

Editorial: “Biblical Theology”— Reflections on its Importance

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The topic of “biblical theology” is not a new one to our *SBJT* readers, nor is it a new topic to our seminary community. In fact, just two volumes ago (vol. 10.2, Summer 2006), we addressed various aspects of the discipline such as the relation between biblical theology and hermeneutics and the preacher’s task of proclaiming the whole counsel of God, as well as seeking to demonstrate biblical theology’s value by showing how it specifically is used in our reading and application of Scripture. Why, then, return to the theme again? The most straightforward answer is that we believe the subject of biblical theology and its actual use in the seminary, church, and home is vitally important for the life and health of God’s people.

It is no doubt the case that every generation must affirm anew a correct doctrine of Scripture. From the halls of church history, we learn the sad yet important lesson that once people move away from a high view of Scripture—namely, that Scripture is nothing less than God’s Word written, fully authoritative in all that it addresses and completely reliable in all that it affirms—it does not take long for God’s people to be weakened in their understanding of the gospel and less effective in their kingdom service. However, we also learn that it is not enough for the church merely to affirm a high view of Scripture in order to preserve God’s people from error. In reality, the most pressing need is a commitment both to

affirm Scripture as God’s Word, coupled with a burning desire to study, understand, and apply Scripture, by God’s grace, to our daily lives for God’s glory. Sadly, today, among many evangelicals, we witness the diminishing of Scripture’s authority both in terms of its doctrinal affirmation and its actual use in our churches and our individual lives. Even among conservative evangelicals and Southern Baptists who gladly embrace a high view of Scripture, there is far too much biblical illiteracy which, in the end, leaves us with a failure to understand and apply rightly the “whole counsel of God” to every aspect of our lives. One of the reasons we believe biblical theology is so important for the church is because we are convinced that it can practically help us remedy our biblical illiteracy by equipping God’s people to think in terms of a “whole-Bible” theology.

After all, in the simplest of terms, “biblical theology” is the discipline that seeks to read specific texts (i.e., exegesis) in light of the entire canonical context of Scripture. Convinced that God has graciously revealed himself to us progressively in history ultimately centered in our Lord Jesus Christ (see Heb 1:1-3; Col 1:15-20), and convinced that Scripture is *God’s* Word and thus exhibits a unity amongst all of its diversity, biblical theology seeks to examine the unfolding nature of God’s redemptive plan culminating in Christ. As such, biblical theology provides the basis for understanding how texts in any

portion of Scripture relate to the entire biblical teaching with the goal of learning better how to read and apply Scripture correctly, to proclaim “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), and to “think God’s thoughts after him.” In short, biblical theology is utterly essential in enabling the church to know our glorious Triune God better by knowing his Word better. Without it, we will often fail to understand the “big picture” of Scripture and God’s redemptive plan, with the implication that the glory of Christ and the centrality of the gospel will be undercut. In the end, we are convinced that the less we teach, preach, and apply a “whole-Bible” viewpoint, the less we will think theologically in the church, because to think theologically is ultimately to think in terms of the entire canon of Scripture.

It is for this reason (and many more) that we are returning to the subject matter of biblical theology. In this issue of *SBJT*, the bulk of the journal is devoted to the three wide-ranging lectures on biblical theology delivered by Graeme Goldsworthy at Southern Seminary, March 18-20, 2008. Delivering the Gheens Lectures, Dr. Goldsworthy unpacked the biblical and theological grounding for the discipline as well as its importance in the seminary curriculum, the church, and the home. Dr. Goldsworthy is certainly qualified to address such an important subject given his expertise in the field and his many faithful years of serving the church in producing books and materials that have enabled God’s people to read and apply Scripture in such a way that they understand better how all of the Scripture finds its meaning and center in our Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to the Goldsworthy lectures, we are also publishing a contribution by

James Hamilton, now associate professor of biblical theology at Southern Seminary, who illustrates how one person in the field is actually going about the task of doing biblical theology. In his article, Dr. Hamilton makes a case for Joseph being a type of Christ through a careful reading of how the Joseph narrative is utilized by the book of Samuel and applied to David and then applied to Christ in the New Testament. These four lectures together allow the reader to see what biblical theology is, why it is necessary and important, and also how it is being practiced today by evangelicals committed to the full authority of Scripture.

However, slightly different from previous editions of *SBJT*, instead of including our *SBJT* Forum, I asked two well-known evangelicals broadly working in the field of biblical theology to reflect on the importance, practice, and promise of biblical theology, especially in light of the specific presentations of Goldsworthy and Hamilton. I wanted them to reflect upon what they believed were the strengths and weaknesses of the discipline of biblical theology and the presentations included in this journal. As with any discipline, it is always wise to listen to thoughtful reflections by those working in the field, and that is why we have included the responses of Robert Yarbrough and Mark Seifrid.

It is my prayer that this edition of *SBJT* will serve as “iron to sharpen iron.” May it lead us to know our great God better through his Word and ever be equipped to handle rightly the Word of truth, for the glory of God and the good of the church.