

Biblical Theology

Been There / Read That Podcast Transcript

Point of Distinction: Modern Biblical Theology Vs. The Biblical Theological Movement

In the 1950-60's an attempt was made to blend Historical Criticism, Higher Criticism, and Confessional Theology. **Point:** The Biblical Theology Movement did not view the Bible as fully inspired and readily embraced the ideas of a corrupted text and a non-historical view of God's mighty acts. In essence, the BTM viewed the Bible as harmonious but not factual or historical.

Advocates of the BTM included James D. Smart, Paul Minear, Floyd V. Filson, G. Ernest Wright.

Bevard Childs and James Barr were two noted scholars who attacked the Biblical Theological Movement (though they themselves were not "Good Guys").

Modern Biblical Theology: High view of Scripture.

Geerhardus Vos is the individual responsible for popularizing Biblical Theology as is practiced today by individuals who hold a high view of Scripture.

Vos's influence focused the development of Biblical Theology on the process of revelation within a historical setting. I.e. Biblical Theology draws a line of development within a context of historical revelation – otherwise known as progressive revelation.

Biblical theology is a method of study that attempts to understand the theology and concerns of the Biblical writers – rather than expressing the theology and concerns of the Biblical reader. It attempts to understand the beliefs of the Biblical writers on their own terms and listen for the writer's own points of emphasis by allowing them to express their thoughts in their own words and within their own structure rather than attempting to feed their teaching through an artificial grid constructed by the reader.

Key Concepts: Progressive Revelation, Intertextuality, Biblical Unity, Whole Bible Theology, Historical Reliability.

Practical Example: In order to develop a Biblical Theological view of the Holy Spirit, one would begin in the Old Testament and trace the developing theme of the Holy Spirit from Genesis through the Minor Prophets and then use that foundational understanding to build an understanding of His role in the Gospels, the book of Acts, and the Epistles. Along the way, you would be forced to develop a prophetic view of the Restoration of Israel in the Prophets and understand the New Testament writings as a fulfillment of that prophetic foundation.

The Close Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

Biblical Theology is related to Systematic Theology, yet is broader in Scope. Many liken this relationship to a parent/child relationship.

Biblical Theology focuses on the *process of revelation* within a historic development, while Systematic Theology focuses on the *logical* construction of a topic.

Practical Example: Let's explain the differences between Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology with a practical comparison of how they would approach the topic of Sanctification. Systematic Theology would address the topic of Sanctification by gathering a list of all passages where the term is used, and then sort through the data to explain in logical fashion the different nuances of the topic from a Biblical perspective. Biblical Theology on the other hand would approach Sanctification as a theme developed within a book, a corpus of books, or the entire canon and demonstrated how the theme of Sanctification was developed through historical progression.

Understanding the two approaches to the same issue helps to demonstrate that Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology are not at odds, but rather complement each other. Once the historic development of Sanctification is understood (the goal of Biblical Theology), one can sort through the information and present a logical case for a wholistic view of sanctification (which is the goal of Systematic Theology).

Think of it as Biblical Theology = Development and Systematic Theology = Dissection and Application.

Biblical Theology asks "What are the interests and thoughts of the writer?" whereas Systematic Theology asks "How does Scripture address my points of interest?"

Point: Without practicing Biblical Theology first, Systematic Theology can run the risk of taking passages out of context and missing key elements of the argument along the way. You cannot draw application from a passage without first understanding what the passage says and how it is used by the author.

Example: Biblical Theology does not study Paul to see what he says about baptism – that's what Systematic Theology does. Biblical Theology focuses on the writings of Paul in order to see what interests Paul and what the Holy Spirit wanted to say through Paul's. Baptism may be a part of that message, but there is much more to the message than just baptism.

Problem: We are a people who are application driven and we struggle to study the whole Bible, listen to the Bible on its own terms, and understand the Big Picture of Scripture.

Illustration: Our people know the topic of Baptism, but they don't know the message of the New Testament or the general storyline of the Bible. They have not been taught the full message. We have been taught to deal with a dissected Bible (Systematic Theology) rather than a whole Bible (Biblical Theology).

Pointed: The Bible must first be understood as a book of revelation before it can become a book of application. **The Issue:** Understanding the Bible as God's Self-revelation makes it a God centered book rather than a man centered book. Until we learn to embrace that concept, we will continue to utilize only a portion of that revelation.

Quote from Ron Courter: We know a lot of Bible Stories, but do we know the Story of the Bible?

Question: Why is that the case? Because we look for stories that apply to us, rather than seeking to learn the whole story that God has written.

Major Point: We have been taught, either directly or by example, to approach Bible study from a Systematic background, rather than allowing the Bible to speak on its own terms. We have had the cart before the horse.

Example: When we teach young men to develop sermons by picking up a concordance and finding every place where a particular word is used – and thus conducting a word study, we have taught them how to interact with parts of the Bible, but not the Bible as a whole. We have taught them that it is not necessary to study the whole Bible and that it is okay to limit our studies to the parts of the Bible that interest us or that we find personally applicable.

How do we correct the problem? By learning to practice Biblical Theology and developing Expository Preaching. Whole Bible Theology and Expository Preaching go hand-in-hand. Teaching a passage of Scripture within its context – immediate, corpus, canonical, and biblical contexts.

Acts 20:27

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Question: Can we make the same boast as Paul when there are entire portions of the Bible that we have not studied, let alone taught?

Names To Know:

Geerhardus Vos – the founder of modern Biblical Theology as a methodology.

Three of Biblical Theologies Strongest Proponents:

G. K. Beale -
Andreas Kostenberger
D. A. Carson

How to Do/ Challenges of Biblical Theology:

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

Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church by Michael Lawrence and Thomas Schreiner

Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect by Scott J. Hafemann

Range of Methodologies:

- 1-** Study of Major Themes of a Book or a Corpus/Collection
- 2-** Study of central themes throughout Scripture
- 3-** A Central theme of Scripture (book or Bible)
- 4-** Metanarrative Story Line

Range of Methodologies Expanded:

1- Study of Major Message and Themes of a Book or a Corpus/Collection

- a. **Example:** In his book A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters, Andreas Kostenberger seeks to uncover the message and themes of the Gospel, the Letters, and the Revelation of John, synthesize them together to show how they build upon one another, and then place them within the scope of the New Testament and the Bible as a whole. **Key Concept:** Synthesis must come after each individual book is considered.
- b. **Example:** G. K. Beal in his monstrous volume entitled A New Testament Biblical Theology seeks to establish and understanding of the Old Testament and then demonstrate how the New Testament authors interact with the Old Testament (intertextuality), build upon it (progressive revelation), build upon one another, and helps complete the unified Canon of Scripture.

Examples and Authors:

Introductory Level:

A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized
by Michael Kruger

A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised
by Miles VanPelt

Advanced Level:

Biblical Theology by Geerhardus Vos (Whole Bible)

A New Testament Biblical Theology by G. K. Beale (Whole Bible)

The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of Old and New Testaments by
Thomas Schreiner

New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ by Thomas Schreiner

A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters by Andreas Kostenberger

Commentary on 1&2 Timothy and Titus by Kostenberger

A Theology of Matthew by Charles Quarles

Finding Favor in the Sight of God: A Theology of the Wisdom Literature by
Richard P. Belcher Jr.

Theology of the Old Testament by Paul R. House (examines each book, it's
thematic focus, and its relation with other books within the Canon).

Book of Note:

Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible by Stephen G. Dempster
(A Biblical Theological approach to understanding the Old Testament
within the arrangement of the Hebrew Canon – the TaNaK).

2- Study of central themes throughout Scripture

- a. This would be best approached after considering individual writers/books
contribution first and then a synthesis of all their works

Covenants, Kingdom, Salvation,

Temple:

From Eden to the New Jerusalem by T. Desmond Alexander

The Temple and the Church's Mission by G. K. Beale

Inaugurated Eschatology

God's Design For Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey
by Andreas Kostenburger

Series:

New Studies in Biblical Theology by IVP (Book Studies as well as Thematic)
Short Studies in Biblical Theology by Crossway

Both are currently producing new volumes on a regular basis.

3- A Central theme of Scripture (book or Bible)

- a. The Holy Grail approach.
- b. Each thinks they have come to “THE” center, while bringing relevant points, yet not to the exclusion of others.
 - i. Covenants, new creation, kingdom
- c. It is an oversimplification of a complex work
- d. Better: Several interrelated motifs rather than a single center

Examples:

Kingdom Through Covenants by Penter Gentry and Stephen Wellum
God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment by James M. Hamilton
The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative
by Christopher J. H. Wright

Against this Approach:

Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity by Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House

4- Metanarrative Story Line

- a. Big Picture approach
- b. Story Tracing and Development
 - i. Book by book and then consider the Big Picture.
 - ii. Multiple ways to connect the dots.
 - iii. Can overlook some points while focusing on others.
 - iv. This approach is generally not exhaustive.
 - v. Tends to focus on the author’s favorite collection of Biblical books and themes.

Examples:

Christ From Beginning to End by Hunter and Wellum
God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Story Line of the Bible by Vaughan Roberts
The Unfolding Mystery by Edmond Clowney (student of Geerhardus Vos)
Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible by Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins,
and Thomas Schreiner