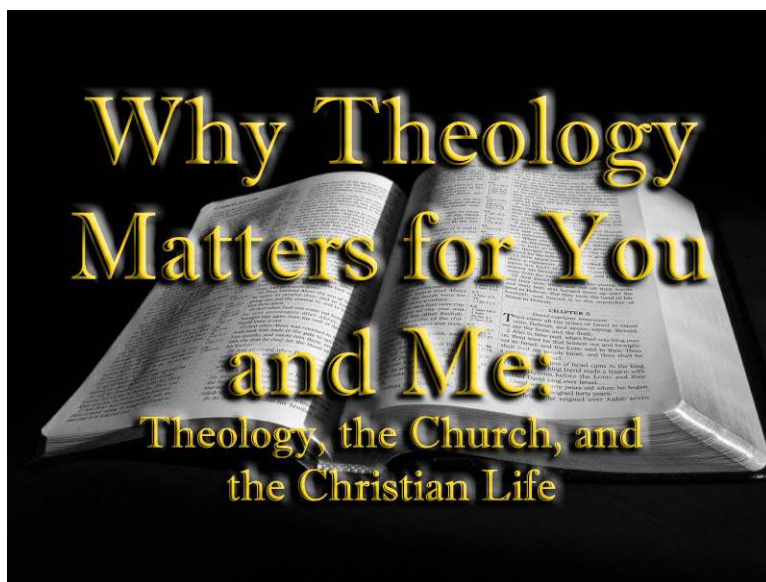


Theology for Life

Volume 1 | Issue 1 | Summer 2014



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A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH



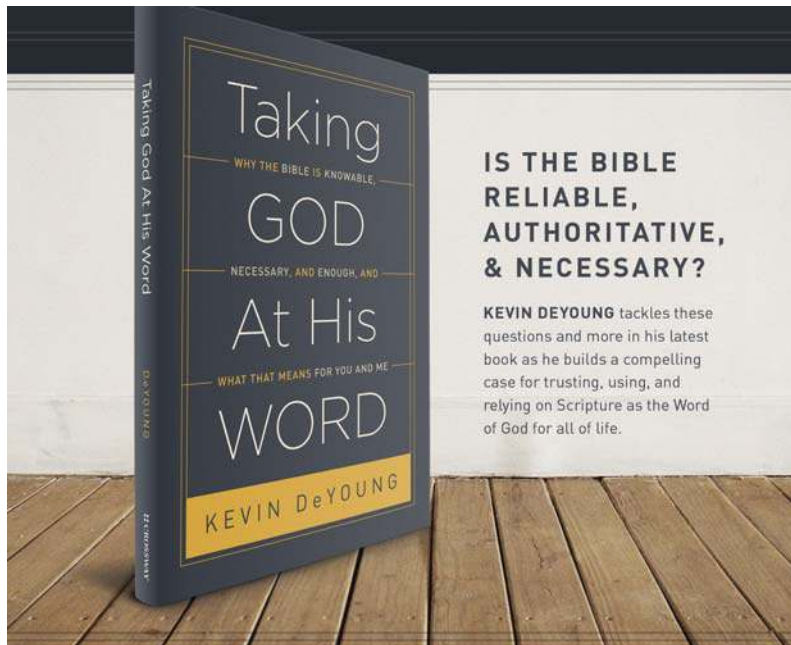
"Theology is best done in the context of the local church and with a view toward the Great Commission. This is, unfortunately, rare in theological institutions, which makes this volume distinctive. I heartily recommend it to pastors and church leaders looking for a theological manual written by Christian ministers in active pursuit of the mission of God."
—J. D. Greear, lead pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC

"Daniel Akin and his band of theologian-writers have successfully offered to the church a systematic theology that is firmly rooted in the authority of Scripture, is consciously practical in always asking the 'so what?' questions, and is doxological in orientation. *A Theology for the Church* is aptly named, and it will serve well pastors, students, and any who seek to understand better the God of the gospel."
—Todd L. Miles, associate professor of theology, Western Seminary



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IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE, AUTHORITATIVE, & NECESSARY?

KEVIN DEYOUNG tackles these questions and more in his latest book as he builds a compelling case for trusting, using, and relying on Scripture as the Word of God for all of life.

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—**DAVID PLATT**, Senior Pastor, The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama; best-selling author, *Radical*

"One of my prayers for the next 20 years of ministry is that we might see the level of biblical literacy exponentially grow. For that to happen we must learn what the Scriptures are and how heavily we can lean on them. DeYoung serves this end well in *Taking God At His Word*."
—**MATT CHANDLER**, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas; President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network

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Editor's Corner

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When I was a teenager, I feel in love with theology. I had come home from a high school summer camp and was riding a spiritual high. I resolved at that camp that I was going to grow in my knowledge of God's Word and so determined I would go to the church library after youth group service that following Sunday to pick up some books to read toward that end. I began this journey and came to discover that I truly loved theology. People often asked me during this time (and do today), what kind of theology I like. My consistent answer to that question is, "I love all of it!" I read so much and so often during my high school years that the church librarian began to give me the pick of the books as they were do-

nated by people in the church. She then started giving me books stating, “With the way you read you’re going to seminary.” Here almost twenty years after that event, I am still reading and consuming theology and serving the Lord.

We live in a world where many are greatly confused about what they believe, why it matters and how to live based on those beliefs. In the Boise (Idaho) area, there are Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and many Christians who have replaced their local church with a coffee shop. In ministering to the saints over the years, in a variety of capacities, I have often come to discover that when Christians talk about theology, they are not always as clear as they should be in their understanding of it (or in their communications regarding it). Speaking clearly and in the proper doctrinal and theological categories does not mean you’re a “know-it-all”, it means that you’re seeking to love the Lord with all of your heart, mind, and strength.

The Reformers and Puritans sought to ground

God's people in His Word. They did this because they knew that when God's people focus on how they feel above what God has declared in His Word, they will be misled by their own feelings instead of Truth. Christians are a people who live not by how they feel, but from the objective standard of God's Word, which is authoritative for faith and practice.

We live in a day when our greatest need as believers is to ground our lives in the truth of His Word. His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths that sets us on the pathway of righteousness and life everlasting. As you'll learn in this first issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, to ask and answer the question, "What is theology?" is not just for the ivory towers of academia, but to inform and guide all of our Christian lives. Theology is for all of life because all of our lives are lived before the sovereign gaze of an all-knowing and all-powerful Lord.

As you take up and read this issue it is my prayer that not only would your knowledge and understanding of God's Word increase, but that your passion

to worship and delight in Him would soar as it did with me those two decades ago. Grow deep and wide in the grace of God, and watch as God uses you in amazing ways for His glory. This is my prayer for you as you read this magazine and continue in your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor - Theology for Life

What is Theology?

By Dave Jenkins

At first it may seem innocent

to ask the question, “What is theology?” after all theology means the study of God. Throughout this article, I intend to demonstrate that while it may be innocent to ask the question, “What is theology?” the answer is actually quite complex, serious, and very important. At this point some people may think that their suspicions about theology are justified—namely that theology isn’t important because it is dry and boring. I can understand that sentiment, we theologians *do* use a lot of “big” words that the vast majority of people never even think to use.



In my early teens I grew not only in my relationship with Jesus, but also with studying the Word of God, learning the great truths of Christianity. Some people may accuse me of being a nerd at this point, and they may have a point to a degree. Yet, here’s the thing: everyone is a theologian. Since everyone has a belief system, we must be clear about what theology is and why thinking through a biblical worldview is so important. When Christians speak, teach, or write they are to do so from a biblical worldview. Crucial to having a biblical worldview is to understand that at the heart of this worldview is God Himself who creates us, sustains our planet, and who empowers us through the Holy Spirit to make much of Jesus. It is in and through the Risen Christ that Christians are to proclaim the message of the Bible, which contains one unified message about Jesus, His coming to die, rise and ascend and to yet return. It is this message that Christians are to enjoy and proclaim.

“[Christians] view Theology as only for the ‘professionals’...”

Often Christians say that they don't have theology nor are they theologians, however, this is the wrong approach. In my experience Christians often say this because nobody has walked them through what key doctrinal and theological words mean. So, instead of being honest about what they don't understand, Christians often refuse to be authentic about what they do and do not know. While Christians today have more resources than ever, what we need is a filter through which to view those resources. Our desire to spread the fame of God among the nations is spot on, but we also need to understand that we are all theologians, even if we aren't professionally trained ones.

One of the main reasons why Christians object to being a theologian is because they don't feel that they are qualified to speak to the issues. They view theology as only for the “professionals”—those with a Ph.D. or a Master's degree. Yes, there is a need for professionally trained theologians to speak to the issues of our day with great clarity. Yet, there is also a need for Christians in the pew to speak to the issues of our day, as well as within their workplaces.

One of my chief goals, and the reason this magazine exists, is to equip lay people to speak to the issues of the world today. We, at [Theology for Life] want you to understand that doctrinal and theological issues truly matter. And beyond that, we want you to know what the terms mean so you can speak with confidence to your friends and neighbors about the glorious truths contained in the Bible. We believe that every Christian regardless of their education level, can and should learn the truths we are communicating in this (and future issues of this magazine). Make no mistake, friend, the stakes have never been higher for every Christian to speak to the issues and do so through a biblical worldview.

Here is where theology comes in. Theology is the application of our doctrine, which comes from the Word of

God. It is a doctrinal statement that Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6), and that salvation is only available through Jesus (Acts 4:12). The application of that truth would be, for one, to explore the depth of it by examining, for example, the exclusivity of Jesus and how if one rejects Him, they will go to Hell, a place of unrelenting, unending, and conscious punishment.

One reason why many Christians don't see theology as important is because of how we view doctrine and theology. Christians often see our theology as more important than grounding our convictions in the truth of the Word of God. The greatest problem in evangelicalism today is our lack of doctrinal depth, precision, and conviction. This was made plain in circa 2000-2007 with the rise of the "emergent discussion," which was a conversation about discipleship and how to reach people. The fruit of this discussion demonstrated that under the guise of "conversation", evangelicals, rather than standing on the Word of God, would rather compromise the truth.



At the heart of this magazine is the idea that what we, as Christians, need is a return to the Word of God and to the confessional standards of the early Church. Our greatest need in Christianity of this generation is to return to our first love Jesus. We need to return to the Word of God and to study the fruit and labors of men and women who have gone before us in church history.

Sadly, many evangelicals view church history with suspicion and the whole enterprise of theology as unimportant—even while they hold onto convictions and declare their beliefs, which is the task of theology. Evangelicals should learn from men like John Owen and Charles Spurgeon—men who stood fast on the Word of God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Evangelicals, our great cry should not only be for more "Owens" and "Spurgeons", but for men and women on fire for the glory of the gospel.

How then can Christians be theologians?

By understanding the relationship between doctrine and theology, Christians can gain confidence that when they open their mouths they have something to say that will profit others and point sinners to the gospel. Since everyone, even your neighbor, is a theologian, the question as it's been said is whether you're a good theologian or a bad theologian. How then can one be a "good theologian"? Being a good theologian means being faithful to the Word of God and to the teaching of the Church throughout its 2,014 years. This includes affirming and teaching what has been taught by the Church from the Word of God throughout its history. Even here it's important to make mention that Christians do not affirm creeds for the sake of the creed itself, but rather affirm creeds because Christians of ages gone by have sought to faithfully teach the Word of God, and to answer objections to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. While people today view with suspicion any form of institutionalism, even the New Testament epistles affirm the reality that Christianity is a community gathered together to corporately worship the Lamb slain, hear the Word preached and participate in the sacraments of communion, and baptism. Being a good theologian means placing oneself under the authority of the Word of God, of the local church, and faithfully proclaiming the entirety of the gospel.

One reason creeds are important to biblical Christianity is because they give us an example of what doing theology in community looks like. Pastors and ministry leaders met and discussed the relevant issues through a biblical-theological framework and then spoke to those issues after deliberating. The great creeds of the Christianity were written in response to error that is to teaching that deviated from the truth of the Bible. Therefore, Christians need to understand that Christianity is not a "loner" religion, where having a card-carrying membership to the church of Starbucks or a subscription to every sports channel known to man cuts it. Rather, the Christian faithfully places himself/herself under authority in the local church for the purpose of sitting under the teaching of the Word of God, faithfully preached with the focus being the exposition of the text and the expounding of the glories of the gospel in that text.

There are, as I'm sure you can see, dangers on all sides when we look for the answers to questions like, "what is theology?" and, "how do we do theology?" There are many different fields within theology; including biblical theology, which is concerned with looking at whether there is a unified message in the Bible; systematic theology, which seeks to apply biblical theology; and historical theology, which is concerned with the Church's teaching and application of doctrine to the life and health of the Church. In this magazine you will learn more about biblical theology and historical theology, as well as learning what systematic theology is. Underpinning all of this writing is the idea and belief that doctrine and theology are not for some stuffy ivory tower, but for you. They are for your everyday life as you head to your job (whether you work in a secular or ministry field), and as you minister in the trenches of ministry in your local church.

I realize that seeing doctrine and theology in this way may be new to you. When we learn new things in our walk with God, we are confronted with a choice to either apply what we learn or to completely disagree. One of the areas of concern I have for you, as you open this magazine and read the contents, is that you be discerning. Yes, I want you to understand doctrine and theo-

gy, but in doing so I want you to learn to be discerning. I want you to think through these issues. I want you to test and examine them and mull them over, again and again. In other words I don't want you to simply take what we say here at face value, but to test it, examine it, and reflect on it. I'm sure you are used to being told what to do and how to think, so this type of instruction may seem strange. I want to challenge you now to think about what I'm saying and

"...doctrine and theology are not for some stuffy ivory tower, but for you."

consider it.

One of the greatest concerns I have and at the heart of the reason why this magazine exists is to equip lay people to be doctrinally knowledgeable and theologically capable. In other words, I want you to be able to discern truth from error and to confront it in a way that honors God. I want you to be known for convictional kindness that affirms what is true, rejecting what is false, and speaking kindly and to the point about what God says from His Word to His people. I want you to not only be able to confront false teaching but also to be able to be conversant in doctrinal and

theological issues.

Dr. Albert Mohler said, "The tragedy that evangelicals have lost the art of biblical discernment must be traced to a disastrous loss of biblical knowledge. Discernment cannot survive without doctrine." Throughout this article I've been arguing for a comprehensive biblical/theological framework in order to answer the question, "What is theology?"

At the heart of this question is the idea that theology is not only for academics but for your everyday life. The reason that is the case is because, as Dr. Mohler notes, we as a people lack biblical discernment due to the fact that we have lost a vision for biblical knowledge.

"The number 1 predictor of spiritual maturity...is reading the Bible on a daily basis, [but] only 16 percent of churchgoers read the Bible daily..."

In summation, the problem of biblical literacy is a rising one. Researcher George Barna states that, "Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples."

According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments. No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don't know what they are," said George Barna, president of the firm.

The bottom line is that: "Increasingly, America is biblically illit-

erate," (see George Barna's [Site](#)). To further give context to this problem twenty-five million copies of the Bible are sold in the United States annually. Nine out of ten homes in the USA have a Bible. More than 400 million copies of all or part of the Bible are distributed through Bible societies each year. "The number 1 predictor of spiritual maturity (according to a study by LifeWay Research) is reading the Bible on a daily basis, [but] only 16 percent of churchgoers read the Bible daily and 25 percent of churchgoers don't read the Bible at all."

Since the problem of biblical illiteracy is so widespread, there is a great need for you, the lay person, to understand the relationship between what the Bible teaches and how to apply it to your thinking and thus to your life. As we conclude this article I want to give you a few ways you can take what you've learned and apply it to your life and thinking.

First, refuse to be a statistic!

Those statistics listed above are shocking for a reason—they are meant to awaken you to the problem and get you to open your Bible. Regular Bible reading will help you to deal with the challenges you face every day.

Second, if you aren't already, get planted in a church that teaches the Bible. There you will develop a biblical worldview and thus be able to speak to the issues of our day through a biblically theological framework.



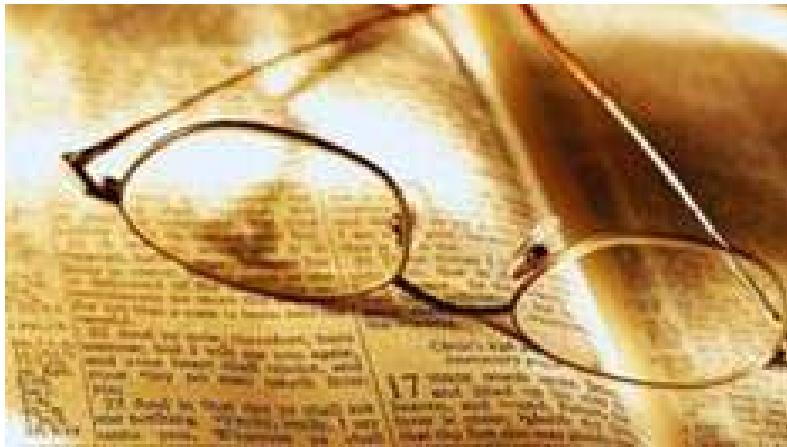
Finally, fight for your joy in God!

Refuse to be apathetic about your faith or to take it for granted. And finally, I encourage you to tell your friends about the work we are doing here at *Theology for Life*. We earnestly desire to come alongside local churches. Theology for Life is a resource to and for the local church. The men who write in this magazine do so for that purpose—in order to help you grow in Christ. In conclusion, as Dr. Michael Horton has noted, “Theology is more than an intellectual hobby. It’s a matter of life and death, something that affects the way you think, the decisions you make each day, the way you relate to God and other people, and the way you see yourself and the world around you.”

Albert Mohler, “*The Shack, the Mission Art of Evangelical Discernment*”, 27 Jan 2010, accessed June 1 2014. <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/01/27/the-shack-the-missing-art-of-evangelical-discernment/>
Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2013), 13.

Biblical Theology – Its Construct, Importance, and Relationship to Systematic Theology

By Michael Boling



Biblical theology is a relatively new discipline that has gained an increasing amount of support in recent years as the practice and understanding of biblical theology has begun to endure great refinement and purpose. As a discipline, it is arguably not as well-known or understood as its sister disciple of systematic theology. With the recent plethora of books looking at various biblical theologies and the attention paid to this discipline by scholars in an effort to examine how to actually “do” biblical theology, this discipline is beginning to emerge as a needed methodology within the overall framework of theology proper.

In this article, we will define biblical theology, take a brief look at the history of the discipline, note various types of biblical

theology, and examine why biblical theology is an important and promising discipline for sound biblical exegesis. Furthermore, we will analyze the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology noting why all believers should be concerned with utilizing this valuable theological discipline in their daily Bible study.



Definition

Biblical theology is defined by scholars as the field of study concerned with examining the historical flow of patterns, principles, and concepts found in Scripture as related by the biblical authors with a distinct focus on how those various aspects reveal the scarlet thread of redemption that weaves its way throughout the biblical corpus. Dr. Thomas Schreiner avers biblical theology “restricts itself more consciously to the message of the text or corpus under consideration. It asks what themes are central to the biblical writers in their historical context, and attempts to discern the coherence of such themes [...]” with a focus again on the gradual unfolding of the plan of redemption as revealed by God in His Word.

History

Further defining and refining what biblical theology is and how it should operate as a functioning discipline has been the source of great discussion amongst theologians and scholars alike. The use of the term biblical theology as applied to a distinct theological discipline is said to have initiated by the German biblical scholar Johann Gabler “who defined biblical theology in 1787 as a distinct historical discipline”. In the early 20th century,

Why Theology Matters for You and Me

theologian Geerhardus Vos suggested that biblical theology be re-defined as “that branch of exegetical theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.” Recently, noted theologians such as Dr. Graeme Goldsworthy, Dr. D. A. Carson, Dr. G. K. Beale, and Dr. Jim Hamilton have championed the continued refinement and use of biblical theology. Goldsworthy declared that “the emergence of biblical theology is a feature of the dynamic of revelation within Scripture itself, and becomes evident the moment the prophetic word in Israel begins to link previous prophetic words and events into a coherent pattern of salvation history.” As biblical theology continues to mature as a discipline, more theologians will increasingly see the value of it as a means to better understand core theological doctrines.

Types of Biblical Theology

Since biblical theology has been defined as a discipline that touches on all matters of Scripture, it should be no surprise that many types of biblical theology can be pursued. For example, a student of Scripture can embark on a study of the biblical theology of the church, a biblical theology of worship, a biblical theology of missions or a biblical theology of covenant. In fact, many book publishers have an entire array of titles that examine the aforementioned subjects as well as a variety of other important theological concepts.

Each type of biblical theology, regardless of the particular subject matter under investigation, must maintain as its focus the central and prevailing theme of redemption as outlined in Scripture. This means that if one desires to study the biblical theology of salvation, it is imperative to begin with the Book of Genesis and trace salvation throughout the grander narrative of Scripture. In doing so, one will be better equipped to annotate and exegete the manner in which salvation is depicted by the biblical authors in their own time, as well as how the flow of redemption points to Christ’s work on the cross and how that impacts the flow of history from that point forward.

Any type of biblical theology must be rooted in the understanding that biblical theology “lies in an analytical

Christology that goes well beyond the simplistic assertion, as important as it is, that Jesus died for our sins.” All types of biblical theology must necessarily examine the grand biblical drama as it relates to the entirety of redemption with Christ as the central focus.

Importance of Biblical Theology and Practical Application

One may rightly ask why biblical theology is of any importance for believers or if this discipline is something for the scholarly elite to worry about. The answer to that question lies in the reality that biblical theology “as its name implies, even as it works inductively from the diverse texts of the Bible, seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of all the biblical texts taken together.” In an age where sound theological exegesis often seems like a lost art with snippets of Scripture strung together to support pet and fad doctrines, the discipline of biblical theology is poised to positively impact a more cogent and holistic approach to the study of Scripture.

Doing biblical theology

well impacts how one approaches, understands, and applies the patterns, principles, and for that matter, the overarching message of

“...studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology.”

Scripture. Dr. James Hamilton, in his excellent book on biblical theology, rightly notes, “Studying biblical theology is the best way to learn from the Bible how to read the Bible as a Christian should. By the same token, studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology.”

Since biblical theology is focused on examining the patterns, principles and the message of Scripture as relayed by the biblical authors, it is imperative for the believer to engage those issues in a consistent manner, rooted in the underlying big story or narrative of Scripture. How then should biblical theology be approached and what does doing biblical theology well look like in everyday practice? The first step is to dig into Scripture itself, to explore its pages devoid of presuppositions, personal opinions, or bias, instead allowing the Holy Spirit to write God’s Word on the very

fibers of your heart. This necessitates the fervent and consistent reading of Scripture. Structured, consistent Bible reading will enable the believer to ascertain how the message of Scripture points to the redeeming message of the gospel found in the person and work of Christ. Sound biblical theology requires examining how the text one is studying fits into the larger biblical drama and narrative, paying special attention to the unique perspective of that particular biblical author, and how the situation they are depicting again points to and is related to the overarching theme of Scripture.

An example of what this looks like can be found in doing a biblical theology of creation. A study of origins will first bring the reader to the Genesis account of creation, a section of Scripture that is immediately followed by the entrance of sin. Grasping that the original creation was perfect and devoid of sin and death establishes the necessary framework by which the rest of Scripture leads to the promise and coming of the Redeemer, as well as the promise that one day sin and death will be no more. A biblical theology of creation done properly will focus on a study of creation along with the necessary element of

discovering how creation moves in Scripture to the sin and death, which ultimately leads to the solution of sin and death through the work of Christ on the cross. Biblical theology done properly roots all of Scripture to the message of redemption and restoration found from Genesis to Revelation.

Relationship of Biblical Theology to Systematic Theology

While biblical theology and systematic theology are distinct disciplines, it must be noted that both disciplines are intimately related and interdependent. In fact, it can be stated “biblical theology is an intermediary between the biblical text and systematic theology...The reality is that neither discipline can truly do without the other. Everyone systematizes his theology, and it can be done truly biblically only when the Bible is read on its own terms and by its own method – the explanation of salvation history.” Biblical and systematic theology must be joined together when studying Scripture to avoid an overemphasis on either doctrine. Such an

overemphasis could potentially lead to either an overly systematized view of Scripture or a perspective that spends an inordinate amount of time viewing the flow while forgetting to stop and examine the respective individual elements of the biblical message as they relate to the underlying message of redemption and restoration.

Similarities

There are certainly some similarities between biblical and systematic theology that must be noted. Both disciplines have as their focus the unity of Scripture with a concerted effort at ensuring a Christocentric (Christ centered) application of the biblical message. The marriage of biblical and systematic theology is such that properly doing either discipline requires the use of the other. Each interpreter of the Bible systematically engages Scripture by carefully examining the text as a whole in order to develop what can be considered sound doctrine. Furthermore, “while there is an undoubted methodological progression from biblical theology to systematics, there is also a vital input of systematics that makes biblical theology viable.”

Differences

While biblical and systematic theology are intimately wedded and interdependent, there are notable differences that must be properly understood. The approach of systematic theology is topical, hierarchical, and synchronic engaging a particular subject matter as somewhat of a slice of theology. On the other hand, biblical theology takes a more historical and comparative approach looking at how the various pattern, principles, and truths of Scripture move towards the ultimate culmination of redemptive history.

In Conclusion...

In the words of Dr. Robert Yarbrough, “the goal in interpreting God’s Word, the Bible, is not success in the normal sense; it is to glorify God and engage in a use of His Word with which He will be pleased.” The discipline of biblical theology is an essential part of the overall tool belt of doing good theology that must be utilized by all believers, whether they are new to the faith or seasoned theologians. Understanding the unity of Scripture and how the various truths contained therein point

Why Theology Matters for You and Me

to the scarlet thread of redemption woven in the very fabric of God's Word is a foundational element of sound Bible study. As noted by Dr. Vern Poythress, "The eternal God has revealed himself unambiguously in the successive stages of revelation, stages set out in the pages of Scripture and climaxing in the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Theology is something all believers should be involved in given that growing in relationship with God requires knowing the God we desire to grow in relationship with. A properly grounded biblical theology enables Christians to grow in their knowledge of God and in their appreciation for the biblical message of redemption and restoration wrought throughout history by God. When we do sound biblical theology, we will in turn better grasp the reality that He is the very crux of what all theological pursuits and all of life is about.

Mike Boling is the Associate Editor for Servants of Grace Ministries.

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What is Systematic Theology?

By Dave Jenkins

In this Magazine Issue

we've been seeking to answer the question, "What is theology?" with a hope to be biblical, theological and practical. In this article I want to help you understand what systematic theology is and why it is important. Ever since the dawn of the Church, Christians have been keen to engage in theology. Doctrine seeks to



take what the Bible teaches and elaborate on it while theology is the application of our doctrine from the Word. Both doctrine and theology are to be grounded in the Word of God. As Dr. John Frame states in his systematic theology book, "Theology must be in accord with Scripture."

The Point of Systematic Theology

In my first article titled, *What is Theology*, I explained that theology is the study of God. Since the time of the Apostles, the apologists of the early Church sought to take what they read in the Scriptures—the Old Testament writings—together with the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, and explain it in ways that the people would understand. Theologian's today aim to do the same thing. With systematic theology theologians aim to take the biblical teaching on certain topics and put them into specific categories. Some people today get so hung up on the categories themselves that they miss the point of systematic theology which is the synthesizing of biblical doctrine.

Being involved at my local church has taught me that speaking clearly, especially about theology is vitally important. For example, typically, what ends up happening in my small group is that we talk about what we've been saved *from* (sin), but hardly ever discuss what we've been saved *to*, namely to a new identity in Christ for the purpose of growing in His grace, culminating in glorification. With that said, in this article, I want to help you think in clear doctrinal and theological categories with the goal being that you can communicate orthodox doctrine matched with a life that reflects sound doctrine (orthopraxy).

Before I begin on this endeavor, however, let me share a personal story. As a freshman in high school, I began my study of systematic theology. In our youth Sunday school class, we studied systematic theology. Honestly, at first I didn't get any of the terms; I struggled with the terms for a long time and kept going over and over what the words meant, until I could explain them. Today I have no problem explaining what the words mean. This took time, though, and I mention it because I understand how hard it can be to learn hard doctrinal and theological terms. It is important to keep in mind that what is most important is not the terms themselves, but being able to communicate the truth behind the words.

A few years ago I was known for correcting people when they would communicate something about theology that I thought they needed to be able to explain better. I then realized that while correcting them if they got the teaching wrong was appropriate (in a kind way), what I needed to understand was that everyone is at different levels in their knowledge and understanding. I'll be honest—sometimes I even correct people today in the wrong way—after all old habits die hard, as the saying goes.

My point is that to be a good theologian one has not only to speak correctly about the theology, but also live by what he/she preaches. Many people know the right answers to theological matters, but live contrary to the teaching of the Word of God, and thus tear down what they espouse. In other words, as my mom tends to wisely say, "Actions speak louder than words." Friends, we must not only believe the right things, but our lives must

match what we believe. Theologians call this orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

That means that we have the right belief leading to a life that reflects the theology. Put another way, right theology should shape and transform our lives. When what we believe doesn't change the way we behave, think, and live, then we are guilty of being hypocrites.

Dr. Ligon Duncan once stated, “Biblical theology and systematic theology, done rightly are friends. They need each other. They complement one another.” The modern understanding of systematic theology has needed to change and is changing as more and more biblical theologians are writing at a popular level for lay people regarding the storyline of Scripture. Biblical theology done rightly as Dr. Duncan states “complements one another”. This is an important point because when biblical theology doesn't inform systematic theology, our theology takes the place of doctrine (becoming a serious problem). When this happens the relationship between doctrine and theology are confused and even separated, which causes a lot of issues as seen in a lot of our seminaries today.

Systematic theology rightly understood is informed by biblical theology. The goal of biblical theology is to inform the study of systematic theology, since systematic theology seeks to synthesize the biblical teaching on a particular doctrine. Systematic theology isn't only for the ivory towers and theological nerds. While often it is perceived that way, and according to many a systematic theology book that view seems justified, I intend to explain why having theoretical systematic theologies is eminently practical.

Systematic theology, as I've stated in this article, aims to synthesize biblical doctrine. It does this by taking the clear teaching of Scripture and then putting it into categories where one can observe clearly and consider the topic at hand. To some people what I just said justifies their view: that theology is better left to the professionals. The fact is, however, that everyone is a theologian—even your atheist neighbor who espouses that God is dead. To make the statement that God is dead is to make a theological statement which reflects one's view of God. We could continue on this vein of thought for some time, demonstrating how people make theological statements, but the point

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is that everyone has a theology which means everyone is a theologian to some degree or another. Systematic theology aids our understanding of biblical doctrine by expanding on it.

Dr. Wayne Grudem helpfully points out in his book, *Systematic Theology*, “Any Christian should find his or her Christian life enriched and deepened studying systematic theology.” The other day my small group and I had our last meeting until later in the fall. At that meeting we were examining Romans 5:12-21, and I made the comment that what we were talking about in that passage should lead us to worship of God. The goal of theology is not just to gain more knowledge, but rather to have heady truth impact the way we live. This is why sound theology leads to sound living. This is also why, as I’ve been explaining in this article, thinking clearly about these issues is so vital.

As Grudem so aptly states, “A Christian should find his or her Christian life deepened by studying systematic theology”, for the simple reason that thinking deeply about these issues does matter. We

live in a time when many approach the Christian life in the wrong way. Instead of viewing doctrine and theology as important to the Christian life, we instead see how some Christians in our local churches emphasize “how they feel” or “what they got out of the blog post or teaching”. The real problem is that people are not “feasting” on the preaching of the Word of God, although this may not be because of the preacher as is so often said. When we approach the Christian life in terms of what we *feel*, we come to worship service with the expectation that only what we “get out of the service” is what matters. This approach is the wrong one to take and is precisely what leads to the problem that I’ve been describing in this article—namely that doctrine and theology are not for the ivory tower academic, but rather for the local church, and for every Christian.

Every single Christian is a theologian. We all come to the Word, seeking to understand what it says and desiring to make sense of it for our own lives. With that said, Christians do have an objective standard by which to measure

what they believe in the Word of God. As Drs. Frame and Grudem have made abundantly clear, systematic theology is to be derived from the Word of God.

Doctrine divorced from discipleship means discipleship ceases.

Doctrine is the fuel that propels discipleship forward to the glory of God. This is why confusing the categories of biblical and systematic theology is so dangerous. We can become so focused on systematic categories that we begin to impose our theology on the Bible rather than have our doctrine inform our theology. Yet, often the emphasis in seminary is the opposite of this. The danger here is that if we know our systematic theology more than what the Bible teaches we will begin to impose our systematic theology on the text of Scripture. This is not how we are to treat the Word of God as Christians. As believers we are taught to handle the Word of God with great care (2 Timothy 2:15). This means that biblical theology should inform our systematic theology. Biblical theology provides the framework for systematic theology to build its categories.

If you were to walk into my office you would be confronted with five bookshelves, along with several degrees on the wall, a TV, a stand with a collection of books, a printer and my desk. Every single one of us walks into different rooms every day and we are confronted with what is there. The same is true with biblical and systematic theology. We come into the world of the Bible in biblical theology. We come to read, meditate on, study, reflect on, and obey what the Bible says. We are to live in this world and have our heads and hearts deeply affected and shaped by what it teaches. Yet, often we would rather do the opposite. We would rather hold to our own thoughts about topics so rather than engaging what the Bible says. And thus we rush into the room of theology before we've spend time in the world of the Bible. When this happens (and it does happen) people emphasize their thoughts and feelings above the Word of God, instead of humbly submitting to the Bible.

Earlier this year the men's ministry that I'm part of at my local church had a men's retreat. At that outing my Pastor spoke about encouragement from the Word of God. His message was

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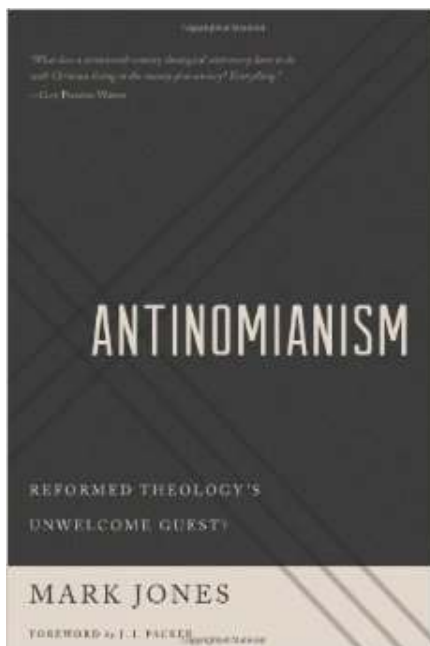
the best one in my opinion. The other two messages given were seemingly scattered and hard to follow. While the speakers had a couple of good points they were doing what I've described in this article—being theological without first being doctrinal. While I have no idea how they arrived at good application which was good given their talks, it reinforced for me the need for Christians to think clearly about these matters. This is why we must understand that believing the right doctrine is never enough. Sound doctrine is to affect the way we *live*. If it doesn't then let's just be honest and admit we either don't know it or don't believe it. Either way we need to study doctrine and theology, as we are called to be workmen who are not ashamed. We are to handle the Word of God well and not be sloppy servants of the Word.

Understanding the relationship between biblical and systematic theology is eminently practical and vitally important. In conclusion here are two helpful takeaways from this article. First, understand that biblical theology informs systematic theology. Ground your heart, and mind in the truth of the Word of God. Second, grow in your understanding of systematic theology by reading good books on it. Start with Dr. Horton Pilgrim's *Theology Core Doctrines of the Christian Life*. Then move onto Wayne Grudem's *Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Don't just stay stagnant in your understanding of systematic theology, but continue to progress onto more advanced works like Calvin's *Institutes* and many other works of like mind. Read broadly and widely on the subject even among those whom you may not agree with on a wide variety of subjects. By doing so you will grow not only in your understanding of what the Bible teaches, but be conversant with what others have said and are saying about these matters. I urge you to open your Bible as you read and be a Berean, a workman not ashamed, rightly handling the Word of God.

- i. John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R, 2013), 6.
- ii. Ligon Duncan, *Proclaiming a Cross-centered Theology* (Wheaton, Crossway), 32.
- iii. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995), 23.

A Book Review: *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?*

By Lane Keister



His insights concerning Christology are worth the price of admission.

I had connected antinomianism with a truncated view of grace, but I had not taken it back one

further step to Christology. Antinomians do have a truncated view of grace. God's grace is saving me not only from sin's guilt in justification, but also from sin's power in sanctification, and the latter grace is an enabling grace, unlike the former grace. But Jones takes it back to Christology: what about Christ's mediator-ship in heaven? Does He not view the sinner with great pity and compassion?

My friend Mark Jones has just written [a very important book on antinomianism](#). For those who don't know what the term means, etymologically it means "against the law." However, as Jones points out, that may not always be a helpful way of describing the theological positions (which are not always very uniform). Jones carefully delineates the historical positions that were around at the time of the Westminster Assembly. It is very important to note here that antinomianism

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was one of the most important bogeymen of the Westminster divines. Jones ably shows this through the primary sources of the time (something Jones shows quite the mastery of). Much of the book is taken up with this historical debate. Rightly so, for that debate in the 17th century has an enormous impact on how we define terms and categorize beliefs today. Several other things are highly commendable about this book. Jones is an extremely careful, irenic author, always acknowledging where antinomians have said something true. I have noticed, and Jones

“Jones is an extremely careful, irenic author, always acknowledging where antinomians have said something true.”

agrees, that most of the time we and they would agree about much of what they say concerning justification. Sanctification, of course, is where we would disagree. His insights concerning Christology are worth the price of admission. I had connected antinomianism with a truncated view of grace, but I had not taken it back one further step

to Christology. Antinomians do have a truncated view of grace. God’s grace is saving me not only from sin’s guilt in justification, but also from sin’s power in sanctification, and the latter grace is an enabling grace, unlike the former grace. But Jones takes it back to Christology: what about Christ’s mediatorship in heaven? Does He not view the sinner with great pity and compassion?

The distinction Jones makes between the beneficent love of God and the complacent love of God is a vital distinction. The former means basically how God sees us in Christ in justification. The latter is how God sees sanctification progressing in us. The former admits of no degrees, but the latter does. The flip side of the coin applies as to how God sees our sin. God can be displeased with our sin, not as a judge, but as a Father. The distinction Jones makes here, which is based on the Reformed fathers and, more importantly, Scripture, helps us to make sense of the biblical data regarding these things. Only a few very small things would I mention by way of criticism. They are mostly in the category of things that Jones mentions but doesn’t develop, and are therefore things about which I wish he had said more. One of them is something I heard Rick Phillips say at the

Gospel Reformation Network conference two years ago, and which really rocked my world. Jones mentions it but doesn't develop it, and it is this: a Christian is no longer totally depraved. If God has given that person a new heart and mind, making them to be born again, then they are not just declared righteous in justification, but have the beginnings of a new way of life in sanctification. There is still indwelling sin, yes. There is still a lifelong battle, yes. But isn't it such an encouragement to know that the Triune God has taken up residence in us? That place where God dwells in us in no longer totally depraved. Jones mentions it on page 129, but I would have enjoyed some development of that theme, especially in the historical theology.

The other thing that I wish he had done is to engage Westminster West's theology a bit more directly. Jones has shown that he is very irenic, and is very concerned to be fair. This decision not to engage Westminster West feels like an intentional decision on his part. He talks about Michael Horton a bit. But we need writing on this subject that casts light and not heat on the subject. And when it comes to Westminster West, there has all too often been heat and not much light.

One tiny disagreement I have is with regard to the Horton/Garcia exchange in the Confessional Presbyterian Journal last year. Horton's article was designed to address the hermeneutical issue of the law/gospel distinction in relation to reading Scripture. It was never designed to address the issues that are but tangentially related *vis-a-vis* legalism and antinomianism.

All in all, this is an extremely important and helpful book, and one cannot but agree with Carl Trueman's assessment of this book as timely. In Jones's effort to be irenic, he did not say that antinomianism is rife in the Reformed and evangelical world right now, but of course it is. This book is a very important corrective, and needs to be read, particularly by pastors. Pastors need to be very careful to avoid antinomianism and legalism. This book helps us to do that.

Rev. Lane Keister is a PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) pastor currently serving Lebanon Presbyterian Church in Winnsboro, SC.

Church History & Historical Theology: Why are They Important?

By Brian H. Cosby

“What does Henry VIII have anything to do with me?”

I grumbled to my mom. I was seventeen years old and in the middle of a European History class. As my *least* favorite subject, history seemed utterly pointless and irrelevant.

“...studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology.”

Fast-forward three years. Once again, I found myself sitting in a history class, though this time as a freshman at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Samford requires all of its students to take a certain number of basic courses, and history was one of them. For whatever reason—I’ll credit the professor—the stories of the past came alive and I became

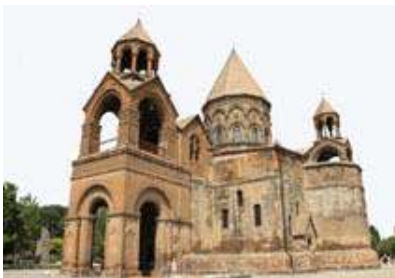
more and more enamored with the people, the movements, and the watershed events that transformed culture and civilization. In a few short days, I switched from a course of business to a course of history, eventually graduating with it as my major.

You might be in the same boat asking, “Why study history?” Or, perhaps more specifically, “Why study *church* history?” As a sub-category of church history, we also seek to understand historical *theology*—the articulation and explication of biblical doctrine by those who have lived and died. These are fair questions. Let me give you four reasons why I believe knowing church history is beneficial and three why we should seek to understand historical theology.

Church History

First, knowing church history helps explain our identity. Who are the people of God? Where did we come from? Assuming

you are a Christian, you have been reborn into a multi-ethnic worldwide family. Church history points us to the God who chose a people for himself from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The church—which is the bride (Rev. 21:9) and body (Eph. 4:12) of Christ—is made up of all those who are called out of the world as God’s treasured possession (Deut. 7:6). If you are a Christian, these chosen people (1 Pet. 2:9) are your spiritual family—a long line of sinners and saints.



Second, knowing church history helps explain the present. What is the history and heritage of your local church? Is it part of a denomination? Why? Does your church recite the Apostles’ Creed or hold to a confession of faith like the Westminster Confession of Faith or the London Baptist Confession of Faith? Knowing the past helps explain the present—what we do, why we baptize infants (or not), and why you have a local church at all! Whether you realize it or not, you are affected by your

family’s history, your nation’s history, and your church’s history. Knowing our past helps explain our present.

Third, knowing church history guards us from repeating its mistakes. You’ve probably heard it said, “History repeats itself.” This is true! Church history is replete with controversy, heresy, envy, strife, sin, arrogance, and foolishness. We see how pride has led to ruin, anger to murder, and lust to adultery. We see how errors in understanding the Bible led to unintended consequences and how abandoning the Bible altogether led to a slippery slope of disastrous proportions. There have been countless times that I have been able to recognize a current trend in the church *today*—with its unintended consequences—simply by being familiar with church history. Knowing the past helps guard us from repeating the same errors in the future.

Fourth, knowing church history testifies to God’s powerful working as HIS STORY. Despite the sin and folly of the church, God overrules our sin for his good purposes. Indeed, history is *his story*! It testifies to the God who will work all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11), whatever his hand and plan have predestined to take place (Acts 4:28). He has declared the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) and calls us to take part in his tapestry of sal-

vation. The scarlet thread running throughout the pages of history is the God who is, at once, sovereign, good, holy, self-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, loving, and faithful to his church.

Historical Theology

Historical theology explores the people, places, events, and movements of the past that have formed distinct thoughts, doctrines, and theological systems. A further—and more practical—element of historical theology seeks to learn from the theological development and articulation in the past and apply that to the present. Let me give you three ways to both approach and apply the study of historical theology.

First, understanding the meaning behind the words and language used in past theological discussion helps frame and codify the meaning behind the words we use today in theological discussion. For example, the early church wrestled over the doctrine of God, in general, and the doctrine of Christ, in particular. Words like “person” and “substance” became part and parcel of the theological language when speaking of the Trinity. Today, we refer to the three “persons” of the Trinity. They are of the same substance (*homousios*)—equal in essence, power, and glory—but different

persons, with different roles and functions. While it is true that the word “Trinity” nowhere appears in the biblical text, we stand on the shoulders of the early church and gratefully accept their diligence and precision in handing down language to describe biblical doctrine.

Second, theological insights by those who have gone before us—if they accord with the truth of Scripture—are as true now as they were then. Moreover, God has gifted men of the past to communicate that truth in such a way that it becomes a timeless way to think *more biblically* the thoughts after God. For instance, the Puritans translated biblical doctrine into very practical application for everyday life—from milking the cow to rowing a boat. The Puritans have handed down a vast corpus of works of practical divinity, all designed to bring the truth of Scripture home. While we can certainly see the application directly from Scripture today, the Puritans—and many others throughout history—have helped the church by articulating and presenting that application. And most of them were much more biblically literate than we are today!

Third (and related to an awareness of not repeating the mistakes of the past), by studying historical theology, we see various theological trends and doctrines repeat themselves over

and over again. Today, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses believe what the 4th-century heretic, Arius, believed about Jesus—that he is *not* God, but rather a lesser created being. Those who espouse the idea that we are not *that* sinful, but instead have some vestiges of inherent good in us, are simply re-stating a form of what the early 5th-century heretic, Pelagius, taught. Those, today, who want to completely separate from society and live in a commune, follow a long line of unbiblical groups who have sought to do the same throughout history. Knowing historical theology helps us identify modern theology—both its good and its bad repetitions.

Applications and Examples

You see, it's helpful to know how various thoughts repeat themselves so that we can more easily identify those thoughts and quickly protect the flock of God from feeding on poor and misguided theology. As a pastor, I do this all the time. The people in my church regularly ask me about a certain author, book, or religious movie. They wonder if the person's theology or book teaches something revolutionary, controversial, or whether it is full of unbiblical teaching. What's oftentimes needed is a good dose of historical theology. They can quickly gain a proper

perspective on the idea or the book in light of the greater history of the church.

It's also helpful to know church history and historical theology in the area of *denominationalism*. Many people today don't

“...the 4th century heretic, Arius, believed...that [Jesus] is *not* God...”

like the idea of denominations—the word itself makes them cringe and squirm. But denominations are not bad, in and of themselves; they simply help define a group's theology, values, and goals. Every group has those three elements, so why not give it a name? It's oftentimes helpful! But where did they come from and who helped organize them?

The fact that most denominations affirmed predestination in their early creeds and confessions, for example, helps clarify how far many of these denominations have deviated today from their early beliefs. To take a very specific example, it also helps understand why most Pentecostal groups—which came out of the Methodist movement—do not affirm predestination. John Wesley, who founded the Methodists, didn't believe it. Similarly, many denominations that are “anti-

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denominational” nevertheless enjoy working and co-laboring with other like-minded churches with similar values and goals. These non-denominational “denominations” are simply a modern-day expression (in part) of what we find in the 15th century, called the Radical Reformation.

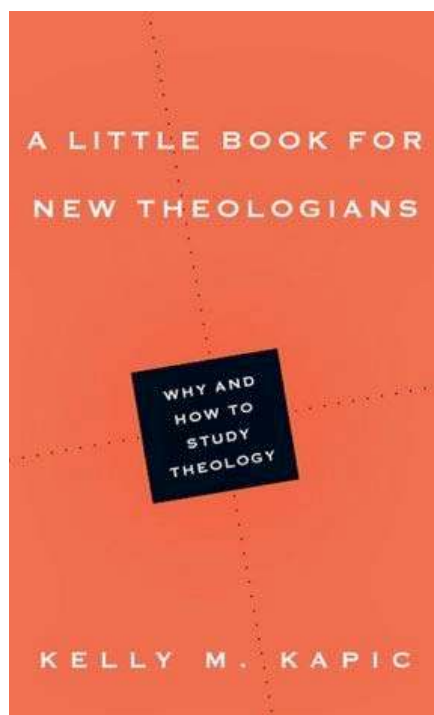
A final point of application may be seen with an event such as the Crusades (1095–1291). Atheists, agnostics, and people from other religions regularly point out how self-professing Christians can be the most brutal and intolerant by pointing to the events of the Crusades. However, the atrocities committed in the name of Christ have nothing to do with the actual truth of Christ. The truth of God’s Word does not depend upon the actions of those who bear the name of God, nor does it support the violence committed by self-professing Christians during the Crusades. This, to be sure, is opposite of the Quran, which *does* teach its followers to act harshly against those who don’t follow their god: “Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them” (Surah 9:5).

The study of church history and historical theology is of immense value. I would even argue that it is necessary in our day in which we give a defense for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15). We gain a greater perspective of where we’ve come from, our identity, and our theological and biblical heritage. But we also are given a greater assurance and foundation for offering praise to the glory of God—who has preserved his people throughout time as the great cloud of witnesses, and who now beckon us onward in our race of faith.

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A Book Review: *A Little Book for New Theologians*

By Craig Hurst



When it comes to the life of a professional theologian, therein lays a dangerous and entangling temptation to divorce the deeply spiritual nature of the Christian walk that is grounded in the study of the Bible with the high-

ly demanding life of theological studies within academia. It is hard to imagine that one whose livelihood is studying and teaching the Bible can ignore the deeply spiritual nature of his or her day-to-day work. While it may not seem obvious to many, there is an interrelated nature between the life of the mind, as applied to the study of the Bible, and the development of the soul as it is shaped by that very study. One cannot be the theologian God would have him (or her) to be if in his working on the text of Scripture he does not allow Scripture to do its work on him.

The charge of not only the professionally trained theologian, but also lay Christians, is to not divorce soul work from mind work. All Christians are commanded to love God with all of their mind and soul which means they are to be theologians. Following in the tradition of Helmut Thielicke's classic work, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, Kelly M. Kapic has written his new master-

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piece titled, *A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology*. In this short and readable book Kaptic guides the reader on the basic spiritual principles all theologians, professional or not, need to be mindful of as they put theology into practice.

Some Christians might ask, “Why study theology?” Kaptic’s simple answer to them is to know, love and worship God better! When one can do this he/she can enjoy God more fully. Kaptic states, “We enjoy God to the degree that we worship Him faithfully...” (pp. 21). God made us to worship, know, and love Him. We grow in our knowledge of God through His Word. This knowledge is not reduced to facts in our minds, but rather is connected to how we relate to and worship God. Out of a desire for His image bearers to know Him better, God has revealed Himself in Scripture and through the finished work of Christ. Kaptic rightly notes that this connection is strongly Trinitarian when he states, “The father reveals Himself through His Word [Christ] as He comes to us by His Spirit...” (pp. 32). The Christian journey of knowing God is a pilgrimage. As pilgrims “...we rightly respond to God’s revelation when our words about God, whether many or few, are placed into the matrix of worship. When we see the relationship between theology and worship

we are moved beyond intellectual curiosity to an engaged encounter with the living God...” (pp. 36).

So we study God, or practice theology, in order to worship and know Him better, but in doing so we need to allow the Holy Spirit to bring our character in line with God’s Word. Kaptic spends seven chapters outlining some major areas in which theologians need to pay attention to themselves in their study of the Word. The first, as has been mentioned earlier, is the inseparability of the work of the theologian with the life of the theologian. Kaptic succinctly pinpoints what is at stake when he says, “Attempting to separate life and theology is to lose the beauty and truthfulness of both” (pp. 42). While our theology can go off-track because of poor study habits, it can also go off track because we fail to allow the text to shape our minds and hearts as we study the Word (pp. 45).

Secondly, this practice (allowing our character to become aligned with the Bible) leads to “faithful reason”. Faithful reason is built upon faith as it looks “to the triune God in humble dependence on Him” (pp. 57). This is in line with the old adage “*fides quarens intellectum*” (literally ‘faith seeking understanding’), meaning that faith comes before

understanding. With its tie to faith, and faith's tie to worship, reason finds its home in worship.

In another aspect of worship we see the relationship between prayer and study of the Word, we are re-

“Jesus’ whole life and ministry were characterized by what He said and did...ministering to people.”

minded that prayer is one of the most neglected spiritual disciplines for Christians, and can be neglected even more during the study of theology. Prayer in combination with the practice of theology helps to personalize the task as it draws us to God! It has been astutely observed that if one wants to know someone's theology then one should listen to the other person pray. Prayer can be a testing ground for our theology.

The next characteristics of a faithful theologian are *humility* and *repentance*. These two go hand-in-hand, for as we are called to humility we are to turn from pride, which requires repentance from it. “Humility”, Kacic says, “has a vision of God’s majesty, love, and forgiveness in Christ, producing love for God and one’s neigh-

bors” (71). When a Christian takes seriously his or her responsibility to study Scripture, pride can creep in as one understands more of what God has revealed to them. Instead, the more we learn the more we should be brought to our knees in humility. “Revelation and repentance often come together” as we learn more of that which we need to repent of while studying Scripture (75).

In chapter eight, Kacic makes a connection that very few Christians are likely to consider with regards to becoming a faithful theologian—that of suffering, justice, and knowing God. Theology, Kacic argues, is messy work that should draw us to reflect the compassion of Jesus in our daily lives. Jesus’ whole life and ministry were characterized by what He said and did, and much of what accompanied His teaching was ministering to people. Jesus is our example of how to minister well to people in the middle of the mess of their sin. Jesus was willing to get messy for the sake of others because of what He believed about them—they needed His saving message.

Following James 1:27, Kacic pointedly notes that:

“For in truth, we in the church sometime seek to be “unstained” by distancing ourselves from

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those most troubled in society, those in most need. They can become absent not only from our churches but also from our thinking, and this does affect our theology. Most of the time we cannot help that child without getting ourselves messy too. Connecting ourselves to the vulnerable, the oppressed, the damaged and the suffering will connect us with their pain and suffering”(84).

We are to go to the stained of the world to help free them from those stains, all the while guarding ourselves from being stained from the world as well. We don't ignore the stained; we seek to bring the compassion and justice of God into their lives.

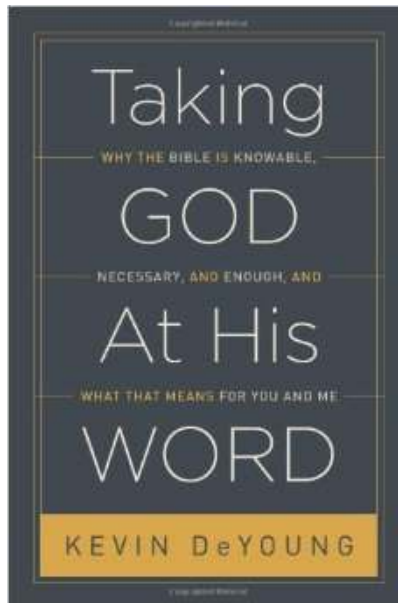
In many ways the final two chapters complement each other. In chapter nine, the role of tradition and community are emphasized. It is here that “we self-consciously seek the counsel of the saints from both the past and present” (93). It is arrogant to dislodge ourselves in the study of Scripture, from the stream of faithful saints who have gone before us. We are not the first Christians to study the Bible; we need to give honor to those who have “earnestly contended for the faith once delivered to the saints” throughout church history. Finally, as much as we are to honor our elders in the faith, we need to keep our love for Scripture supreme. It is in this that we can honor those faithful Christian theologians who have gone before us. We love the Word because God has revealed Himself in it, identified with it, and called us to Himself through it.

A Little Book for New Theologians is a great primer on the wedding of the task of theology with the life of the theologian. In this book, Kopic successfully shows how the academic study of God's Word is to be joined with the growth of the Christian in the grace of God. This is refreshing book and should be required reading for all serious Christians, especially those in college and/or seminary who are seeking to enter into vocational ministry.

Craig Hurst is the Book Review Editor for Servants of Grace Ministries.

A Book Review: *Taking God at His Word*

By Brian H. Cosby



Kevin DeYoung’s book, *Taking God at His Word*, is one of the most practical books about the Bible that I’ve ever read. Immensely specific in its applications, the book gives the believer added confidence in trusting, depend-

ing on, desiring, knowing, and studying God’s Word.

In a culture that is lost on the sea of relativism, DeYoung presents the Bible as the soul’s anchor—keeping the believer tied to the Rock of our salvation and to the eternal truths established by our sovereign God. Because the Bible is inspired by a sovereign, holy, and good God, it is *necessarily* authoritative. We should swallow our pride here. The Bible brings us to a place of *dependence* and *submission* because it is the *very Word of God* and He has all rights over his creation.

Of the many helpful take-aways from the book, I found the *sufficiency of Scripture* to be the most convicting and comforting: convicting in the sense that I have relied too often on a plethora of programs to gimmick people into the church or to “bring them” to salvation. But I haven’t valued God’s Word as sufficient. He not only governs the ends, but the means. He has already prescribed the appoint-

ed means of grace by which he both saves and sanctifies his people. The sufficiency of Scripture, however, is also incredibly comforting precisely because of this reason. We don't need to spend an indefinite amount of time looking for the latest and greatest “keys” or “tools” for growing buildings, budgets, and bodies—his Word is sufficient!

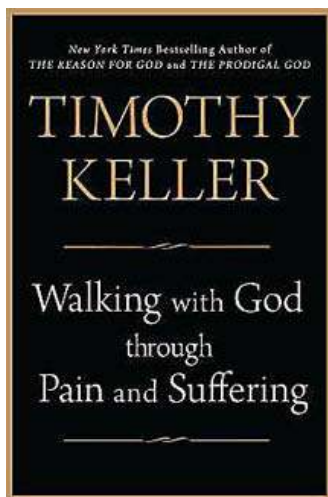
I also love DeYoung's emphasis on the *necessary nature of the truth of Scripture*: there is no salvation apart from the gospel message contained in the pages of the Bible. The only proper way to view our world—philosophy, history, poetry, science, marriage, children, worship, money, etc.—is through the spectacles of Scripture. Make no mistake: God's Word is absolutely necessary for all things pertaining to faith and life. For all of these reasons, I highly commend Kevin DeYoung's book, *Taking God at His Word*.

Brian Cosby is pastor of Wayside Presbyterian Church (PCA) on Signal Mountain, Tennessee, and author of God's Story: A Student's Guide to Church History (Christian Focus, 2014).

A Book Review:

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering

By Dave Jenkins



Mention the word suffering, pain, evil, or any other similar word

and you are likely to get some very interesting and contradictory statements. The Christian has a suffering Lord who lived and breathed till his early 30's; but he lived without sin, died a bloody death, rose from the grave, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, thus defeating death and the grave. While many people today (both Christians and non-Christians

alike) view suffering in the wrong light, Dr. Tim Keller's recent work titled, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, broke this conventional view and is one of the finest treatments on the topic of suffering that I've read.

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering is broken into three parts. Part one explores our understanding of the furnace, which spans the first four chapters. Chapter one examines the culture of suffering, chapter two the victory of Christianity, and chapter three examines the chal-

“...*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* broke this conventional view and is one of the finest treatments on the topic of suffering...”

lenge to the secular. The section concludes with looking at the problem of evil. Section two is titled, *Facing the Furnace*.

Within this section, Keller looks at the challenge to faith, the sovereignty of God, the suffering of god, the reason for suffering, learning to walk, and the varieties of suffering (a total of six chapters). The book concludes by looking at what it means to walk with God in the furnace through weeping, trusting, praying, thinking, thanking, loving, and hoping.

In seminary I wrote a research paper on the topic of suffering from the book of Job. In that paper I examined what people in our culture have said about suffering in addition to what has been said by respected leaders in evangelicalism. It's unfortunate that during seminary I lacked a reference that was as well written as *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Keller's book takes an aerial view of how our culture approaches and deals with the topic of suffering, how the Church has handled these questions and how to grow through suffering. It is precisely because this book engages the culture's view, what the Church has said, what the Bible teaches, and why this issue is important for the Christian that makes *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* such an important contribution to the literature on suffering. Most books on this topic excel in one or two areas (culture or Scripture), but this book excels at all of the topics listed above, and brings together the best scholarship to bear in one book. In my humble opinion, this is Dr. Keller's most important book since questions regarding suffering affect everyone—whether they are Christian or not.

***Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* was a timely and important book for me** to read at this point in my life. In recent days, pain and suffering have been an unwanted part of my life due to issues with family illness. This is why I appreciate this tremendous work by Dr. Keller so much—the author takes us deep into this topic, but does so with fidelity to the Word of God so that the reader will understand what the Gospel says about these issues. In classic Keller fashion, he makes much of Jesus while guiding his readers through the various arguments our culture makes about the topic, all to expose our hearts and minds to the truth of the Word of God. For this and many others reasons, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* is one of the most important books of the year and is easily in my personal top-five list for this season of my life.

Dave Jenkins is the Executive Editor of Theology for Life and faithfully serves at Ustick Baptist Church, in Boise, ID.

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