

Biblical Theology Core Seminar: Session 13 Workshop # 4

I want to begin this final class by turning the tables and asking you a few questions. Let's just make sure we've learned some things along the way. Pop quiz time.

1) What is biblical theology?

Someone *could* use the term to simply mean theology that's biblical (as opposed to unbiblical). And what people have in mind here is systematic theology. We have been using the term in a slightly more technical sense to refer to a way of reading the Bible (a hermeneutic) as one book, by one author, telling one story, that centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It helps us to focus on redemptive history and to ask how every text points to Jesus and his good news.

2) Should reading every text with a view to Christ cause us to be careless with the text in front of us?

No, we should always begin by asking what the point of the specific text in its context is. These means using the historical-grammatical method, in which we try to understand the text on its own historical and grammatical terms, as set down by the human author.

You might recall in class 3 we talked about two exegetical tools. The first was historical grammatical method. The second was literary form. There are multiple literary forms you need to take into account in Scripture: Narrative; Parable; Poetry; Wisdom; Prophecy; Epistles; Apocalyptic, and more. And the literary form will impact your approach to the author's intended meaning.

3) In addition to the exegetical tools, we listed a number of storyline tools. What were they? Let's start by listing them.

- Themes: we want to pay attention to the Bible's main theme lines. Examples of themes include sin, redemption, sacrifice, God's grace, and so forth.
- Covenant
- Continuity/Discontinuity
- Promise/Fulfillment
- Typology

4) What's a covenant, and why are they so important for us to understand?

A covenant is "A solemn commitment, guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both covenanting parties, sealed with an oath" (Paul Williamson, NDBT). And they're important because they provide the structure which hold the Bible together. They define the terms by which different groups of people interact with one another and with God. A key question to always ask in the task of interpretation is, which covenants are in play in this text?

5) What are the two covenants that God established in Scripture with all humanity (which we might call “common” covenants)?

The covenants with Adam and Noah.

6) What are the major covenants that God established in Scripture with a special people (what we might call the “special” covenants)?

The covenants with Abraham, Moses, David, and the new covenant.

7) What is a biblical type? Or, what do we mean by typology?

To say something is a “type” of something else in the Bible means that you are asserting God intended to teach us about a second thing by connecting it to a first thing. Some event, person, or institution is organically connected by God’s intent to something else so that the first things helps us to interpret and understand the second thing.

8) What are some examples of some biblical types?

But the biblical text refers to Jesus as last Adam, Abraham’s Seed, new Israel, David’s greater Son. It also describes him as the Passover Lamb, the once-for-all sacrifice, the temple, the Good Shepherd, a king, a priest, the Rock struck by Moses, the true Exodus, the vine of Israel, the Lord of the Sabbath. These are all types.

9) Can we make anything a type? How do we make sure we’re being responsible with our typology?

A type is not simply allegory that makes arbitrary and mere linguistic connections between symbol and the thing symbolized. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Inn is the church, the innkeeper is Paul.

I think the safest way to establish a type is to root it in the biblical text. Really, we’re looking for the New Testament’s permission to call something a type. That’s not always the case, but it typically is.

10) Why is biblical theology important for the church to understand?

Most fundamentally, it’s critical to reading our Bible’s rightly. There are so many false churches and false believers spreading throughout the globe today because false teachers grab a Bible verse and distort it. Roman Catholics and Mormons do. Cults and prosperity gospel churches do it.

Second, biblical theology centers our churches on the power of the gospel and not on moralism. People love motivational talks. They pay for them. “Living in excellence!” “Making Your Marriage Marvelous.” But moralistic and motivational talks don’t give life

to the dead or sight to the blind. They don't change the leopards spots. Only the gospel does all that. And a Christian sermon, no matter where it's coming from in Scripture, gets its power from the gospel.

Third, biblical theology shapes our church's mission. Biblical theology teaches us that Bible is primarily about what Jesus uniquely did. And all our actions and work as churches and church members emerges from the knowledge of what *he* did.

Fourth, biblical theology leads us to worship. It teaches us the Bible is about Jesus, not about us.

12) What's the story of the exodus fundamentally about?

It's fundamentally about the fact that God saves his people for his own glory. And he uses this people in the Old Testament to ultimately point us toward a greater exodus to come through the person and work of Christ?

13) What's the Old Testament law fundamentally about?

It's fundamentally about God's revelation of his own character, which must be put on display in all those who would image him. And there is only one person who has ever lived who has kept God's law perfectly—the one whom Paul calls the “image of God.”

14) What's the story of David and Goliath fundamentally about?

It's a story in which God rescues his people from his enemies through an unlikely savior of God's own choosing who relies on the power of God and seeks the glory of God above all else. It's a story that prepares us for an even more unlikely Savior of God's own choosing to come, who also will rescue God's people from God's enemies.

15) When we read the psalms, should we directly apply them to ourselves? If not, how should we read them?

We should always read them through Christ. In other words, we can make praise and confess and ask and lament before the Father in heaven knowing that Jesus made a way for us to the throne of grace through his blood. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? He with clean hands and a pure heart. Well, that's not me. But in Christ, it is.

16) What are four questions we should ask of every text for good interpretation?

1) What is the point of this text in its original context? 2) Where are we in the Bible's storyline (under what covenantal administration)? 3) How does it point to Christ? 4) How is it relevant to me, standing where I stand in relations to Christ?

17) Does the Old Testament law apply to us as Christians?

Not *directly*, no. Think of the Ten Commandments. They begin by saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” He gave the Ten Commandments to historical, ethnic Israel. And so with the rest of the Law.

At the same time, Jesus, we’re told, fulfilled the law. He kept it. He embodied it. And he gives us what we need from it. And the people of Israel, Paul tells us, are meant to be “examples for us” (1 Cor. 10:6). So the law as it’s articulated in the Old Testament may not directly apply to us, but, yes, it’s very much *relevant* to us. Sure enough, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. The law teaches us about the unbreakable connection between righteousness and blessing. You must be righteous to be blessed. The law teaches us that we are not righteous, and we had better find someone who is so that we can be blessed. The law teaches us that God’s people must be holy and set apart.

18) Non-Christians sometimes accuse us of applying our Bible inconsistently because they will pull random laws from the Old Testament and make the observation that we don’t follow that. “Hey, do you wear two kinds of cloth at once? Do you eat shellfish? Aren’t you being inconsistent?” How do we respond?

Drawing on the last answer, we simply observe that the entire Mosaic administration was given to the people of Israel and not to the church; that God was accomplishing something very specific at that time; and that work has now been fulfilled to Christ.

“In moving from an elementary school to a junior high, a student will not presume that all the classroom structures and rules remain the same simply because both schools belong to the same school district. But nor will he presume they are all different. Instead, he will ask the new principle and teachers, “How do things work now that I am in junior high?” The lesson for our purpose is this: every rule and institution in the Old Testament is indeed *relevant* for the Christian, because Christ fulfills all of it (see Matt. 5:17-18); yet generally only those structures and rules which Jesus and the apostles say bind us should bind us.” (From Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*)

19) Non-Christians and Christians alike will sometimes draw out various events in redemptive history in order to accuse us or to get something. For instance, the non-Christian might point to how “Joshua and the people of Israel killed whole cities in the land of Canaan” in order to insinuate we Christians similarly aspire to a theonomic state. Or, in precisely the same way, a prosperity gospel preacher might point to the Prayer of Jabez to say that we can ask God for earthly blessing in the here and now. How do we respond?

First, we observe that the Bible provides God’s history of redemption, and, like history generally, it’s filled with non-repeatable events. That is, the Bible doesn’t give us all this history so that we can repeat it, but so that we can learn from the unique things God does at each point along the way.

Second, redemptive history is divided up into different covenantal administrations. The two examples listed here both come from the Old Covenant era, and God was doing something very specific in that era, namely, using a particular nation to teach all the nations of the earth that they belonged to him and were liable to his judgment. Indeed, as you keep reading after Joshua into the rest of Israel's history you see that Israel was no less liable to God's judgment than the people of Canaan. In fact, we're just as liable as Israel and Canaan if we don't repent and believe. Do you think what happened to Canaan is unfair? You probably think the threat of judgment against you is unfair to. And that's just the problem. We're all our own gods and judges! That said, we're no longer under the old covenantal administration. It successfully taught its lesson. Now, we're under a new administration, and there's another lesson: Jesus can save us from the judgement we deserve.

Now only that, the blessing he offers is something better than what Jabez asked for: Jesus offers us the chance to be reconciled to God and to all God's people.

20) Is the Bible all about you and me? If not, who is it about?

No, it's about Jesus!

Well, I hope you feel like you've learned something in the biblical theology core seminar. I have one more textual case study we can do if we need to. But since we haven't had as much time for Q&A in this course as I would have liked, I'm happy to spend the rest of the class doing that if it would be beneficial. *Questions about anything in the course?*

CASE STUDY: ACTS

Let's do one last case study, this time from the book of Acts. Remember the four questions we want to ask of every text: what is the point; where are we in the storyline; how does it point to Christ; how does it apply to us through Christ?

Turn to Acts 2, and listen as I read the first 4 verses:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Take a couple minutes now and see if you answer our four questions with the friend next to you.

1) What is the point of this text?

What is the author trying to say or do or teach us?

- Most fundamentally, the author is doing history here. Luke is simply recounting how the remarkable events of the day of Pentecost transpired. Look back at 1:15 and you see that church numbered around 120 people at this point. In these verses, Luke starts by saying, “There the 120 were all together when this most amazing thing happened!” Pentecost, in Greek, means the 50th day. The Jews celebrated the Feast of Weeks 50 days after the Passover at which the first fruits of the corn harvest were presents and, in later times, the giving of the law of Moses.
- In these verses he’s also preparing to say that Old Testament prophecy was been fulfilled on this day of Pentecost. A few verses later he will recount Joel’s prophecy. Look at verses 16 and 17: “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘An in the last days is shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...[verse 21] And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

2) Where are we in the historical redemptive storyline?

Turn back to John 7:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. **38** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” **39** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus’ prediction right here helps us to locate ourselves in the storyline. A moment will come when I am glorified, says Jesus, and at the moment the Spirit will be given to all who believe.

3) How does this point to Christ?

Turn back to Acts 2. Peter is preaching. He’s explaining what the people see, on the one hand, as promised by Joel. But even more importantly, he explains that all of this is a result of Christ’s crucifixion, Christ’s resurrection, Christ’s ascension, and Christ’s session (or sitting) at the right hand of God, which in turn triggers the giving of the Spirit. Look at verse 23: “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up...” Then verses 32 and 33: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, have having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

So what we’re witnessing in Acts 2 is a the remarkable, once-in-history, moment in which Jesus is exalted by being set down at the Father’s right hand—just as unique in history as the redemption and the resurrection—and by the giving of his Spirit in a new and remarkable way. The gift of tongues that we witness, then, isn’t the big deal. That’s

just a sign of what's really a big deal, namely, that Jesus himself, the man they all knew and travelled with for three years, is being seated in heaven.

So how do our four verses point to Christ. Well, in context they point to him as the one being seated in heaven who gives the gift of his Spirit to his people.

4) How does this text apply to us through Christ?

Is this a guide for speaking in tongues? Hardly. It's a remarkable assurance of the promise that all who believe will receive God's Spirit, as we read. His Spirit will come, we read elsewhere in the New Testament, as a comforter, and the firstfruits, and the downpayment of even more to be given later.

Any questions?