redemptive-historically and covenantally.

In addition, we differ with our dispensational colleagues in two ways. (1) We see old covenant Israel, through the Davidic covenant, reaching its fulfillment in Christ who is the true Israel and David's greater Son. As such, in Christ *all* of God's promises to Abraham, Israel, and David, rooted back to Adam, are fulfilled in him. The Church, which is comprised of Jews and Gentiles, now receive these promises in and through Christ. (2) We view the land promise given to Abraham as first rooted in Eden and creation and now fulfilled in Christ and the

dawning of the new creation. In this way, the land promise *through* the biblical covenants becomes a pattern or type which looks back to creation and looks forward to Christ and the new creation. Given that Christ is the fulfillment of *all* the biblical covenants; given that he is the last Adam and true Israel; given that the new covenant people united to him is *one* people comprised of elect Jews and Gentiles, then we do not believe that there are promises still to be fulfilled to ethnic Jews in the millennium apart from Christ and the church.

Obviously more can be said, and once again it is important to stress our agreements more than our disagreements. Yet, how one "puts together" the biblical covenants does matter and it will lead to various differences especially in the area of ecclesiology and eschatology. In our view a mediating position is necessary between the dominant positions of covenant and dispensational theology, which is what we have sought to offer in "progressive covenantalism." 

Going Deeper

with *Richard Gaffin*

Gaffin Introduces One of the Most Important Biblical Theologians of the Past, Geerhardus Vos

WHO WAS GEERHARDUS VOS?

Born in the Netherlands on March 14, 1862, Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) emigrated with his family to the United States in 1881. Following theological studies in Grand Rapids, Michigan at the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church (the precursor of Calvin College and Seminary) and Princeton Seminary, he studied in Germany, first in Berlin and then in Strassburg, where he received his doctor's degree in Arabic studies in 1888.

His personal gifts and remarkable scholarly ability across the entire range of theological studies, evident already as a student, did not go unrecognized. In the

Fall of 1888 he began teaching at his alma mater in Grand Rapids, where for five years he was responsible for a wide spectrum of subjects ranging from Greek grammar to systematic theology and carried an instructional load at times as high as 25 hours per week, preaching, in addition, at least once nearly every week. In 1893, in what proved to be the decision of a lifetime, he accepted appointment as professor to the newly created chair of biblical theology at Princeton Seminary, where he remained until retirement in 1932.



The long Princeton years appear to have been relatively quiet and untroubled, given over to teaching, research, writing and occasionally preaching, with no outside involvements or other complications interrupting this pattern in any substantial

way. Primarily through seminary courses, several books and numerous articles and book reviews, he worked at developing the discipline of biblical theology, for both Old and New Testaments, within a cordial commitment to the classical Reformed confessions and the theology they entail. During retirement and then posthumously, with the editorial efforts of son, Johannes, some of his most important work was published. He died in Grand Rapids on August 13, 1949.

HOW DID VOS INTERPRET THE BIBLE?

Vos did not lecture or write formally on biblical interpretation. Consequently, the principles he employed are disclosed by analyzing the actual interpretation he provides over a lifetime of involvement, as noted above, in biblical theology or, his preferred designation, "History of Special Revelation." Two statements, one from his 1894 Princeton inaugural address and the other written well into retirement, serve to bracket his entire life's work and also to pinpoint its hermeneutical thrust. "It is certainly not without significance that God has embodied the contents of revelation, not in a dogmatic system, but in a book of history, the parallel to which in dramatic

interest and simple eloquence is nowhere to be found." "The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook but a historical book full of dramatic interest."

These statements, nearly identical, express an overall and controlling interest in his approach to Scripture, namely its historical character. As the immediate context of each as well as the rest of his writings makes clear, they do not mean that the Bible consists only of narrative or provides a uniform historiography. Rather their concern is the subject matter of biblical revelation. Within the wide variety of literary genres present in Scripture, there is a common overall historical focus with an eschatological orientation. Specifically, that controlling framework is the history that begins with the entrance of human sin into the originally good creation, incorporates along the way the history of Israel, his chosen covenant people, and reaches its culmination in the person and saving work of the incarnate Christ, the triumphant God's supreme, nothing less than eschatological self-revelation.

This generalization holds for biblical revelation in its entirety. It is not that by far the largest part of Scripture or that its main emphasis concerns Christ's redemptive work, while the other, less prominent portions are basically independent of

this concern, related to redemption only indirectly or not at all. Rather, in its way every single strand in the rich diversity of biblical revelation is oriented to salvation in Christ. Specifically, his death and resurrection, messianic suffering and glory, constitute the eschatological focal point of all biblical revelation.

This christocentric focus is brought to light by the way in which Vos views the relationship between redemptive deed and revelatory word or, more broadly, the interrelated historical processes of redemption and (verbal) revelation. Revelation—pre-fall, preredemptive revelation in Eden excepted—is interpretation, whether as attestation or explanation (the line between them is not

THE HISTORY OF REVELATION, WHICH INCLUDES ITS INSCRIPTURATION, IS AN ESSENTIAL STRAND WITHIN THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION AS A WHOLE.

hard and fast), of redemption. God's word invariably has his redemptive deeds for its subject matter. Apart from redemption revelation has nothing to say; "it would be suspended in the air." Revelation is a function of redemption and so comes in a historically progressive fashion. The

accomplishment of redemption is not a divine work that breaks into history only at a single point. Rather, the long history of God's covenantal activity consummates in Christ's work. Accordingly, the pattern of God's redemptive deeds sets the pattern by which he reveals himself verbally. Revelation is historically progressive because redemption is historically progressive and epochal in its realization. The history of revelation, which includes its in-scripturation, is an essential strand within the history of redemption as a whole.

This linking of revelation to redemption results in a balanced assessment of Scripture. On the one hand, Scripture has absolute necessity as God's direct verbal self-revelation, precluding any polarization of "deed revelation" and "word revelation" in favor of the former or by depreciating or denying the latter. On the other hand, the Bible is not an end in itself - what

a high view of Scripture can easily forget. Scripture would not exist apart from the redemptive-historical, covenantal matrix out of which it comes and with which it is concerned. Without introducing unwarranted dichotomies or an undue restriction on the scope of revelation, Vos

accents that verbal revelation provides knowledge concerning the nature of God, man and the world as it is God's own interpretation of his activity first as creator and then as creator and redeemer. The rationale for revelation being historically progressive is not only pedagogical. The deepest motive controlling the flow of its history is not instruction but incarnation. Scripture provides no basis for an intellectualistic conception of revelation or theology. It is everywhere directed, as redemptive-historical, to the full, flesh and blood historicity of human life. "The circle of revelation is not a school, but a 'covenant.'"

The biblical-theological method exemplified by this redemptive-historical or, more broadly, covenant-historical orientation has important consequences for interpretation. First, it seeks more consistent fidelity to the hermeneutical proposition given with the sola scriptura of the Reformation—Martin Luther's well-known "Scripture interprets Scripture." The sense of this self-interpretation, which focuses the principle that the text is to be interpreted in the light of its context, is that the diverse teaching of Scripture, as God's written word, is a concordant unity. Any one part is located within an expanding horizon of God-given contexts that always serves to clarify. Biblical revelation is self-

elucidating because it is an organically unified whole.

Through various exegetical studies Vos clarifies this unity as it is resident ultimately in the subject matter of Scripture. Biblical revelation, in its literary diversity, faithfully records the actual history of special revelation. That history, in turn, is unified as the ongoing interpretation of redemptive history, which, centered in Christ, unfolds organically, like a maturing organism. Theology methodologically controlled by this redemptive-historical, eschatological framework, established by Scripture itself, will not only be prone to reach more thoroughly biblical conclusions but will also tend to begin with the right questions. For Paul and the other biblical writers, "The historical was first, then the theological."

Second, this orientation results in concentrated attention to the role of the human authors of the biblical documents. For Vos this is not a captivation with the alleged "humanity" of Scripture at the expense of downplaying its primary divine authorship. Rather, because his concern is with revelation as a historical process, he is inevitably drawn to the varied human instrumentality that is an integral factor in giving shape to that process. The distinguishing characteristics and

peculiarities of each of the human authors and what they have written are essential to revelation as historically differentiated. Divine and human authorship, the unity and diversity of Scripture, are not in tension. Careful attention to the writings of the various authors in all their respective individuality and particularity will only serve to disclose in all its rich diversity the organic unity of the Bible as revelation.

Third, Vos has a marked sense of continuity between the interpreter today and the New Testament writers. “Still we know full well that we ourselves live just as much in the N. T. as did Peter and Paul and John.” Paul, for instance, is viewed as a theologian and “the father of Christian eschatology.” Without ignoring important, categorical differences (inspired—uninspired, canonical—noncanonical), both the New Testament writers and their interpreters are concerned with a common subject matter, the history of redemption, and share that concern from within basically the same redemptive-historical, eschatological context, bracketed by Christ’s resurrection and his return. If one grants that theology ought to be essentially exegetical, based on interpretation of Scripture, awareness of this continuity tends to insure a more rigorously biblical focus and more biblical

boundaries to the entire theological enterprise.

THE LEGACY OF GEERHARDUS VOS

Vos is among the first in the tradition of Reformation orthodoxy to give pointed, systematic attention to the doctrinal or positive theological significance God’s self-revelation as an organically unfolding historical process with diverse human authors and to begin following out corresponding methodological consequences. As the father of a Reformed biblical theology, he provides an important alternative and corrective to the biblical

AS THE FATHER OF A REFORMED BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, HE PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT ALTERNATIVE AND CORRECTIVE TO THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY RESULTING FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT

theology resulting from the Enlightenment and the historical-critical method of interpretation with its denial of the divine

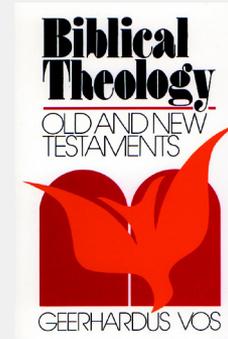
authorship of Scripture and its controlling commitment, more or less self-conscious, to the rational autonomy of the interpreter (e.g., J. Gabler).

His work shows that the redemptive-historical orientation he articulated is not an optional exegetical luxury. Detailed grammatical-historical exegesis remains essential, but, if it is properly reflective, recognizes that it interacts reciprocally with and to the extent that it is controlled by a larger outlook. For Scripture, that outlook is the redemptive-historical, eschatological perspective it provides as a horizon indispensable for understanding it, whether in its parts or as a whole.

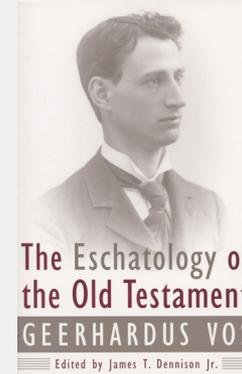
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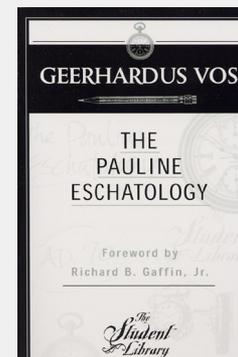
START READING GEERHARDUS VOS



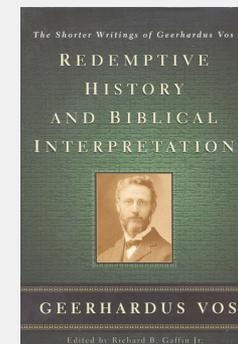
Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments (Banner of Truth)



The Eschatology of the Old Testament (P&R)



The Pauline Eschatology (Baker)



Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation (P&R)



THE GOD WHO BECAME HUMAN

by
Graham Cole

Biblical theology as a discipline pays close attention to the unfolding biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. In so doing it particularly looks at the plotline with its Christo-centric focus as Brian Rosner suggests. My new book, *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of*

Incarnation, belongs to this genre.

However, the result of the study may surprise. Did Isaiah expect the incarnation of Yahweh or did Jeremiah or Malachi? I think not. Instead we find two lines of expectation: the coming of God and the coming of a divine agent (e.g. a king like David, a prophet like Moses). So then how was this most stupendous divine act providentially prepared for? How could an incarnation be possibly understood truly but, of course, not exhaustively?

Reflecting on these questions led me to explore the way God is self-revealed from the very beginning of the biblical narrative, next the former and latter prophets, then in Israel's hope. What struck me is how God comes before us as though embodied, as though incarnate. We read of the divine heart, arm, face, grief, and anger. We find the God who speaks, stands, acts and performs in ways analogous to human roles as a shepherd or king or warrior or nurse. This led me to posit three categories of such materials: anthropomorphism (human like shaped, e.g. arm), anthropathism (human like emotion, e.g. grief) and anthropraxisms (human like roles, e.g. king). Indeed, in some of the biblical testimonies the appearance of God can best be described as "anthropomorphic theophany" (e.g. Jacob's wrestling match

in Genesis 32), to borrow from James Barr.

GOD WITH US

I also found that a third term besides the traditional ones of transcendence and immanence was needful to do justice to the biblical revelation. Transcendence refers to how God as creator is not caught up in creation. Immanence balances transcendence by referring to how the Creator as sustainer is at work within the created order. Here I was aided by a term from Norman Pittenger, "concomitance." God is the one who comes alongside us as presence. That presence is seen in the garden (Gen. 2), the tabernacle (Exod. 40), the temple (1 Kings 8) and in Israel's hope that God himself would come to Zion (Ezek. 48).

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff's theory about theories provided yet another tool to help understand how, when the incarnation took place, it could be intelligible. The anthropomorphisms, anthropathisms and anthropraxisms of the Old Testament together with the theme of the divine presence and the hope of Yahweh's coming provided the conceptual preparation for the wonder of the incarnation. These various elements constituted what in Wolterstorff's

terms are background data beliefs without which the phenomenon on view would be unintelligible. For example, these sentences would be unintelligible with the reader's background beliefs about the English alphabet.

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

Particularly important for this work was Paul's description of the incarnation as a "mystery" in 1 Timothy 3:16. In Pauline theology a mystery is an element in the divine plan that up until that point had been hidden. For example, that believing Jews and believing Gentiles would have equal share at the divine table (Eph. 3). In that light, I could understand why a biblical theology of incarnation is much more subtle than say a biblical theology of covenant or kingship or sacrifice. If the Old Testament explicitly prophesied an incarnation then Paul's use of "mystery" becomes puzzling in the extreme.

What then do we see in the incarnation? Something amazing! Such is the divine love a grace, that God in the climax of the covenant does not send a surrogate, whether a merely human prophet or a merely human sage or a merely human Davidic king, but comes in the person of the Son, truly God, truly human. The incarnation of the Son of God is divine concomitance without peer. He so comes to

reveal the Father, to defeat the devil, to redeem his people, to be our sympathetic high priest who represents us, and as corollary the incarnate Son show us what it means for humanity to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Adam failed at that, so did Israel. This Adam, this Israel, this Son did not. In many ways the Bible presents the story of three sons.

Last, it is important to note that the incarnation has theological implications for theological method, for the doctrine of God and change, for the affirmation of the created order, for the valuing of human life, for understanding mission, for the encounter with other religions especially Islam, for the problem of evil and for ranking doctrines. Nor can we forget that there are existential implications as well. Ultimately, the incarnation should lead us to appreciate the depths of the divine love and wonder at what God has done in real space and in real time.

Graham A. Cole is Anglican Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School. He is the author of *Engaging With the Holy Spirit: Real Questions, Practical Answers*; *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*; *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*; and *The God Who Became Human*. He is married to Jules, a dress designer, author and teacher of fashion. He is an ordained Anglican minister. 



BOOK REVIEWS

**88. OUR SOUTHERN ZION:
OLD COLUMBIA SEMINARY (1828-1927)**

by David B. Calhoun

**91. THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOUL OF THE CHURCH:
THE ROOT AND FRUIT OF SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP**

by Thabiti Anyabwile

93. KINGDOM COME: THE AMILLENNIAL ALTERNATIVE

by Sam Storms

98. CHRIST-CENTERED BIBLICAL COUNSELING

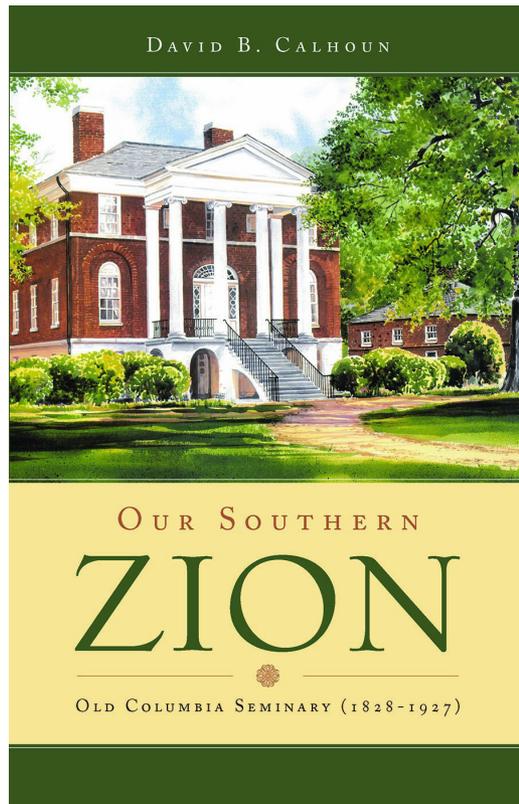
*Edited by James MacDonald,
Bob Kellemen, and Stephen Viars*

**101. LIVING BY REVEALED TRUTH: THE LIFE AND PASTORAL
THEOLOGY OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON**

by Tom Nettles

**104. POPOLOGETICS: POPULAR CULTURE
IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by Ted Turnau



COUNTERING CONTEMPT FOR THE HISTORY OF SOUTHERN WHITES DAVID CALHOUN RESURRECTS AN OLD HERITAGE THAT WE CAN LEARN FROM

by Gary Steward

David B. Calhoun is probably best known for his highly-prized two-volume history of Princeton Seminary. In *Our Southern Zion: Old Columbia Seminary (1828-1927)* (Banner of Truth) he has put forth a similar—though shorter—work which opens up the world of “Old Columbia” seminary from its beginning in 1828 to its relocation to Decatur, Georgia, in 1927. Columbia seminary had close connections with Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary,

and Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century. While Princeton could boast of its Alexanders and Hodges, Columbia could boast of George Howe, James Henley Thornwell, Charles Colcock Jones, John Adger, William S. Plumer, John Girardeau, and a number of others. While some may be familiar with these names, most today are likely unfamiliar with these important theologians, educators, and preachers. Calhoun’s book does a valuable service in telling their story in an interesting and compact way.

The figure who stands out above the others in Calhoun’s work is James Henley Thornwell (1812-1862), and rightly so. Thornwell taught at Columbia from 1855 until his death in 1862, before which he served in a number of academic and pastoral positions—including as president of South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina). He also served as editor of the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, which appeared in 1847 and rivaled Hodge’s *Princeton Review* in its scholarship and breadth. Thornwell’s abilities as a theologian, philosopher, and ecclesiastical leader would shape the character of Southern Presbyterianism for years to come. Calhoun quotes Southern historian Eugene Genovese as saying: “Thornwell rose to become one of the foremost leaders of a state that burst with outstanding men. [James C.] Calhoun considered him a giant among men, notwithstanding political differences over nullification and much else. . . . His impact upon the most eminent southern divines—Benjamin Palmer, John Adger, John Girardeau, among others—could hardly be exaggerated. Among other accomplishments, his contributions to the theory and practice of education could be read with profit today for the light they throw on current concerns. And by common consent, he emerged as the greatest theologian in the South and among

the greatest in the United States” (136).

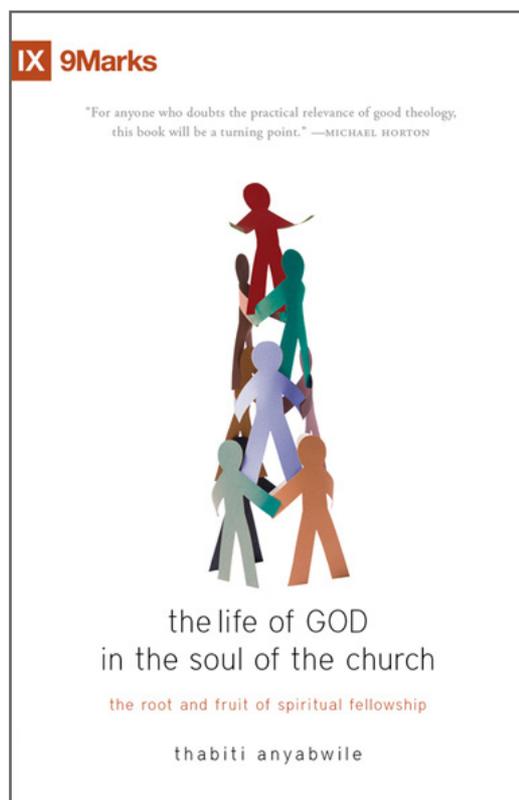
John Girardeau (1825-1898) also stands out from Calhoun’s work as a preacher and theologian who deserves to be more widely known. Girardeau spent over twelve years as a preacher to slaves in South Carolina before the outbreak of the Civil War and almost eight years after the war as a pastor to a largely black congregation. Girardeau was one of many connected with Old Columbia who labored as a slave evangelist, with Charles Colcock Jones and John Adger also having a significant ministry to slaves before joining the faculty of Columbia Seminary. In 1874 Girardeau stood almost alone (with Thomas Peck, against Benjamin Palmer) in resisting the Southern Presbyterians’ proposal to form racially segregated churches. Girardeau was extremely gifted as a preacher and noted for his “pulpit eloquence,” and yet his gifts as a theologian shone as well, especially in his writing on the doctrine of adoption and on the nature of the human will. Calhoun points out two works that most will almost certainly be unfamiliar with: Girardeau’s *Discussions of Philosophical Questions* (1900) and *The Will in Its Theological Relations* (1891), which critiques “the necessitarianism of Edwards” from a Calvinistic perspective (285, 289).

Calhoun states that the “Old Columbians to a man supported slavery before the Civil War and accepted segregation thereafter. They did not so much try to defend it, but neither did they oppose it” (xviii). On the other hand, Calhoun states that their “attitudes and practice toward black people, however, were more complex and nuanced than generally thought” (xviii). While “Thornwell defended slavery,” Calhoun also notes that “Thornwell demanded the legal sanction of slave marriages, the repeal of the laws against slave literacy, and effective measures to punish mistreatment of slaves.” (133) Calhoun notes that while we must abhor the cruelties of American slavery and the racial prejudice then common, the lives of these Southern believers still have valuable lessons for us today and should not be ignored. He again quotes Genevese, who has lamented the current “neglect of, or contempt for, the history of Southern whites, without which some of the more distinct and noble features of American national life must remain incomprehensible. The northern victory in 1865 silenced a discretely southern interpretation of American history and national identity, and it promoted a contemptuous dismissal of all things southern as nasty, racist, immoral, and intellectually inferior” (xviii-xix). It is Calhoun’s hope that what was good about the Old Columbian heritage might not be lost, even while acknowledging that the men of that period, as in our own time as well, had definite faults (xix).

For those wanting to know more about the shape and character of Reformed theology and theologians of the South, Calhoun directs readers in his introduction to his *The Glory of the LORD Risen Upon It*, which is a history of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia from 1795-1995. Old Columbia seminary had a close relationship with this church and shared with it many of its faculty members. He also refers readers to Douglas Kelly’s *Preachers with Power*, which sketches the lives of Daniel Baker, Thornwell, Palmer, and Girardeau, as well as Morton Smith’s *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*. Henry Alexander White’s *Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 1683-1911* remains the standard work on these men.

Calhoun’s work is an enjoyable read, especially for any who appreciate the history of Reformed theology in America. His description of Sherman’s burning of Columbia in 1865 and its aftermath is especially memorable. Given its scope, at times *Our Southern Zion* feels like it is only skimming the surface, but this is less a testimony to the book’s deficiency as it is more to the richness of his topic. Many will profit from this book and from the many authors and reprints it references.

Gary Steward is a Ph.D. candidate at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. ■



CHRIST THE CENTER ANYABWILE ENCOURAGES CHURCHES NOT TO BE CENTERED ON PROGRAMS, BUT UNION WITH CHRIST

by Matthew Barrett

The title of Thabiti Anyabwile’s new book, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church: The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Fellowship* (Christian Focus), builds off of Henry Scougal’s classic, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. There Scougal zeroes in on the fundamental truth of the believer’s identity, namely, that to be a Christian is to possess the divine life within. Despite its insight, Thabiti recognizes a major weakness in Scougal’s work: “The book fails to elaborate any corporate expressions of our union with Christ” (9). Therefore, Thabiti’s aim is to remind Christians not only that the life of God is in the soul of the local church but this divine life is to be shared, public, and

relational. His purpose is to impress upon the saints “a particular vision of spiritual fellowship centered not on external activities and programs but on our shared life of spiritual union with Jesus the Son of God” (10).

Two aspects of Thabiti’s book especially stand out. First, by turning to 1 John 1 Thabiti establishes that the goal of spiritual fellowship in the church is joy and holiness. Unfortunately, many churches today see no connection between the two. Few see holiness *as* joy. Instead, holiness is a burden, only bringing hardship, robbing us of all our joy. Holiness becomes a mere duty, keeping

us from what we really want. Holiness kills joy. But this is not what we see in Scripture. The bride of Christ is called to holiness because holiness is that which brings about freedom instead of captivity, joy instead of sorrow. While the false joys of this world “entangle, ensnare, shame, and make us want to hide ourselves from other people in our guilt,” the joy of holiness adds no sorrow, regret, or shame but instead allows us to walk in a “boundless, free, and glorious joy because the life of God is light in our souls” (23).

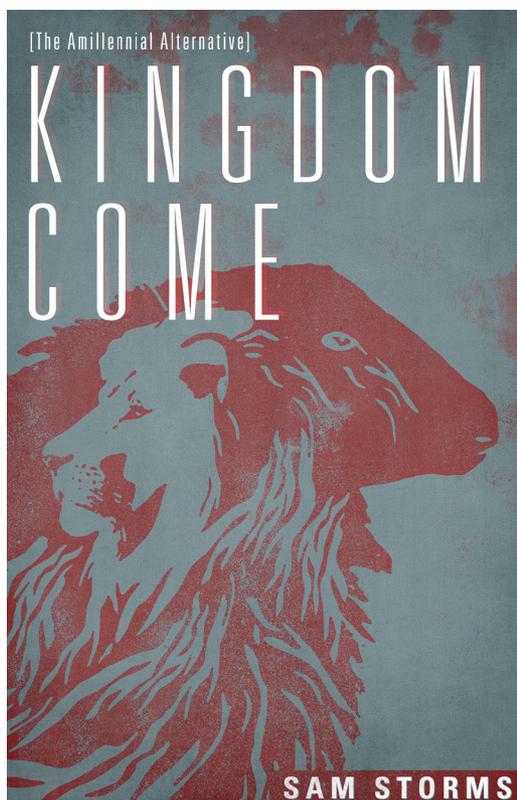
Second, Thabiti puts his finger on perhaps one of the most serious problems in contemporary Christianity, namely, the tendency to think of our Christian life as individual and private. Scripture, however, knows of no Christ-follower who is not actively apart of Christ’s bride, the church. While it is true that we enter “faith individually and personally,” nevertheless, “we live the faith corporately and publicly” (29). As 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, *we have fellowship with one another*, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Thabiti concludes, “This is why we regularly include public confession of sin in our public services. During those times, we are deepening our fellowship with God and with each other as we turn from sin to walk more faithfully in the light.” Thabiti warns that if we cut ourselves off from fellowship with God’s people we “will make ourselves vulnerable, weak, and tired because we are trying as one person to replace all that is meant to be shared together in the community” (29).

But it is not enough to simply warn the Christian

that he is in danger of starving spiritually by removing himself from the body of Christ. We must also acknowledge that such a mentality is offensive to God himself. Building off of 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Thabiti highlights Paul’s argument that “to deny your place in the body or to act independently of other members is to say that God does not know what He is doing.” God sent his Son to be crucified, buried, and resurrected in order to save sinners so that they would become part of his body. Therefore, to conclude “I don’t need the other members” is to say, “God blew it!” and “God did not know what he was doing!” Such a mindset is to say that God cannot build his church. “These attitudes,” says Thabiti, “slander and blaspheme God.” Such Christians are pulling apart the body of Christ, limbs and organs and all. Such Christians are “waging a quiet war against Jesus’ body.” Given this common trend in contemporary Christianity, Thabiti’s words of rebuke are very much needed.

To conclude, Thabiti’s treatment of what life should look like in the local church is saturated in Scripture. Each chapter takes us back to the biblical text, correcting our preconceived notions of church life and instead molding us into a biblical framework that reflects Christ’s intention for his bride. That said, no pastor should pass up this opportunity to be encouraged and admonished as to how our local churches can better reflect the shared life in Christ within the context of corporate worship and fellowship with one another.

Matthew Barrett is Executive Editor of *Credo Magazine*. 



WHEN WILL THE KINGDOM COME? CHALLENGING THE AMILLENIALISM VIEW

by Robert Saucy

At the beginning of his book, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Mentor), Sam Storms clearly states the aim of his work: “To provide a biblical rationale for what is commonly known as amillennialism. In doing so I will of necessity be forced to account for what I believe are the shortcomings of all varieties of premillennialism, and in particular the dispensational, pretribulation eschatology” (13). The latter concern stems from Storm’s conversion to amillennialism from the dispensational eschatology he was taught at Dallas Theological Seminary in the mid

1970s.

Unfortunately, Storms, at times describes a dispensationalism that few if any contemporary advocates and even those of his Dallas days would espouse, i.e., a system that sees the distinction between Israel and the Church in terms of two separate peoples that have two distinct purposes and destinies in God’s plan—one earthly (Israel) and one heavenly (the Church) (52, cf. 181). Later revisions of dispensationalism, although briefly mentioned, are largely ignored. Since these revisions retain a distinction between Israel

and the Church, Storms posits a central and controlling thesis which stands against all forms of dispensationalism: “The fulfillment of Israel’s prophetic hope as portrayed in the Old Testament documents is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the believing remnant, the Church . . .” (16). Expressed theologically, rather than “replacing” Israel, “the Church of the present age is simply the continuation and maturation of the believing remnant of Israel, namely, the disciples and all others who received Jesus as Messiah. Thus, the fellowship or Church established by Jesus stands . . . in direct continuity with the Old Testament Israel. This body is ‘true’ Old Testament Israel: the remnant” (343).

A WEALTH OF AMILLENNIAL INTERPRETATIONS

Before we analyze Storm’s thesis more thoroughly, it should be observed that the bulk of the 559 pages involves a discussion of “the major biblical texts that inform our understanding of eschatology” (13). A few comments on some of these may be noted. Considerable attention is devoted to the prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9 and materials from Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 11:2-12:13—texts that are deemed important to dispensational eschatology. The first 69

weeks, according to Storms, begin with the Decree of Cyprus in 538 B.C. and extend to the baptism of Jesus. The 70th week follows immediately with the middle marked by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the last half covering the present age until Christ returns. The four kingdoms (ch. 2), four beasts (ch. 7) and the he-goat (ch. 8), are all seen as ending in the Greek empire rather than Rome. Likewise the “king” throughout chapter 11 is Antiochus Epiphanes IV (2nd century B.C.). In sum, we are not to look to Daniel “for extensive detail concerning an alleged ‘Antichrist’ or the second coming of Christ and the end of human history” (132).

Interpreting the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25), Storms parts company with many traditional amillennialists by taking the partial preterist view. He reads Matthew 24:3-35 as describing the period from A.D. 33 to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Reference to the second coming of Christ does not begin until 24:36. One of a number of unusual interpretations in his book is the way Storms deals with the coming of the Lord in verse 30. Rather than the sign of the Son of Man being related to seeing “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory,” Storms suggests Jesus spoke about seeing a sign “that proved that He was in heaven,” vindicated and exalted at God’s

right hand (269, citing DeMar).

Two interpretations in Acts are also worth noting. First, the promise of the Spirit's coming and the witnessing of the gospel to the end of the earth in Acts 1:8 is the fulfillment of "the much anticipated kingdom of God" (285). Second, James' quotation of Amos 9 in Acts 15:13-18 teaches the present restoration of the Davidic kingdom with the salvation of Gentiles as the fulfillment of "the prophesied regathering of the true Israel" (301).

The eschatological texts in 2 Thessalonians concerning the Antichrist are discussed at length with the conclusion that the restrainer was holding back the man of sin or Antichrist in Paul's own day, and therefore could not be a future person. In the end, Storms acknowledges that he simply does not know what this passage teaches.

Four chapters are devoted to the eschatology of the book of Revelation with a primary concern to deny the futuristic interpretation of dispensationalists. He espouses a recapitulation view of the seals, trumpets, and bowls with all of them covering the entire period between the two advents of Christ. The references to three and a half years, 1260 days or time, times and half of time all refer to this entire age as a time of persecution. Likewise, in step with all

amillennialists, the 1000 years in which Satan is bound (Rev 20:1-3) and the saints are reigning with Christ (20:4) refers to the present age.

Finally, Storms also points to a number of texts that in his mind absolutely prove that Christ's return inaugurates the eternal state and therefore leave no room for an intermediate millennial kingdom prior to eternity. For instance, he cites 1 Corinthians 15:22-58 (the consummation of the kingdom introducing the eternal state comes with the defeat of death which happens at the second coming of Christ); Romans 8:18-23 and 2 Pet. 3:8-13 (the new earth and eternity come at Christ's return); Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 (the righteous and wicked are sent to their eternal destinies at the judgment when Christ returns); and John 5:28-29 (there is only one general resurrection of both righteous and wicked). Rejecting all premillennial interpretations of these texts, Storms concludes that Revelation 20:4-6 (part of an apocalyptic, symbolic book) must be interpreted in a way that accords with these plain truths.

WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL?

To adequately respond to this book would

require an equally lengthy tome. Space limitation permits interaction with only a few problematic issues which in this reviewer's mind undergird Storms' basic thesis. To reach his conclusion he sees the New Testament teaching the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in ways that would not be anticipated from these prophecies. For example, Jesus is said to have answered his disciples' question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in a way that was different than the Old Testament picture (284, 286).

The reason for this change is the rejection of Christ by Israel as a nation. According to Storms, the punishment of that nation for its apex of unbelief was "final and complete," expressed "in the destruction of Jerusalem and the final rejection of the nation from their privileged status as the people of God" (41, 40). But was this rejection not also predicted by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 53), along with the promise of a subsequent gracious conversion and restoration as a nation in a new covenant? Does the New Testament clearly teach such a final and complete rejection of Israel in distinction from the hope predicted by the prophets?

Underlying the concept that the prophecies are changed in the New Testament and the basic thesis of the work that the Church is the true Israel of prophecy is Storms'

apparent belief that all of the promises of salvation belonged to Israel. Thus all the references of blessings to the Gentiles require that they become part of true Israel. This raises the question of the relation of Israel to the nations. Was Israel called to be a special witness to the nations in order that they also might come to know God (e.g. Isa. 19:23-25), or was it simply a name for all believers? What are we to make of the nations bringing their glory into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21;24, 26)? Will all of these nations exist, but no Israel?

Finally, the basic thesis of Storms' amillennialism raises an interesting issue in relation to Romans 9-11. Most commentators on Romans see Paul's discussion of the future of Israel as the result of his proclamation of salvation in Christ in the first eight chapters. Since Israel as a nation had rejected Christ, the question arose, "What about all of the covenant promises that God had given to that people in the Old Testament Scriptures? Has the word of God failed" (e.g., 9:6)? It was to this question that these chapters were addressed.

But if Jesus had clearly taught that his disciples were a new Israel and the rest of the New Testament, including the apostle Paul, were clearly teaching that the church, both Jew and Gentile, was the continuation

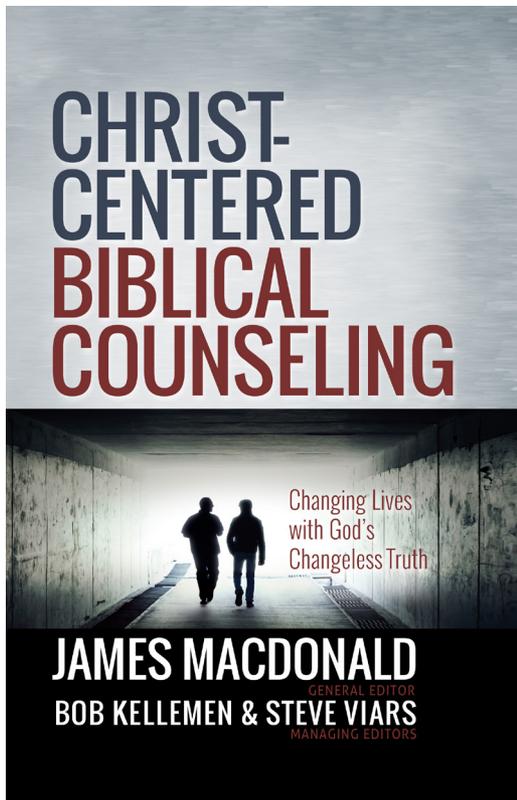
and maturation of Old Testament Israel and now constituted the true Israel of God, it is difficult to see why this question even arose. If Storms' view rightly describes New Testament teaching, then the first century believers would have known that God's covenant promises were being fulfilled in the church and that his word had not failed. But Paul does not use this response in Romans 9-11. He nowhere refers to Old Testament texts concerning the regathering of Israel or for that matter the streaming of Gentiles to Zion to explain his present ministry. Rather he supports what is presently going on with texts that refer to saving Gentiles when Israel is in disobedience (cf. 10:19-21). To suggest, as Storms does, that the question is whether any ethnic Jews would be saved seems inadequate as the earliest church was made up of ethnic Jews and no doubt some were coming to Christ regularly.

thorough and convincing often evokes analyses of numerous views on the debated topics. The author's penchant toward preterism as well as symbolic interpretation no doubt contributed to what this reviewer deemed some excessively complicated interpretations. Although not always an easy read, its freshness, thorough discussion of many biblical texts, and interaction with various views makes it a useful work for all who desire a fresh presentation of amillennialism, especially as a reaction to dispensational eschatology.

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A WELL-RESEARCHED DEFENSE OF AMILLENNIALISM

This book is packed with detailed and frequently complex biblical interpretations and theological arguments. It evidences considerable research including historical data particularly in relation to Daniel and Revelation. The obvious desire to be



CHANGING LIVES WITH CHRIST'S CHANGELESS TRUTH BIBLICAL COUNSELING FIXES OUR GAZE UPON CHRIST

by Michael Nelson

The newly formed Biblical Counseling Coalition (2011) organized around the goal of fostering collaborative relationships as well as providing relevant biblical resources that equip the body of Christ to change lives with Christ's changeless truth. As their confessional statement continues, it says that they pursue "this purpose by organizing our thinking around one central question: What does it mean to counsel in the grace and truth of Christ?" (429). *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Harvest House), edited by James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and

Stephen Viars, is this goal and purpose expanded into one volume containing over forty authors. The sheer amount of participation followed by coherence among these authors is amazing in itself. The collaborative nature among these biblical counselors who are comprised of men and women of various backgrounds, with different experiences, makes this volume a unique compendium of writing on one subject. For anyone looking for one book that summarizes and explains biblical counseling, this is definitely the book.

The first half is composed of the theology

behind biblical counseling. John Piper's chapter, "The Glory of God: The Goal of Biblical Counseling," is placed first. Piper, in usual fashion, impacts readers from the beginning. He states that the goal in biblical counseling is "God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally-in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self forgetting lovers of people" (24). From here, the rest of part 1 connects biblical counseling with the nature of Scripture, the Trinity, and redemption, and applying these truths through the gospel to the sinful human heart, leading to salvation and producing holiness, being held together by the hope of eternity. What is described is really nothing new; it is simply taking Scripture within its context and connecting it to the Bible's grand narrative. In the midst of this big picture is the hope that comes through understanding the gospel. As Nicolas Ellen and Jeremy Lelek explain in their chapter, "the reason for this rests in the fact that our hearts are wired for worship, and our worship is directly tied to our sense of hope." (218). This hope drives our pursuit of holiness as we fight the battles of sin and suffering, with the truths of Christ, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The second half of the book is composed of the practice behind biblical counseling. It is here that the theology of biblical counseling

in the first half is fleshed out in the life of the church and in the ministry of the counselor. The view of the writers in this book is that "formal counseling is required when struggles of sin and suffering reach a point of crisis, but informal counseling occurs all the time." (227). Therefore, focus is not only given to private ministry of the Word in the counseling room, but also the public ministry of the Word. These two aspects of counseling interweave together as they both serve similar functions in the believer's spiritual formation. Both ministries encourage believers to "grow spiritually by abiding in Jesus" (290). In addition to displaying what biblical counseling looks like in the life of the church, attention is given to the process and procedure of change. The goal here is to "equip biblical counselors to minister God's Word to hurting people with confidence, competence and compassion" (325). This includes explanations of data gathering, sorting out problems, counselor involvement, finding idols of the heart, seeing the power of confession, repentance and forgiveness, as well as understanding the complexities of the mind/soul relationship.

I recommend *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* for two reasons. First, this book is extremely practical. Providing a theology that undergirds counseling is necessary, but theology should always lead

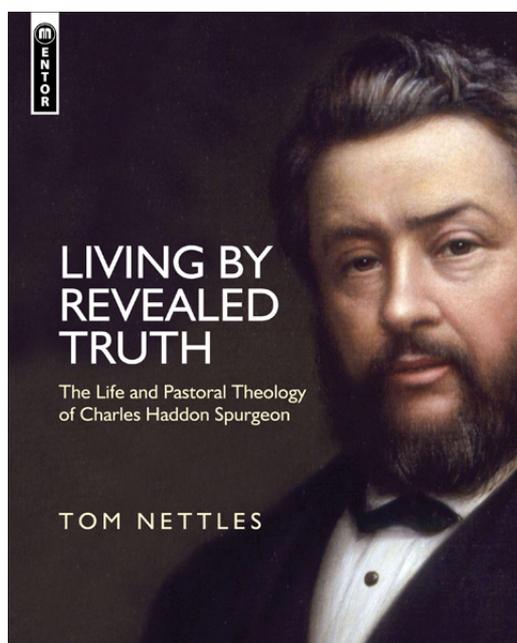
to practice. Case studies abound throughout this volume displaying truth applied to problems. In addition, many chapters come with bullet points, diagrams and grids to help further break down information.

Second, *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* offers a helpful balance between different strands of biblical counseling. This was clearly demonstrated by Laura Hendrickson in her chapter on “The Complex Mind/Body Connection.” Hendrickson wades through difficult waters when she addresses disagreements over medicine and counseling. She argues that when it comes to medicine and counseling, “neither extreme position is consistent with the full counsel of Scripture or with the findings of medical science” (415). This balance displayed throughout this book comes through having a variety of writers, which again adds to the value of

this volume.

As Bob Kellemen and Steve Viars conclude, “*Christ Centered Biblical Counseling* will equip you to equip others also so that we bring Him glory through our individual and corporate growth in Christlikeness” (426). This conclusion shows through in the message of this book where the reader will see that, “understanding people, diagnosing the root sources of problems, and prescribing wise ‘treatment options’ requires robust, relational, comprehensive and compassionate care grounded in our shared redemptive relationship to Christ” (422).

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LEARNING FROM THE PRINCE OF PREACHERS

THOMAS NETTLES OPENS A NEW WINDOW INTO THE HEART AND SOUL OF CHARLES SPURGEON

by Jeff Straub

One of the most recognizable names from 19th century British evangelicalism is Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the widely-read pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Southwark, London from 1854-1892. As a religious leader, Spurgeon left an immense mark on British life during his long tenure in London. As a pastor and a preacher, Spurgeon continues to influence succeeding generations of ministerial men, Baptist and otherwise, to excel in the work of the ministry. If the writer of the book of Hebrews were to add an addendum to his eleventh chapter, Spurgeon would be a prominent choice for inclusion. As such, it is fitting that he should be the continual

subject of biographical research. Yet how to make a new biography of such a well-known figure is the burden Thomas Nettles takes up in this recently released *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Mentor), a book more than fifteen years in the making.

Biographies of the grand preacher have abounded since his meteoric rise and untimely death at the end of the 19th century. Most of them focus on Spurgeon and his many ministries—from the thriving inner city church, to the Pastor’s College, to his orphanages. So many were Spurgeon’s earthly accomplishments that the simple telling of

the story generally is a sufficient task for the average biographer. Nearly all biographies deal with some aspect of his publications, most commonly the massive collection of sermons comprising the *New Park Street Pulpit* and its successor, *The Metropolitan Pulpit*, which continued publishing “new” Spurgeon sermons for more than a generation after his death when the exigencies of the First World War finally brought the series to a close. (Spurgeon’s early printed sermons, which he personally edited each Monday morning for weekly release, were his Sunday morning sermons. After his death, sermons from other services were offered to the reading public, though without his editorial supervision.) Also among the corpus of Spurgeon’s work beyond the sermons was his weekly paper *The Sword and the Trowel*, over which he provided the editorial supervision and contributed numerous articles, essays, and book reviews. Finally, Joseph Passmore and James Alabaster, the friends and publishers of most of Spurgeon’s material, also issued a number of titles from Spurgeon’s pen that were either a collection of selected sermons around a particular theme (*The Saint and His Saviour*) or devotional treatises (*John Ploughman’s Talks*).

Using this vast and abundantly accessible material, much of which has been overlooked in older biographical studies, Nettles, a veteran biographer, has given to lovers of Spurgeon a grand new window into the heart and soul of the great preacher. Nettles’s chief

contribution to Spurgeon studies is his ability to shift the pages of Spurgeon’s writings, especially the *Sword and Trowel*, to lay bare Spurgeon’s pastoral ethos, something heretofore underappreciated in Spurgeon studies. This volume is not for the faint of heart as its massive six hundred plus pages of text imply. However, the reader who rises to the occasion to peruse this volume will be richly rewarded as he watches the author wade and sift, survey and analyze these writings of Spurgeon, especially during his latter years, to offer a new and fresh look at the inner man of the great Baptist churchman. By following this approach, Spurgeon’s theology is brought to light in a way not yet done by any previous biography. Nettles moves the reader beyond the pertinent facts of Spurgeon’s life to an analysis of his theological underpinnings and their impact on his life and ministry, especially focusing on Spurgeon the pastor. While Spurgeon was many things—editor, author, builder, controversialist, and preacher *par excellence*—he was first and foremost a pastor. His London congregation numbered more than 5,000 at the time of his death and he bore with the sheep God gave him, laboring long for their spiritual edification. Nettles captures Spurgeon’s pastoral heart in his opening chapter, citing Spurgeon himself, “I would have every Christian wish to know all that he can know of revealed truth. Somebody whispers that the secret things belong not to us. You may be sure you will never know them if they are secret; but all that is revealed you ought to know, for these belong to you and

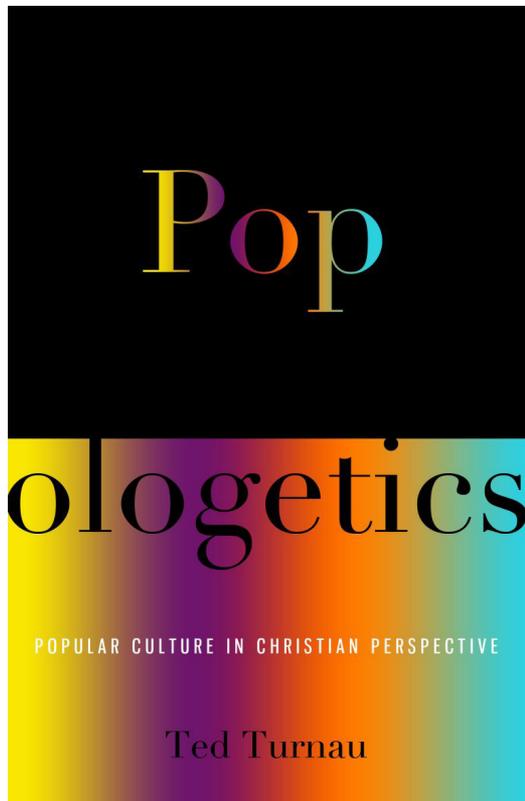
to your children. Take care you know what the Holy Ghost teaches. Do not give way to a fainted-hearted ignorance, lest you be great losers thereby.”

Spurgeon wanted the people of God in general and his London church in particular to be in full sympathy with the Word of God. It mattered not how he was personally viewed in the public eye, so long as he was faithful to the Scriptures themselves. For Spurgeon, “every aspect of his ministry was driven by a well-developed, clearly articulated systematic theology and by a commitment to a conversion ministry, both of which were consistent with revealed truth.” “His preaching, the development of institutions and services, his publications, his perception of church life, his evangelism, his suffering, and the controversies in which he played a part all reflect a commitment to a system of truth developed from the Bible and expressed most clearly in Puritans and evangelicals such as Owen, Charnock, Bunyan, Newton, Whitefield, Romaine, Brooks, Manton, and Sibbes.” Accordingly, Nettles declares “the fullness of Scripture and the finality of redemption through Jesus Christ governed Spurgeon’s understanding of all things and, in his view, should be the determining truth for all human thought and action.” Even in the Downgrade Controversy that saw Spurgeon and the Tabernacle break with the Baptist Union, Spurgeon held that believers who held “Holy Scripture to be the inspired truth of God cannot have fellowship with those who deny the authority from which

we derive all our teaching.” According to Nettles, Spurgeon simply and systematically applied the Scriptures to his everyday life and service for the Lord. He could do little else as a steward of God’s calling.

In this marvelous book, Nettles reminds us again why the life of Spurgeon has been so often told and so long remembered. Internet websites are devoted to his thought, his sermons have never gone out of print and can be had both in paper and digitally, and his story is told again and again. Vestiges of his shadow continue to linger on the evangelical and Baptist landscape. This book will be a welcome addition to the lengthening of that shadow and the library of any minister who longs to be more biblical in his service for the Saviour. Nettles writes as a lover of Spurgeon who manifests a deep appreciation for Spurgeon’s unique and abiding life and ministry. *Living by Revealed Truth* will encourage and edify both those with only a basic knowledge of Spurgeon as well as the Spurgeon aficionado who is already thoroughly acquainted with Mr. Greatheart but wants to hear the story unfolded in a new and thoughtful way. This reviewer hopes that *Living by Revealed Truth* will be widely read and trusts that Spurgeon’s life will continue to bring glory to the God whom he served so faithfully.

Jeff Straub is Professor of Historical Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. 



APOLOGETICS MEETS POP CULTURE SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE AFRAID TO ENGAGE POP CULTURE?

by *Andrew Keenan*

“It is said that the Hornburg has never fallen to assault,” said Théoden; but now my heart is doubtful. The world changes, and all that once was strong now proves unsure. How shall any tower withstand such numbers and such reckless hate?” King Théoden in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* has fallen victim to a crippling fear, as the surrounding enemy closes in on his walls. Under pressure to save his people Théoden feels alone, desperate and scared. This reaction sounds too familiar to the way Evangelicals think about popular culture and their neighbors. Pop culture terrifies

most people, and the church has responded in a variety of ways. Whether we are afraid of culture or attacking it we have seen our situation through the lenses of Théoden, as a hopeless battle with the enemy closing in around us.

In *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (P&R), Ted Turnau attempts to give the reader a reason to not only rid themselves of this fear but instead to engage popular culture with a theologically grounded apologetic. The first question we should be asking is, “Why has it taken so long for someone to write this

book?” It is a fresh and intelligent look at popular culture with a fair critique of other philosophies concerning culture and the tools needed to think critically. His main point is that contrary to our handling of pop culture previously, it does have something to offer Christians. The book consists of three primary sections.

In the first portion of the book Turnau lays out the theology of a Christian’s obligation to interpret popular culture. It is in this section that he defines pop culture as “specific media that informs our everyday world...and in genres that are widely accepted and enjoyed in a given society...” (6). He later adds that pop culture is also accessible to all kinds of people groups, which is what makes it popular culture. The helpful definition coupled with his presuppositional apologetic, created a strong and cohesive argument for deep and biblical cultural interpretation.

The second section of the book was strong and very detailed. He spends a lot of time in these chapters to take apart five different handlings of popular culture. With each philosophy he takes time to talk about what he finds useful and then talks about their flaws. In the last three chapters Turnau really hit his stride. In chapter 7 he challenges the idea that there is high culture and low culture. He says that things like preference

cannot in and of themselves be better, thus creating a higher culture or a lower culture. Instead, “for Christians, the riches of art and culture are a gift given by a generous God and not to be lightly turned away. Art and culture enrich our lives in all sorts of ways” (123-124).

Next, in chapter 9 he talks about complete amalgamation in the postmodern view of culture, which he calls the “culture cheerleaders.” He points out that the idea of postmodernity is based on impulse and has not thought out its own critique of culture. Turnau observes that one of the “especially troubling either/or dichotomies in this approach to popular culture is the insistence that either you engage with popular culture to affirm and embrace it, or you keep your distance to critique it. You must either listen to it as grace or condemn it as idolatry” (178). He clearly exposes the faults in a postmodern critique by stating that our theology or presuppositions should never be entirely informed by culture without first understanding the verdict Scripture already provides. These fair and helpful critiques are the building blocks to the final section on methodologies.

The final section is what brings all the loose ends together, and Turnau’s argument begins to come around full circle. He entitles his method and approach to interpreting

pop culture, Popologetics, and gives us five steps to a hermeneutic of popular culture. This section was especially helpful because Turnau demonstrates that every Christian can practice Popologetics. He writes, “The Christian worldview is not a dry set of theological propositions. It is rooted in the astounding reality of the gospel and touches on our deepest desires – desires that are stirred by popular culture.”(244). If what Turnau says is true, then most Christians can approach pop culture with confidence, provided they possess a historic and orthodox understanding of the gospel. What Turnau is offering in this book is a biblical take on popular culture and apologetics. Instead of looking into the surrounding culture as a dark demise and an enemy caving in on our walls, much like Théoden did in the battle of helms deep, we should look to find the goodness of God in the culture and use it as a place, genre, and forum to preach the gospel. This apologetic should enable the church more appropriately to defend the faith that is within us, instead of hiding behind thick walls.

Andrew Keenan is a student at Lancaster Bible College ◀

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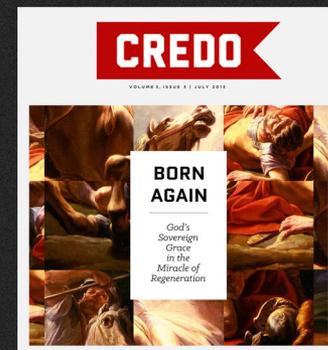
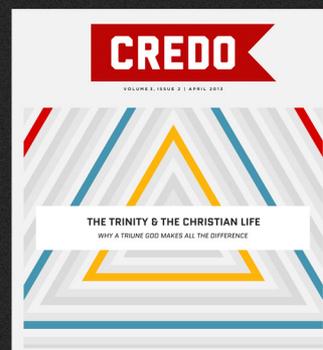
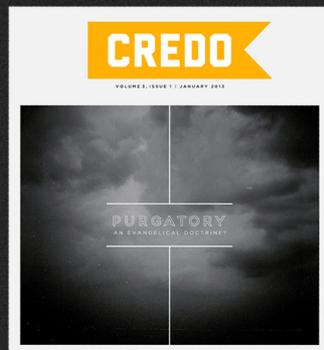
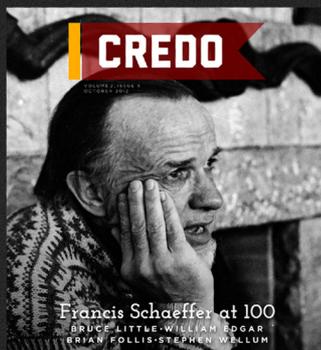
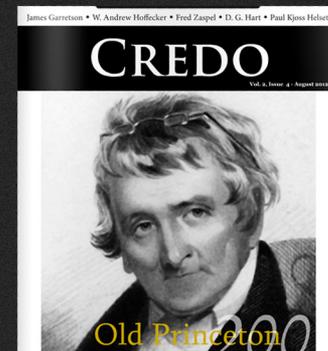
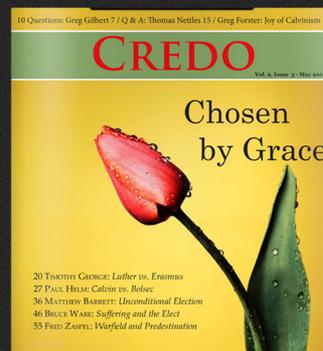
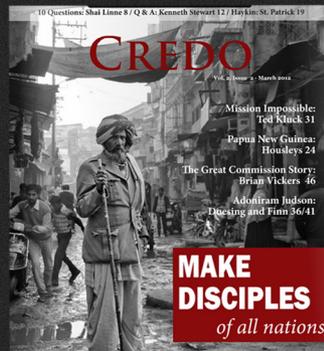
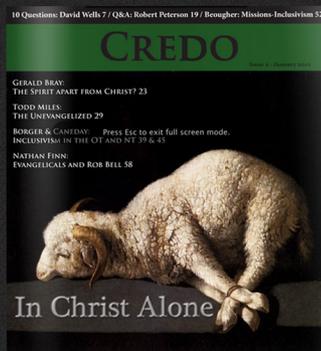
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FIRST PRINCIPLES

How to Avoid Biblical Illiteracy

by Matthew Barrett

The sixteenth century Reformation was marked by a return to the infallible authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*). And with it the walls that divided the spiritually elite clergy from the common Christian came down. No longer was the bishop or priest privileged to the biblical text, as if they alone had the right to interpret Scripture.

But as the Reformers came to realize, there was a problem. Though the Bible was now accessible, the people were biblically illiterate. Even with a copy of Scripture in one's hand, many had no idea where to begin? How were they to approach this massive book?

These questions were not only relevant with the genesis of the Reformation, but they are relevant today as Christians in many churches, for one reason or another, are biblically illiterate. Perhaps you have believed in Christ for the first time, started attending a local church, but when it comes to the Bible you are overwhelmed and have no idea where to start or what to do. If I may, I would like to offer a handful of very practical steps you can take.

First, this may sound too simple, but it truly is the most important thing you can do: read your Bible and pray. If you are a believer, then the Spirit has not only regenerated you but now indwells you. And the Spirit always works in conjunction with God's Word. The same Spirit who breathed-out Scripture through human authors can and does illuminate the biblical text to the believer. So read the Bible and pray that God would assist you, opening your eyes to understand its meaning and message.

Second, read large sections of the Bible at a time. Too often Christians take a piece-meal approach to the Bible, waking up in the morning, reading one verse, and hoping to gain a nugget of truth to get them through the day. How easy it then is to misunderstand Scripture. Such an approach easily ignores the context of the passage. Instead, try to read an entire book in one sitting. Remember, many of the New Testament books were written to churches as letters, meant to be read in one sitting to the recipients. Reading an entire book in one sitting will allow you, like those early believers, to see the big picture, the main message, and avoid missing the forest for the tress.

Third, read Scripture in community with others in the local church. American Evangelicalism is notorious for raising up solo Christians: just me, God, and my Bible. This is terribly unbiblical and unhealthy. If you are a Christian then you are part of the body of Christ, the church. How can a Christ follower divorce himself from Christ's body? The two go hand-in-hand. Therefore, within the context of the local church believers are to encourage one another and hold one another accountable. So benefit from reading and studying the Scriptures with others. Gain from the insights of those in your midst who have studied the Bible much longer than you have. And do not limit yourself to the church of today, but turn to the church of yesterday. Read the Fathers, the Reformers, and others in church history. Remember, we should always be standing on the shoulders of others.

Last, be sure you are sitting under good preaching of God's Word. Too many churches are led by pastors who enter the pulpit and instead of letting the Word of God speak to the people of God they get in the way by distracting the congregation with their own agenda, hobbyhorse, or personality. Find a pastor who is not afraid to do the very thing that is considered politically incorrect—preach! And do not just look for a preacher—after all, there have been many men who preach, but preach the wrong thing. Rather, look for a preacher who will expound God's Word. Look for a pastor who will move beyond

the superficial and take you into the deep waters of Scripture. Look for an expositor who refuses to be content with milk because he sees the people's need to be fed solid food.

Reformers like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin understood this need well. For example, when Zwingli inaugurated his reformation in Zurich, he entered the pulpit of the Great Minster on New Year's Day, 1519, and rather than using the typical lectionary he began expositing Scripture chapter-by-chapter. Heinrich Bullinger notes that Zwingli was fed up with the approach that “cut up into little piece, the Lord's Gospel.” Therefore, Zwingli said, he was now going to preach “without any human addenda.” Zwingli, as Timothy George explains, not only was preaching from the Bible but “also was allowing the Bible to speak directly to him and his congregation.”

Are you sitting at the feet of a Zwingli? Are you reading the Bible as a whole? Are you gleaning insights from the community of saints? These are questions every Bible-believing Christian must ask if he is to avoid biblical illiteracy.

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