

# Editorial: Preaching and Teaching the Whole Counsel of God

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What does it mean to be *biblical* in our preaching and teaching—indeed our entire lives? How do we remain faithful to Scripture and accurately “think God’s thoughts after him” and “correctly handle the word of truth”? Most evangelicals would answer: preach and teach the Bible, and they would be right in that answer. Our foundation for all of life is God’s Word (see 2 Tim 3:16-17). Our glorious task as God’s people is to read Scripture in such a way that we accurately understand and apply what it says and not merely give our own ideas, feelings, and thoughts. But here is the problem: we are all keenly aware that many people (including ourselves!) can quote and refer to Scripture without actually being “biblical.” In fact, we all know that the mere quotation of Scripture is not enough. In the end, in order to be “biblical” in our preaching and teaching we must read biblical texts within their immediate context and, ultimately, in light of the entire canon of Scripture, otherwise our reading and application of Scripture will be a misreading, and we will fail to interpret and apply the whole counsel of God properly.

Obviously, this is not a new problem; it is the age-old issue of hermeneutics. But even though it is not a new problem, it is an important one to think through carefully. As evangelicals we must never forget that it is not enough merely to affirm a correct doctrine of Scripture (even though this is the right place to begin!), but we must also learn afresh to

read, understand, and apply Scripture according to what it is and claims to be. Because the Bible is nothing less than *God’s* authoritative self-revelation through human authors progressively given over time, it must be approached and read as a unified text, amongst all its diversity—a canon which declares God’s unfailing purposes and plan. Furthermore, since Scripture as God’s word-act revelation involves historical progression along a redemptive-historical storyline ultimately centered in Jesus Christ (see Heb 1:1-2), our reading and application of Scripture must take this fact seriously. In contemporary idiom, the theological discipline that attempts to trace out the historical unfolding of Scripture and, thus, interpret Scripture in light of its own presentation and categories is that of “biblical theology” (BT).

An evangelical BT is keenly aware that God did not disclose himself in one exhaustive act but in an organic, progressive manner, tied to God’s performative action in word and deed. As a discipline it seeks to do justice to the Bible’s own presentation of itself. That is why it attempts to do exegesis of any text not only within its immediate context according to the intention of the biblical authors, but it also seeks to understand any text in light of where that text is in redemptive-history and even, in the final analysis, in light of where that text is in the canon due to its conviction that Scripture is God’s unified Word centered in Christ. In fact,

it contends that to read the Bible as unified Scripture is *not* just one interpretive option among others, but that which best corresponds to the nature of the text itself, given its divine inspiration. As such, BT, as a discipline, not only provides the basis for understanding how texts in one part of Scripture relate to all other texts, but it also serves as the basis and underpinning for all theologizing—which after all, is nothing more than the application of Scripture to all areas of life. Without BT, we will fail to understand and apply Scripture correctly, and, thus, we will not fulfill our calling to preach and teach the whole counsel of God.

Sadly, even though most evangelicals would give lip-service to the importance of BT for the life and health of the church, too often we do not practice what we affirm. This is especially true when it comes to the Old Testament. Often in our teaching of the Scripture, whether that teaching is to children or adults, we divorce the biblical stories from both their immediate context and the overall storyline of Scripture. We do a great job of teaching moral lessons but too often we fail to teach how these stories fit in terms of the overall plan of God centered in the gospel. BT seeks to remedy this failure by helping us to think in terms of a “whole-Bible” theology. It seeks to counter the growing biblical illiteracy in our day by returning us to the Scripture in all of its beauty, depth, and breadth. It seeks to help us read all of Scripture in light of the “big picture” in order that we may better preach, teach, and live out God’s Word in our daily lives. In a day in which pluralism and postmodernism encourage us to find our own meaning in Scripture, BT is absolutely necessary to return us to the Scripture in order to discover God’s intent

as he has graciously revealed himself to us across the ages and now consummated in Jesus Christ our Lord. In order to remain faithful to the Lord in our day, we will need to learn afresh how to read and apply Scripture. The discipline of BT is crucial in this regard.

It is for this reason and many more that we are devoting an entire edition of *SBJT* to the subject of BT. In our articles, Graeme Goldsworthy and Tom Schreiner help explain why BT is so foundational for hermeneutics and our preaching of the Word of God. James Hamilton, Mark Seifrid, and Peter Gentry then turn to the actual practice of BT by thinking through the Messianic nature of the Old Testament, the relationship between Law and Gospel, and how BT is crucial in the exegesis and exposition of Ephesians. The *SBJT* Forum addresses specific issues related to BT, which once again helps us think through its importance for the life and health of the church. It is my prayer that as a result of reading this edition of the Journal, we will not only affirm the full authority of the Scripture, but we will learn afresh to preach and teach the whole counsel of God accurately and faithfully, for God’s glory and for the life and health of the church.