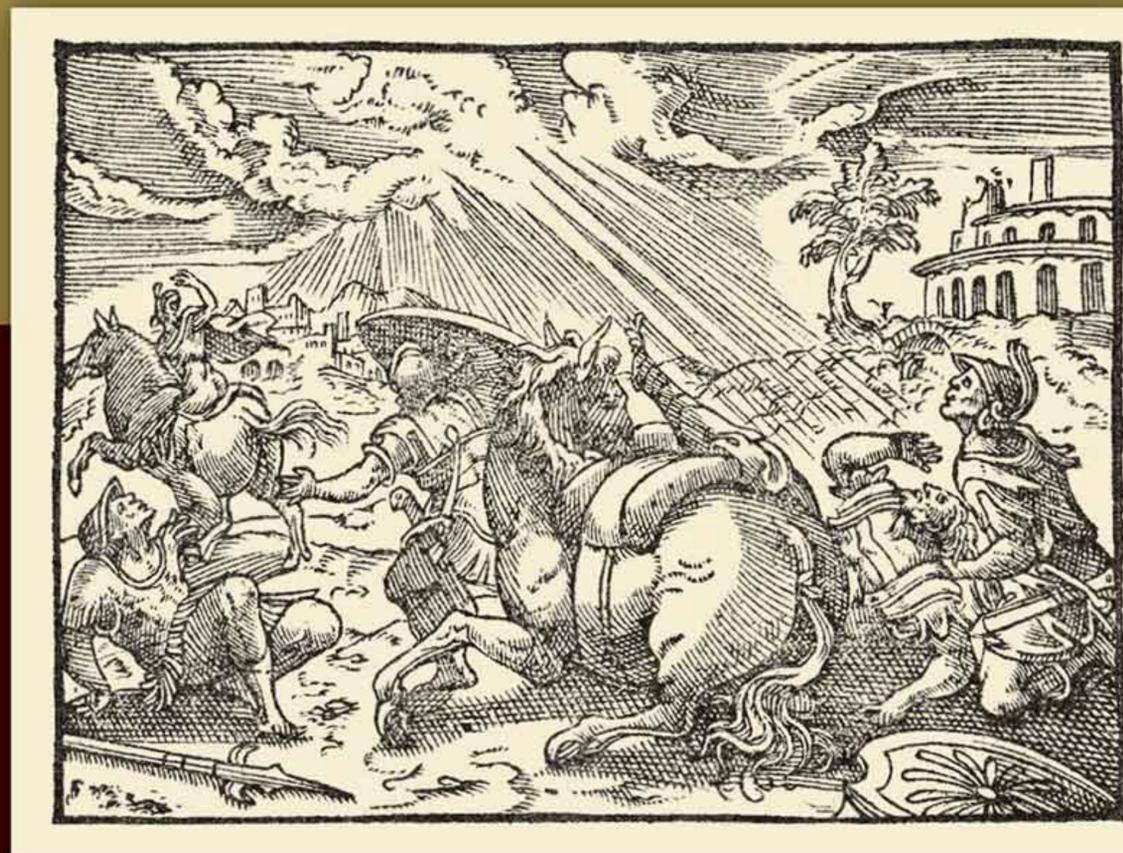


# The Whole Counsel of God

VOLUME 2

THE FULL  
REVELATION  
OF GOD



Richard C. Gamble

“One can view a river from a mountaintop or from the window of a train that runs along its banks. Thus it is with systematic theology and biblical theology. Richard Gamble gives us a ticket to ride through the lush landscape of New Testament theology that yields fresh appreciation for the doctrines of the Christian faith, as he once again provides a creative blend of various branches of theology. The Key Terms, Study Questions, and Resources for Further Study provided for each chapter enrich the whole.”

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“This, the second of the author’s projected three-volume magnum opus exploring the whole counsel of God as it is revealed in the unfolding history of special revelation, deals with the New Testament culmination of that history. Readers will find a wealth of insights that result from this comprehensive effort to integrate the results of biblical-theological interpretation with systematic-theological issues and conclusions in light of the history of doctrine—an impressive accomplishment of a demanding undertaking.”

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“The fruit of decades of scholarship, teaching, preaching, fellowship, and life in Christ, this continuation of Professor Gamble’s survey of God’s mighty acts is impressive. The author provides amazing and sweeping vistas of the forest without neglecting the trees. This volume will reward patient reading and rereading.”

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“Dr. Gamble’s second volume of his ambitious project, blending biblical theology with a systematic-theological structure, encourages the reader to see the entire sweep of redemptive history fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his work of redemption. It should greatly repay close attention. We await the third volume with anticipation.”

—**Robert Letham**, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Union School of Theology

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“Dr. Gamble’s new volume in the *Whole Counsel of God* series is a comprehensive, scholarly treatise on New Testament theology. Following in Paul’s footsteps in Acts 20:27, Gamble continues to explore the whole counsel of God in this second volume. In a field dominated by higher-critical methodologies, Gamble’s work is a breath of fresh air; his approach is biblically faithful and engaging. This work will certainly prove helpful in advancing the kingdom.”

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“Dr. Gamble has labored hard to give another great gift to the church. Few theologians are able to bring together the vast amount of biblical and theological literature in a way that remains accessible and, at the same time, intellectually and spiritually stimulating. I wish a resource like this had been available to me before and during my own theological studies. I can think of no other book that so adeptly merges the deep truths of Reformed theology with the panoramic view of redemptive history. I can think of no other book (besides the Bible) with which to begin and continue in the study of theology. This book should be on the shelf of every Christian pastor, theologian, and Bible student. It is simply the best resource of its kind available to the church.”

—**K. Scott Oliphint**, Dean of Faculty, Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Dr. Richard Gamble is a man of immense learning and talent. I write this as one who has had the privilege of knowing and learning from the man. There is no question that he is a gifted scholar of which this

book is evidence, despite his claim in the preface to the contrary. Yet the distinguishing feature of Dr. Gamble's erudition is his ability to clearly and carefully communicate the profound truths of God's Word to both the farmer and the seminarian, which is no mean feat! From biographical information to the Trinity to our union with Christ, Dr. Gamble instructs us with the patience of a learned theologian and the zeal and clarity of a preacher whose feet are shod with the gospel. The person who reads these pages not only will be instructed in the sacred truths of Scripture but will understand why Dr. Gamble's lectures are so well received and loved by his students. What is more, the reader will also find himself situated firmly in the Vosian tradition of biblical theology, being led by an able guide who is clearly and constructively extending Vos's great vision for the church and the academy."

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"With a scholar's mind and a pastor's heart, Rick Gamble has successfully integrated biblical theology and systematic theology into a unitary interpretive method, while emphasizing personal piety and godly humility as the goals of theological study. The result is a sound and comprehensive exposition of the Scriptures that will bear great influence for generations to come, and in which any reader will find rich nourishment for the soul. Some will call this volume 'groundbreaking,' and so it is, but I can think of no better way to characterize it than a 'demonstration of the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:4)."

—**C. J. Williams**, Professor of Old Testament Studies, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

"In an age when much Western biblical scholarship does not expound Scripture but judges and critiques it, this volume is a welcome return to respect for God's Word—and not in part, but the whole. Richard Gamble carefully recounts what God has revealed in the history and theology contained in the New Testament (with thorough reference to the Old). With emphasis on 'God's mighty acts,' Gamble unfolds Scripture's testimony to God and Christ, to salvation, and to a people—Christ's church. He also outlines an apologetic (in the tradition of Cornelius Van Til) for walking in faithfulness and testifying to Christ's

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—**Mark Zhakevich**, Associate Professor, The Master's Seminary; Staff Elder, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California

# The Whole Counsel of God

Volume 2

GOD'S FINAL  
REVELATION



# The Whole Counsel of God

Volume 2

GOD'S FINAL  
REVELATION

Richard C. Gamble



P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-59638-181-0 (cloth volume 2)

ISBN: 978-1-62995-574-2 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-62995-575-9 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gamble, Richard C.

The whole counsel of God / Richard C. Gamble.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 978-0-87552-191-6 (cloth volume 1) ISBN 978-1-59638-181-0 (cloth volume 2) ISBN 978-1-59638-182-7 (cloth volume 3)

1. Bible Theology. 2. Theology, Doctrinal. 3. Reformed Church Doctrines. I. Title.

BS543.G33 2009

230°.42dc22

2009017106

To my beloved wife, Janice  
With thanks to God for forty years together  
November 26, 1977



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  - B. Human Judgment and Resurrection

ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

VI. Final or Consummate State

- A. Life in Heaven
- B. Life in Hell

Conclusion: NT Eschatology

**18. Union with Christ in Romans 6–7**

- I. Life, Death, and Lordship in Romans 6
  - A. Introduction: Romans 6:1–2
  - B. Dead to Sin: Romans 6:2–4, 6–11
  - C. Alive in Power
- II. Problem of “Reigning Sin” at Romans 6:12–13
  - A. How Can Sin Reign?
  - B. First Answer
- III. Dead and Alive in Romans 6
  - A. Christ’s Death to Sin: Romans 6:9b–10
  - B. Our Death to Sin
  - C. Christ’s Life and Our Life
  - D. New Pattern: Sin’s Eradication: Romans 6:15–23
- IV. Union with Christ in Romans 7
  - A. Chapter’s Thematic Structure
  - B. Paul or Saul at Romans 7?

Conclusion to Part 3

**Part 4: God’s Mighty Acts: God Creates a People**

**19. Christ’s People**

- I. Union with Christ and the Christian Life
  - A. Personal History
  - B. Relationship to God’s Law
  - C. Purposes of God’s Moral Law
  - D. Determining the Nature and Extent of the Abrogation of God’s Law
- II. Jesus’ Description of Believers: Nature of the Beatitudes
  - A. Mirrors and Patterns
  - B. Presupposition and Principles
  - C. Beatitude Blessings
  - D. Context in Isaiah
- III. Jesus’ Description of Believers: Matthew 5
  - A. Poor
  - B. Mourners
  - C. Meek
  - D. Merciful and Pure in Heart

- IV. Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness
    - A. OT Background
    - B. Christ Described Himself
    - C. Christ Described Believers
    - D. Changes
  - V. Salt and Light beyond Israel
    - A. Salt and Light
    - B. Antithesis
    - C. Beyond Israel
  - VI. Blessings to Believers
    - A. Paul on Spiritual Blessings: Ephesians 1:3–14
    - B. Parallel Blessings of Revelation 21–22
- 20. Christ's Church and Kingdom**
- I. Continuity and Discontinuity with the Historical People of God
    - A. Continuity between the OT and NT Church
    - B. Discontinuity
  - II. Use of the Word *Ekklesia* or *Church* in the NT
    - A. Matthew
    - B. Paul
    - C. Hebrews 12:18–21
    - D. Individuals within the Church: *Saints*
  - III. Biblical Images for the Church
    - A. Introduction
    - B. Church as *Body of Christ*: 1 Corinthians 12
    - C. Church as *House of God*: Ephesians 2:19–22
    - D. Church as *House of God*: Hebrews 3:1–6
  - IV. New Church and Kingdom in Christ
    - A. Paul and Moses: 2 Corinthians 3:1–18
    - B. Church and Kingdom
  - V. Christ's Kingdom and the State
    - A. Jesus and the Zealots
    - B. Relationships to the State
    - C. Paul and the State
    - D. The State in Revelation
    - E. Conclusion
- 21. Characteristics and Functions of the Church**
- I. Characteristics
    - A. Established by God
    - B. Holiness

ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

- C. Growing and Preserving
- D. Preserving from Wolves: 2 Peter 2:1–3
- E. Preserving Internal Unity: James 2
- II. Function: From OT Worship to the NT
  - A. Christ's Church and the Sabbath
  - B. Nature of the Sabbath
  - C. Faithful Worship in Both Testaments
  - D. From Tabernacle to Church
- III. Worship in the NT
  - A. Old and New Zion: Hebrews 12:22–29
  - B. Singing in NT Worship
- IV. Means of Grace: Prayer
  - A. Means of Grace
  - B. Command and Obligation
  - C. Command and Benefit: Comfort and Peace
  - D. Component Parts of Prayer
- V. Means of Grace: Preaching
  - A. Prophetic Function
  - B. The Preached Word
- VI. Means of Grace: Sacraments
  - A. From OT to NT
  - B. Definition and Purposes of a Sacrament
  - C. Administration of Sacraments
- VII. NT Baptism
  - A. OT Circumcision
  - B. John's Baptism
  - C. Jesus' Baptism
  - D. Meaning of Baptism
  - E. Infant or Believer Baptism?
  - F. Mode of Baptism
- VIII. The Lord's Supper: A Covenantal Meal
  - A. OT Preparation
  - B. NT Meaning
- IX. Christ's Church
  - A. Marks of the Church
  - B. Membership in the Church
  - C. House and Keys: Problem of Matthew 16:18–19

- 22. Union with Christ and the Indicative and Imperative**
- I. Indicatives and Imperatives in Romans 6
    - A. Command to Reckon: Romans 6:11
    - B. Alive from the Dead in the Mortal Body
  - II. Indicative and Imperative in Colossians
    - A. Paul's Desired Maturity: Colossians 1:1–12
    - B. Bookends and Gifts: Colossians 1:13–20
    - C. Paul's Pattern
  - III. Problem of the Pauline Imperative and Indicative
    - A. Summary
    - B. Sanctification: Gift of God and Task of Believer
    - C. Solution and Central Thesis
  - IV. Peter's Indicatives and Imperatives
    - A. Self-Control: 2 Peter 1:5
    - B. Peter's Ethics: Indicative
    - C. Peter's Ethics: Imperative
    - D. Patient Endurance: 2 Peter 1:5–7
    - E. Baptism and Obedience: 2 Peter 1:8–9
    - F. Take Heed: 2 Peter 1:19–21
    - G. Three Indicatives: 2 Peter 3:14–18
  - V. Preliminary Conclusions on Imperative and Indicative
    - A. Summary
    - B. Overview of the Christian Life
    - C. Sanctification Integral to Salvation
  - VI. Sanctification
    - A. Definitive Act
    - B. Nature of Progressive Sanctification
  - VII. Translating the Indicative and Imperative into Our Lives
- 23. Union with Christ and the Believer's New Identity**
- I. Significance of Christ's Exaltation for the Believer's Life
    - A. Believer and the New World: 1 Corinthians
    - B. Believer's Biography, "Put Off": Colossians 3:1–2
    - C. Dead and Hidden in Christ: Colossians 3:3
    - D. Christ Our Life and Glory: Colossians 3:4
    - E. Prohibited Vices: Colossians 3:5–8
    - F. Believer's Biography, "Put On": Colossians 3:12–17
  - II. Goal or Pattern of Sanctification
    - A. God the Father as Pattern
    - B. Preceptive Will of God (God's Law) as Pattern
    - C. Christ and His Teaching as Pattern

ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

- III. Suffering and the Christian Life
  - A. Distinguishing Quality of Resurrection Life
  - B. Nature of Christ's Suffering
  - C. Paul's View of Suffering
  - D. Peter's View of Suffering
  - E. Human Suffering
  - F. Self-Denial
- IV. Our New Identities Worked Out
  - A. Imperatives
  - B. Revelation 7:9–17

Conclusion to Part 4

**Part 5: God's Mighty Acts: God's People Encounter Unbelief**

**24. A Biblical "Philosophy of Life"**

- I. God Deals with People
  - A. Two Types of People
  - B. Common Grace
- II. Philosophical Schools of the Apostolic Age
  - A. First Century
  - B. Modified Platonism
  - C. Gnosticism
- III. Reality Consists of Multiple Worlds
  - A. Introduction
  - B. Three Temporally Limited Worlds
  - C. Another World
  - D. Connections between the Heavenly and Earthly Worlds
  - E. Interaction with Different Worlds
  - F. Conclusion: Deal with It!
- IV. Believer's Response to the Reality of These Worlds
  - A. Intellectually Acknowledge
  - B. Emotionally and Spiritually Acknowledge
  - C. Develop Christian Philosophy That Incorporates This Reality
- V. Biblical Philosophy vs. Worldly Philosophy
  - A. Gospels and Acts
  - B. Peter and Jude
- VI. Paul the Apologist: The Gospel Applied to Unbelievers
  - A. In General
  - B. Paul's Areopagus Address: Acts 17:17–34
  - C. Paul's Apologetic/Exegetical Method

**25. A Biblical Apologetic Method**

- I. Method and Message
    - A. Proper Method
    - B. Proper Message
    - C. Definition of Apologetics
  - II. Scripture and Apologetics
    - A. God, Scripture, Apologetics, and History
    - B. Scripture's Claim to Authority and Necessity
  - III. Anthropology and Apologetics
    - A. Creator/Creature Distinction
    - B. Total Depravity
    - C. Consequences of Self-Deception
  - IV. General Outline of a Biblical Apologetic Method
    - A. Presuppositions
    - B. Transcendental Presuppositionalism
    - C. Transcendental Critique of the Unbeliever's Worldview
    - D. Apologetic Method
    - E. Conclusion
- Conclusion to Part 5  
Conclusion to Volume 2



# Foreword

JUST AS HE WAS about to put the finishing touches to the book of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet languidly commented, “Of making many books there is no end” (Eccl. 12:12). He could not have dreamed that even in a sophisticated technological age, the same would be true today. Neither could theological students belonging to the baby-boomer era have dreamed that these ancient words would one day apply to volumes of systematic theology!

True, in the third quarter of the twentieth century the volumes of Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* might stand on the shelves of a neoorthodox student, or Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* lie on the desk of a radical scholar, or the more moderate volumes of Emil Brunner be recommended by a less zealous professor. And conservative students might anchor themselves to Louis Berkhof’s exposition of Reformed theology in the concentrated form of his *Systematic Theology* or Hodge’s older three volumes with the same title, or perhaps to one or two simpler works. But how different the “Systematic Theology” section looks today. Now such works abound and seem to increase almost exponentially.

In many ways, this is a good sign. It means that books of substance are still being read. It also means that publishers realize that in an increasingly post-Christian and secular world, there is a substantial readership eager to have a clear and full grasp of the doctrines of the Christian faith. There is, then, a desire to be faithful to Christ in an intellectual environment in which Protagoras’s axiom that “man is the measure of all things” has come home to roost with a post-Enlightenment vengeance.

But Qohelet added a further comment about books: “much study is a weariness of the flesh.” And we may ourselves ask the question: “Do we really need another systematic theology?”

Professor Richard Gamble’s trilogy needs no justification from me,

but perhaps a word or two may be said by way of commendation of his particular contribution. For it is distinctive in several important ways.

First, and perhaps most obvious, it is a massive undertaking partly because of its methodology and approach. The goal is to write *systematic* theology in a way that is sensitive to and benefits from the discipline and fruits of *biblical* theology.

In a famous analogy, the great Princeton professor of *biblical* theology Geerhardus Vos emphasized that both systematic and biblical theology are orderly and biblical—they are both in that sense *systematic*. But where biblical theology draws a line (it is arranged historically), systematic theology takes that line and turns it into a circle of logical, topical arrangement.

Since Vos's day, these two approaches have been growing apart. The separation is not one of which Vos himself would have approved (he had taught *systematic* theology before his days on the Princeton Seminary faculty). It often assumes (wrongly) that earlier Reformed theologians did their theology simply by “proof text,” but thereby reveals a considerable ignorance of the amount of *biblical* theological thinking that often lay behind systematic theological textbooks.

What Dr. Gamble brings to the table in this context is an approach to systematic theology in which he shows his prior workings in biblical exegesis and theology. This makes for a slower read. But the benefit should be obvious. By taking this approach, he both challenges and assists us to think through our understanding of Christian doctrine from a center in God's self-revelation as it comes to us in the pages of his own Word.

The second reason that these volumes are distinctive lies in the way their author has worked hard to make this approach to the study of systematic theology not only available to college and seminary students but also accessible to all readers. More than that, Dr. Gamble sees no antithesis between the study of theology and growth in grace. In this sense, his aim is the apostolic one. He writes “for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness” (Titus 1:1). Readers will therefore discover that these pages are sprinkled with very specific suggestive reflections and applications, as well as find that the general approach prompts reflections of their own that will enable them to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). This is to do theology in the great tradition of Augustine and Calvin and adds a distinctive dimension to this trilogy.

The third reason that Dr. Gamble’s project stands out is that he brings to his task an entire lifetime of preparation. He is well equipped in his knowledge and understanding of the Western intellectual tradition in philosophy; in the literature of antiquity; and in biblical, theological, and historical studies (he has been a professor both of church history and of systematic theology). He is therefore able to straddle the disciplines involved in producing a work that contains within itself many elements of an entire theological seminary curriculum and brings them together in a grand-scale unity.

Systematic theology was at one time regarded as the apex of the theological disciplines, the grand river into which all the tributaries of biblical, historical, philosophical, and indeed pastoral and missiological studies flowed—each making its own distinctive contribution to the grand quest to understand and love what the apostle Paul called “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Readers of volume 1 (*God’s Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*) will surely rejoice that their wait for volume 2 is now over. New readers, however, can readily break into the grand narrative with this volume and find themselves developing an appetite for more. And all of us will look forward to the appearance of the third and final installment and wish Professor Gamble strength and wisdom to complete it in due course—as he himself would doubtless have us add—*Deo volente*.

Sinclair B. Ferguson  
Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology  
Reformed Theological Seminary



# Preface

GOD'S FINAL REVELATION FLOWS from, and is in parallel to and an expansion of, *God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*. This volume is based on the same theological presuppositions concerning the nature of God's revelation as are found in the first. While *God's Final Revelation* could be read separately from the first volume, it is meant to be a companion work. Furthermore, *The Whole Counsel of God* is not complete without the forthcoming third volume that will demonstrate how Christ's church took the treasure of God's special revelation in the OT and NT, so graciously given, and grew in her understanding of it generation by generation, leading to the present.

This volume is not a scholarly contribution but hopes to serve as a college- and seminary-level textbook while being accessible to a general readership. The footnotes contain sources, further information for scholars, and sometimes practical application. To avoid repetition, information found in the previous volume is referenced in the footnotes.<sup>1</sup>

After a methodological prelude, the first part of *God's Final Revelation* opens up the lives and writings of the different authors. Each word of the NT is without error, yet each was also written by a man uniquely chosen by God. Those men communicated God's perfect Word in a way that used their different backgrounds and personalities—backgrounds that were controlled, from the moment of their first breath until the ink was dry on the paper, by God. Biography and theology go hand in glove.

Not only do biography and theology go together, but each of the NT writers composed his portion as a whole. For example, the book of Romans has so many themes jammed into it that proper

1. It is difficult to balance too much or too little "application" as well as "specialization," and where there is an abundance or a paucity of one or of the other, the author asks for the reader's grace!

## PREFACE

study demands analysis of very small parts. But there is a danger in studying those small parts in isolation from the broader themes in the chapters, and all the chapters make the one book. Likewise, there is great value in studying the Gospels as a “harmony,” but there is also merit to understanding each separate book as a whole. Thus, while the whole NT is not covered, the first part includes some summaries of larger portions to provide a context for analysis of smaller parts in later chapters.

From that foundation, the book moves to a unified analysis of the three persons of the Trinity (part 2), then goes to the application of Christ’s saving work to sinful humanity (part 3), then moves to the calling and earthly walk of those redeemed sinners corporately as Christ’s church (part 4), and ends with how God’s people respond to unbelieving challenges (part 5). While not a small tome, *God’s Final Revelation* cannot claim to be comprehensive on any of the topics presented in its twenty-five chapters.<sup>2</sup>

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Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

2. For example, chapters 10 and 11 on the doctrine of God have only one hundred pages, while John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), covered the topic much more thoroughly (with 806 pages) and the Puritan Steven Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), used 1,130 pages of small print on the same topic. A similar volume to part 1 (*God’s Revelation in the New Testament Epoch*) that is more comprehensive is the recent Michael J. Kruger, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 655 pages. A similar volume to parts 2–5 is G. K. Beale’s massive *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1,047 pages.

# Acknowledgments

THANKS GO TO FORMER colleagues and students at the Akademie für Reformatorische Theologie in Germany. Much of the first part was developed there, in the difficult context of evangelical students preparing for ministry in a land where this book's theological presuppositions were usually vilified at the university level. I thank my family for bearing with me during the four years that I prepared those lectures in German and commuted between Germany and the United States. I also thank the family for their encouragement, editorial help, and wise advice in the preparation of this as well as the previous volume. Special thanks go to daughters Dr. Lindsey Gamble and Dr. Whitney Gamble, who helped much with this volume. I received help from former and present RPTS teaching assistants Alex Tabaka, Steven McCarthy, Venky Gospalakrishna, Patrick McNeeley, Brian Wright, and Joseph Dunlap, as well as colleagues Dr. C. J. Williams, Dr. Jack Kineer, and Dr. Jeff Stivason. Special thanks go to Whitney Gamble and Joseph Dunlap, who provided the indexes.

John J. Hughes has expertly guided this work through all the stages of the editorial process, Andrew Buss has made many valuable contributions as editor, and Karen Magnuson was a meticulous proofreader. The manuscript was completed in August 2016; books written after that time, with one exception, are not included in the reference material. A few newer books are mentioned in the Resources for Further Study.

All praise goes to God, who has honored a weak and sinful man with the privilege of instructing men and women in the whole counsel of God for almost four decades.



# Abbreviations

ANE	ancient Near East(ern)
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
CRD	J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema, <i>Concise Reformed Dogmatics</i> , trans. Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008)
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
HTFC	Historical and Theological Field Committee
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNTS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTI</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
KJV	King James Version
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LXX	Septuagint
NAPARC	North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
<i>NTBT</i>	G. K. Beale, <i>A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011)

## ABBREVIATIONS

NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
OT	Old Testament
RD	Herman Bavinck, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i> , ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006)
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> , ed. Hans Dieter Betz, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007)
RPCNA	Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
RPTS	Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984)
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentaries
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, Presbyterian Church in America, 1986); published together with the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), and proof texts
WCG	Richard C. Gamble, <i>The Whole Counsel of God</i> , vol. 1, <i>God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009)
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WTS	Westminster Theological Seminary
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

≈ PART 1 ≈

God's Revelation  
in the NT Epoch





# Methodological Prelude: Justification for the Approach

VOLUME 1 IN THIS series, *God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*,<sup>1</sup> began with an outline of God's creation of the world and moved to the entrance of sin.<sup>2</sup> Despite sin's all-pervasive corruption, God still desired to communicate himself to humanity, and the text examined how God revealed himself through the Bible's formation, focusing on the multivaried characteristics of OT special revelation.<sup>3</sup> From that foundation, volume 1 presented an analysis of the nature and characteristics of "biblical theology" or special revelation in its historical continuity and multiformity.<sup>4</sup> Then we explored biblical theology's relationship to systematic theology and described the nature of systematic theology.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing from and building on *God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*, this volume, *God's Final Revelation*, opens with an analysis of the many characteristics of NT special revelation.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF NT SPECIAL REVELATION<sup>6</sup>

**Authorship.** While God is the ultimate author of Scripture, the Bible is both a human and a divine book. This working together of the

1. While this book can be read independently, it was written as the second of a three-part series and is best understood after having examined the first.

2. Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 1, *God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009) (hereafter WCG), 5–8.

3. *Ibid.*, 1:10–18.

4. *Ibid.*, 1:18–24.

5. *Ibid.*, 1:26–72, 73–99.

6. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) (hereafter NTBT), 5–7, rightly argues that

human and divine is rightly called *concurrence*. The human authors expressed their own thoughts but were under the Holy Spirit's sovereign direction.<sup>7</sup> From the human side, all special revelation is grounded within history and is structured in a chronologically progressive fashion. Proper biblical analysis will investigate the date, location, and cultural setting of each of the NT books.<sup>8</sup> Because the Bible is also a divine book that records God's supernatural acts, there is an intimate relationship between the text—the words of the Bible—and the subjective appropriation of that text into the believing reader's heart.<sup>9</sup> The written account of God's action in time reveals vast principles of truth, in what can be called the *redemptive process*.<sup>10</sup>

**Hallmarks.** Beyond the Bible's unique authorship, God spoke to his people in a way that they could understand; he “accommodated” himself to them.<sup>11</sup> This accommodation connects to another distinct characteristic of NT revelation, which is its “practical” or “contemporary” character.<sup>12</sup> God also communicated special revelation through a legal-like structure termed *covenant*, an organization that developed in a historical fashion.<sup>13</sup> Special revelation thus demonstrates a literary and thematic continuity while still written in a historically progressive manner. The revelation moved with historical and theological connections from Genesis to Malachi and then on to the NT.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there were

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a proper NT theology has certain characteristics. It will address what he terms the OT story line, underline its theological threads, and demonstrate the NT unfolding of the OT. This second volume hopefully has the strengths that Beale mentioned.

7. See Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures: Inerrancy and Pneumatology,” in *The Inerrant Word*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 263.

8. See WCG, 1:254–55, 268, on special revelation and human history.

9. See *ibid.*, 1:15. This too is a work of the Holy Spirit.

10. See *ibid.*, 1:13–14, on the redemptive process.

11. See *ibid.*, 1:16, on accommodation. Ferguson, “The Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures,” 256, rightly said that “the relationship of the Creator to the creation always ‘surpasses knowledge,’ even if, his self-revelation to us as appropriately created receptors, we are able to grasp it.” “Yet the wonder is that God is a revealer of mysteries. We do not fully comprehend them, but nevertheless we may grasp them within the limitations of our creatureliness.”

12. See WCG, 1:15–16, 18: “This knowledge is more than an intellectual perceiving—it is a consciousness of the reality, as well as an apprehension of the properties, of the object of that knowing, interwoven within the subject's life.” John Frame is best known for demonstrating the “practical” or contemporary character of God's special revelation.

13. See *ibid.*, 1:17, on God's use of covenant to communicate his revelation.

14. Recognizing these historical structures solves a great problem—unity and diversity of interpretation. See Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 7.

various “epochs” or “periods” of God’s special revelation that were also progressive in character.<sup>15</sup>

The NT biblical authors assumed this notion of a chronologically progressive divine revelation with thematic continuity in their writing and theological methods.<sup>16</sup> This was demonstrated by the fact that NT writers used the OT in much the same manner as later OT writers used God’s earlier inspired writings.<sup>17</sup> The magnificent literary and thematic unity, attained through centuries of OT writing, came as a result of God the ultimate author and Christ the Messiah as the OT’s goal.<sup>18</sup>

Also in continuity with the OT, the NT has a number of literary “genres.”<sup>19</sup> The scope of the literary distinctions among the NT authors can be vast. The writers were capable of being intensely emotive and doxological—or solidly didactic. For example, the beauty of the book of Revelation’s apocalyptic genre may be unique for the NT, but has many OT parallels.<sup>20</sup>

Second, God intended to give full expression to his truth by choosing very specific men, and then molding their life circumstances and characters and giving them such training that the truth revealed through them necessarily bore the exact impress of God’s own mind.<sup>21</sup> Thus, although the sweep of time between the various NT writers was counted by mere decades rather than by centuries, as it was for the OT, the NT authors had such unique and distinct interests and personalities that even within a single genre they can manifest important differences.<sup>22</sup> The rich literary diversity of the NT occurred simply because

15. See *WCG*, 1:21, for the epochs of special revelation.

16. *NTBT*, 4.

17. *WCG*, 1:19. For more information on the NT writers’ use of the OT, see G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), with helpful bibliography at the end of each book’s presentation.

18. See *WCG*, 1:20, for Christ as the goal of the OT.

19. See *ibid.*, 1:21–22, for more on the Bible’s literary genres. The NT also has literary forms called the Gospels that are different in character from the Epistles. See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 25.

20. For example, in Daniel.

21. See B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (1948; repr., Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 155.

22. Ferguson, “Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture,” 266, reminded readers that “Luke was not an eyewitness of the events he describes, nor was he the penman of a mystical revelation. Rather, he was a careful researcher. The Spirit shaped him with gifts and opportunities to do this, then superintended his activity.”

God meant it to be so!<sup>23</sup> It is the fulfillment of a promise made by Jesus. At John 14:26, he said that the Holy Spirit would come and bring all things back to remembrance (demonstrating concurrence).<sup>24</sup> This background analysis of some of the NT's hallmarks prepares the ground for a formal presentation of the nature and definition of NT biblical theology, focusing on the text's authors, genres, and historical development.<sup>25</sup>

## INTRODUCING NT BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

**Historic-Organic Nature.** While acknowledging the Bible's historically progressive continuity, biblical theology consists of more than a simple narrative of the historical events during the time of the Bible's composition. It presents an interpretive method founded on the organic development of the Bible, tracing God's finger through the history of revelation. It studies the form and content of this divine and supernatural revelation in the beauty of its historical unfolding, with the events that occur considered as parts and products of a divine work. The text's historical background and circumstances are valued as elements of God's revealing activity.

Biblical theology has historically tried to center its theologizing on grammatical-historical exegesis.<sup>26</sup> Thus, biblical theology is intimately bound to solid biblical exegesis, which comprehends the text within its proper historic and literary framework. This process is often termed *redemptive-historical exegesis*. Also, biblical theology is more than simply descriptive, because it contains models and commands for life

23. For example, although John's Gospel was written at a similar time as the Synoptics, it could be argued that it is in a sense a fuller and wider revelation of Christ because of the author's gifts and character. Even if John were written quite a bit later than were the Synoptics, which is certainly possible, then one could attribute the differences to the added years of theological reflection, which is still a unique contribution.

24. Ferguson, "Holy Spirit and Holy Scriptures," 269: "The apostles' 'word' thus became the contents of the New Testament: Gospels (what Jesus said and did); Epistles (the truth about Jesus); and Revelation (the things still to come)."

25. See chapters 2 and 3 on the authorship and hallmarks of the NT. See also V. Philip Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 311.

26. This historical precedent has recently been challenged. For more information, see chapter 10.

and action.<sup>27</sup> Biblical theology often presents what the author determines to be the most complete center or biblical story line.<sup>28</sup>

**Historical Development.** Since volume 3 offers historical analysis, this section needs only to mention a few broad strokes of the growth of the discipline of biblical theology.<sup>29</sup> Scholars acknowledge that the church exercised an integrated biblical theology from her early times, beginning with a theologian named Irenaeus. However, it did not advance very far before the Reformation, probably because the early church adopted prevailing intellectual cultures that operated antithetically to biblical theology.<sup>30</sup>

NT biblical theology reached a historical apex with the work of John Calvin (1509–64) and continued to develop for another century.<sup>31</sup> The Dutch theologians Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius used a biblical-theological method consistent with their overall theology.<sup>32</sup> The English theologian John Owen implemented biblical theology as well, but sadly the method declined afterward.<sup>33</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the German theologian J. P. Gabler called for theology to return to the Bible.<sup>34</sup> However, his appeal was not for a

27. *NTBT*, 5. See Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditations* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 31.

28. Since God is the ultimate author of Scripture, it is legitimate to search for a coherent thematic shape or structure. For more information, see *NTBT*, 163–68.

29. See *WCG*, 1:xxxii–iii.

30. For information on Irenaeus, see Richard C. Gamble, “Christianity from the Early Fathers to Charlemagne,” in W. Andrew Hofferger, *Revolutions in Worldview* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 112–13. For the entire field, see Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 30–42; Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 7–12.

31. For Calvin’s exegetical method, see *WCG*, 1:45, 56–60, and the literature cited.

32. See J. V. Fesko, “On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 467–69.

33. See *WCG*, 1:90–93. William Dennison argued that the Reformed tradition did not advance after Calvin because “although the Reformers were dominated by the consciousness of *sola Scriptura*[,] . . . nevertheless at this time the Reformers continued to accept the system of theology passed down to them, that is, the scholastic systematic arrangement of theological rubrics.” See William D. Dennison, “Reason, History, and Revelation: Biblical Theology and the Enlightenment,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 356. Scholars like Sebastian Rehnman in *Divine Discourses: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 34–37, still define Owen as a Reformed scholastic who adapted Aquinas’s scholasticism to meet the needs of Reformed theology. For more information on Owen’s theological method, see the forthcoming third volume.

34. Richard B. Gaffin, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” *WTJ* 38 (Spring 1976): 281–99; Dennison, “Reason, History, and Revelation,” 348–49; Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 15–16; Fesko, “On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology,” 445.

return to the biblical theology of a Calvin or Owen, but to something else, one that no longer affirmed the Bible's own teaching of inerrancy.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the technical term *biblical theology*, when now used in the higher-critical schools of Europe, is not the same discipline as that which was done in the past, and is done now by contemporary evangelical scholars.<sup>36</sup>

Compounding the problem with the term *biblical theology* being used to describe both a God-honoring method (Calvin to Owen) and a higher-critical method, some more contemporary NT biblical theology scholarship has been unable to recognize aspects or complexities of earlier post-Reformation biblical theology.<sup>37</sup> Other NT theologians have simply been wrong in their analysis when they claim that Reformation and post-Reformation theologians failed to use proper biblical theology.<sup>38</sup>

**Twentieth Century and Postmodernism.** In the middle of the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann's *New Testament Theology* stood as the benchmark by which all other (nonevangelical) scholarship was measured. His approach was championed by many in both Europe and America. His research, inspired by existentialist philosophy, demanded a reinterpretation of the NT text.<sup>39</sup> By the last half of the twentieth century, evangelicals rightly concluded that Bultmann's theological presuppositions imposed a false structure on his NT theology—a structure that actually questioned whether first-century thought patterns could be normative for contemporary thinkers.<sup>40</sup>

35. Gabler had been strongly influenced by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, and Kant's philosophical presuppositions made it impossible to return to a "precritical" definition of the task. See Dennison, "Reason, History, and Revelation," 343–45, 347–48, 354.

36. For some of the differences between Gabler and Vos, see Fesko, "On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology," 450–52.

37. For example, Scobie's 1,000-page tome simply ignored Owen's important contribution. Fesko rightly critiqued the nineteenth-century scholar Farrar's understanding of Cocceius: "this characterization makes for a good story, but it is ill-informed" ("On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology," 469). He also criticized Scobie, who relied "upon this outdated research."

38. A prime example is Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 22: "The lack of any consideration of the historical background in which the Christian theology developed." "Throughout the post-Reformation period until the dawn of rationalism, Protestant theology made no provision for progressive revelation."

39. See Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 9.

40. See "Rudolf Bultmann," in *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 21–22; James C. Livingston and Francis Schussler Fiorenza,

Bultmann's NT scholarship did not know how to deal with history. His popular existentialist approach produced a type of intellectual or theological skepticism.<sup>41</sup> The rocks of that skepticism were supposedly avoided by trying to connect the "historic" elements narrated in the NT events with what was called the *apostolic kerygma*.<sup>42</sup> Yet Bultmann's approach offered no satisfactory solution to the problem of history and meaning.<sup>43</sup>

Bultmann posited the study of the various editors of the NT books (*Redaktionsgeschichte*) as the new place of certainty for NT studies. However, *Redaktionsgeschichte* was constructed on two false presuppositions: first, that the NT evangelists could not be both historians and theologians, and second, that the Gospel accounts were not historical. Thus, Bultmann's way of interpreting Scripture eliminated any tension between the notion of history and theology—by assuming that there was simply no history in the accounts!<sup>44</sup> Scholars who used this method "discovered" more and more conflicting "theologies" in the NT.<sup>45</sup> Bultmann's notions set the stage for later German-language NT theologies.<sup>46</sup>

Coterminous with Bultmann, other theologians took an approach that was flawed in a much less serious fashion. Some in the Dutch

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*Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 153–54, 158–59; Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 32.

41. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 42–46.

42. Wright, *People of God*, 22: "There is a particular oddity about placing 'New Testament theology' as a norm over against Jesus himself, as was done classically by Bultmann."

43. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 47, argued that Käsemann, Bornkamm, and Fuchs in Europe and James M. Robinson in the United States attempted this solution—and failed.

44. Wright, *People of God*, 21–22, recognized that Kähler's, Bultmann's, and Tillich's retreat from history was not a proper response to Reimarus's criticisms, and that if their portraits of Jesus were accurate, then the church would have to revise its faith. Furthermore, Stendahl's attempt to promote philosophical realism (to oppose Bultmann's idealism) still produced a "canon within the canon," and both attempts resulted in nothing but subjectivism.

45. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 37–39, 48. Guthrie thought that it was legitimate to recognize individual differences among NT writers but that the Tübingen School and Conzelmann overstressed the author's personality so that their personalities corrupted the "pure gospel." They also taught that Paul's intellectual giftedness made his writings vastly superior to James, who thus spoke with "less significance."

46. For example, Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), has embraced Bultmann's presuppositions to the extent that he simply ignores other voices. It may be understandable that he would not consult the Dutch NT scholar Herman Ridderbos because of Ridderbos's evangelical commitments, but even Oscar Cullmann and Bo Reicke are conspicuously absent from his bibliography.

Reformed community, following Abraham Kuyper's lead, wrongly rejected the notion that there was any "theology" in the Bible.<sup>47</sup> For them, since theology is what humans "do" to the Bible, theology cannot be "in" the Bible. Therefore, none of the biblical writers were regarded as "theologians," but rather the NT authors provided the material from which the church could then construct a "dogma" or "systematic" theology.<sup>48</sup>

Yet if the Bible contains no theology, and theologians impose the abstract notion of *theology* on the Bible when they create systematic or other categories, then there can probably be no fully trustworthy biblical or systematic theology.<sup>49</sup> Such a pluralistic approach must be rejected.

Another late-twentieth-century development was postmodernism. Postmodern scholars have both rightly and wrongly criticized contemporary NT biblical theology. Rightly they have pointed out the philosophical foundations behind what they term the Enlightenment project.<sup>50</sup> They also correctly criticize older theological writings, like that of Bultmann, for using philosophy (in his case existentialism) to carry their Christianity.<sup>51</sup> They furthermore ask penetrating questions about philosophical and theological presuppositions that impact a person's reading of the NT.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, postmodern emphasis on the NT as text is more helpful than speculation on a supposed oral tradition (long lost) that might (or might not) lie behind a text.<sup>53</sup>

47. Kuyper eliminated any tension between the Bible and theology—simply by assuming that there was no theology in the NT. While imperfect, Kuyper's method was better than that of Bultmann! See Stephen Williams, "Observations on the Future of System," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2006), 50.

48. See Richard B. Gaffin, "The Vitality of Reformed Systematic Theology," in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Wayne Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 20–21. See also Gaffin's critique of this approach in his review of Gordon Spykman, "Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics," *WTJ* 56 (1994): 379–90.

49. In other words, if theology were only an abstract human invention, then legitimate questions could be posed: "Who is to determine whether nineteenth-century Scottish Common Sense philosophy, with its 'self-evident truths,' is superior to Bultmann's early-twentieth-century existentialism?" The contemporary postmodern thinker would have the right to vote for his or her own philosophical system as superior as well. See the following analysis.

50. Wright, *People of God*, 25.

51. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," in McGowan, *Always Reforming*, 157.

52. See *NTBT*, 2. Vanhoozer, for example, has been wrestling with the nature of Scripture relative to the relationship between word and act. See Vanhoozer, "Theological System," 164, 168.

53. Wright, *People of God*, 25.

Negatively, postmodernism introduced questions about “intertextuality” that have not been helpful.<sup>54</sup> Postmodernism is afraid of finding what adherents term “timeless truths” in the NT.<sup>55</sup> Postmodernism also objects to any theological theme as “central” because of its mistaken notion that knowledge is culturally conditioned. Thus, those scholars who try to “integrate” postmodern thinking into their NT biblical theology are not always advancing the cause either.<sup>56</sup>

Believing scholarship has to face further methodological problems. The British evangelical Donald Guthrie saw two basic approaches for NT theology: the descriptive/analytic/historical method on one side, and the thematic method on the other.<sup>57</sup> Guthrie chose the thematic method for his massive work. On the other hand, American evangelical G. E. Ladd adopted the descriptive/analytic approach and viewed NT theology as the foundation for systematic theology, a methodology that is also still used.<sup>58</sup>

However, there are problems with either methodological option. Researchers have recognized problems with the historical or descriptive/analytic approach.<sup>59</sup> Marshall argues that making a collection of texts

54. Intertextuality can be defined as the notion that when later authors refer to earlier texts, the meaning is disconnected from the intended meaning of the earlier text. See *NTBT*, 3.

55. Wright demonstrates that postmodern fear: “It is very difficult to produce a ‘theology’ from the New Testament that is couched in ‘timeless’ categories, and if we succeed in doing so we may justifiably suspect that quite a lot of fruit has been thrown away” (*People of God*, 20). “We will study (biblical) literature to receive messages that transcend space and time. It is an attempt to accomplish, within postmodernity, what Bultmann’s package failed to accomplish within modernity” (*ibid.*, 25). On the other hand, it appears that evangelical scholars may also be abandoning God’s “timelessness” for the notion of “omnitemporality.” See Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 160.

56. Wright, *People of God*, 5, dismisses evangelicalism, or what he terms “fundamentalism,” as simply being caught up in Enlightenment thought. His wrongheaded “project” (26) is to combine premodern, modern, and postmodern philosophies. For more information on postmodernism and theological method, see G. K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984); G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of the Apostle’s Exegetical Method,” *Themelios* 14 (1989): 89–96.

57. Morris, *New Testament Theology*, 9.

58. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). See Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 27. Ten years later, Childs followed Guthrie’s basic approach, as did Scobie. See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Scobie, *Ways of Our God*. Also see Beale’s analysis, *NTBT*, 8n25.

59. Marshall and others argue that theologians should not simply use the NT as the stones with which they construct their building. I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 24. Wright, *People of God*,

is not creating a theology, because a theology requires a systematic arrangement or a design. He claims that there needs to be a synthesis (a thematic approach) despite the risks involved.<sup>60</sup>

Guthrie had recognized inherent problems in his methodological choice, the thematic, such as how best to isolate and arrange the various NT themes. He determined what he thought were the pre-eminent themes, and then grouped the sources historically, so as to summarize NT teaching.<sup>61</sup>

One of the major risks, recognized by evangelicals and others, is to form a thematic structure from some type of systematic theology without demonstrating that the theological structure conforms to the thinking of the NT authors themselves.<sup>62</sup> In other words, a NT biblical theology must honor the NT context and not take a later theological or philosophical framework and assert that it was that of the NT.<sup>63</sup> Believing scholarship must first understand the NT worldview—and only afterward connect it to our own.<sup>64</sup>

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16, discussed what he terms the normative element of biblical theology and notes the problem of the selection of types of early Christianity according to a prearranged evaluative scheme.

60. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 27.

61. Guthrie defended his choice of themes in part by concluding that there was no common agreement on the aims of NT theology and that it was not possible to create a method that would satisfy all the requirements. Granted that the task is difficult, nevertheless, Guthrie's order is problematic. His idea was to begin with God, as basic to any theology, then to proceed to man and his world, to Christology (person and work), to the Holy Spirit and the Christian life, the church, the future, and ethics, and to end with Scripture. A superior approach would construct a doctrine of God (which includes the second and third persons of the Trinity!) in a unified analysis without trying to sandwich them after the topic of man and his world. It would also account for God's communication about himself (Scripture or special revelation) sometime before the last chapter, and would also not restrict "eschatology" to the end of the analysis. See Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 27, 72–74.

62. Wright acknowledged the desperate situation in the nonevangelical world: "The present climate of New Testament studies has thrown up so many confusions of method and content that the only hope is to go back to the beginning" (*People of God*, xvi). "Reading the New Testament seriously . . . sounds so problematic that some may feel like giving it up" (ibid., 10). Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 25n11, criticized Guthrie for choosing a method that Marshall thought was too close to older systematic theology texts. G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), believed that his work was in advance over Guthrie by choosing topics that did not coincide so closely with older systematic topics. For analysis, see Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 25.

63. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 24.

64. See Wright, *People of God*, 12, 24: "The present project is part of the wider task . . . of trying to rethink a basic worldview in the face of the internal collapse of the one which has dominated the Western world for the last two centuries or so." This "presentation problem" will be addressed in the following pages.

A final methodological problem involves integrating OT and NT theologies. Some dismiss the task as impossible because of the conflicts that they see within each Testament, let alone trying to integrate both Testaments.<sup>65</sup> Such a wrongheaded opinion is not an option.

The task for evangelicals (who hold to an authoritative Bible) is not an easy one.<sup>66</sup> Some within evangelicalism operate as if the OT had little to do with the NT. Functionally, that is like saying that the Bible is authoritative—but only the NT is the Bible. A good NT biblical theology will not make that mistake. Also, as demonstrated by G. K. Beale's massive *New Testament Biblical Theology* (2011), a comprehensive work cannot be brief. Given this background material, it is now time to construct a NT biblical theology.

## CONSTRUCTING A NT THEOLOGY

The introduction to *The Whole Counsel of God* mentioned Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders concerning his ministry. The next hundred pages outlined the nature and method of theology, moved to the idea and structure of systematic theology, and then introduced OT theology. The theological positions presented there are foundational to the present volume. This volume returns to the book of Acts to determine the ways that Paul's speech could provide a helpful pattern for structuring the nature of NT biblical theology.<sup>67</sup>

**Content of the Whole Counsel of God.** First, although the account at Acts 20 was a focal point for the content of "whole counsel of God," there were characteristics of that "whole counsel" earlier in Luke–Acts.

Luke's Gospel narrated how Jesus spoke to his apostles during the forty-day period after his resurrection. After opening their minds

65. Most nonevangelical scholars take this position, but a few have argued for Scripture as a coherent narrative. For example, see Richard B. Hays, "Can Narrative Criticism Recover the Theological Unity of Scripture?," *JTI* 2 (2008): 193–211.

66. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 38. Undertaking a theology of both Testaments would be "a mammoth task."

67. Beale, *NTBT*, 164–65, argued that this passage demonstrates the legitimacy of searching for a "center" to NT biblical theology, since "Scripture itself does this." Combining analysis from volume 1 and the following pages will hopefully illuminate Beale's comment: "Exactly what his summary of that purpose was is not clear."

to the Scriptures, he reminded them that the Christ had to suffer and that they should preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations (Luke 24:47).<sup>68</sup> Connecting back to the OT, he then promised his followers power from on high (24:49).<sup>69</sup>

There was a parallel between the Gospel presentation and the opening verses of Acts.<sup>70</sup> As the book of Acts opened (1:3–5), Luke summarized Jesus' instruction as being "about the kingdom of God," and Jesus promised his followers power from on high, repeating the guarantee to the disciples mentioned in the Gospel. The question of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel was on the disciples' minds at Acts 1:6, and the Lord answered their question with yet another promise of coming power, at Acts 1:8.

Later, as the unconverted Saul was persecuting Christ's followers, Philip preached the good news about God's kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ, recorded at Acts 8:12. After Saul's conversion, we learn that Paul was stoned in Lystra and his body abandoned (Acts 14:19–25).<sup>71</sup> However, he and his fellow laborer Barnabas left for Derbe, where they "preached the gospel" or "good news." Paul traveled to other towns, where he "encouraged" disciples, told them that they had to endure tribulation and hardship before they could "enter the kingdom of God," and also appointed elders in the churches.<sup>72</sup>

68. The command to proclaim the gospel to all nations underlines the unity between the OT and NT. The theme of salvation to all the nations is found in the Psalms and Isaiah as well as throughout the NT (e.g., at Matt. 28:19). See Norval Goldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 641; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 1075.

69. Luke 24:49: "And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." This was the promise of the Holy Spirit given fifty days after Christ's resurrection and ten after his ascension. The promise of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in believers' hearts had already been made in the OT at Ezek. 36:27 and Joel 2:28.

70. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 228: "The preaching of God's gracious remission of guilt is the center and the basis of the gospel of the kingdom, especially because it is constantly contrasted by Jesus to the Jewish soteriology."

71. Acts 14:21–22: "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

72. Luke mentioned "preaching" in Derbe and "preach the word" in Perga. See Richard B. Gaffin, "The Whole Counsel of God and the Bible," in *The Book of Books*, ed. John H. White (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 43–44.

Closer to the parting speech to the Ephesian elders, Luke began the narrative about Paul's ministry in Ephesus (19:8), which included "arguing persuasively" with the Jews "about the kingdom of God."<sup>73</sup>

Thus, there are a number of characteristics to the whole counsel of God, as Luke understood Paul's ministry, before the account at Acts 20:20. In summary, Paul's gospel preaching included the need for repentance and forgiveness of sins, seen especially at Luke 24. Also, Paul preached parts of the "kingdom of God," specifically its promise and power. In addition, suffering preceded entrance into the kingdom, and finally, elders were to labor in the midst of God's people.<sup>74</sup>

The next step to comprehend the context of Paul's speech is to observe a larger and narrower context. The larger context began at Acts 19:23–41. Paul had been ministering in the city of Ephesus when a great controversy broke out between the followers of the goddess Artemis and those who followed what was then called "the Way." A man named Demetrius had agitated a sizable crowd, and the multitude was "enraged" (19:28).<sup>75</sup> Paul's traveling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, had been seized by the rabble and were taken into the open theater for swift trial and punishment.<sup>76</sup> Fortunately for the companions, a city official protected them and the crowd was dismissed. Shortly thereafter, Paul left Ephesus, journeyed toward Macedonia, and eventually made his way to Greece. After three months of ministry, he departed for a brief stay at Troas (20:1–6). After quick ministry there (and elsewhere), not wanting to return to Ephesus but to push on to Jerusalem, Paul requested the Ephesian elders to come to him at Miletus (20:7–16).

This narrower context was Luke's record of Paul's calling the fruit of his successful work in Ephesus, the elder-preachers, to hear his final advice. In their presence he gave an account of his life in ministry—what he did from the first day of his significant three-year labors among

73. For more on the nature of the "kingdom of God," see *WCG*, 1:359–60, 551, 558, 572–74, 608.

74. Acts 20:18: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me."

75. Paul's preaching bore an economic impact as large numbers came to faith in Christ. Christianity was not just a personal relationship with Christ without consequences.

76. While Paul was fearless, he was kept from entering the theater; see Acts 19:30–31.

the Ephesians. Paul introduced his conception of the whole counsel of God (20:27) at Acts 20:18b. The “whole counsel of God” was his theme ministering in private homes as well as publicly, with both Jews and Greeks. These verses summarize the nature of his ministry and presentation of the whole counsel of God. It was dangerous, with many plots against him; it was intense, with tears; and it was exhausting, night and day. His manner of conduct was to serve with humility (20:19), coveting no one's silver or gold (20:33), and working hard to provide for himself (20:34). He added that he was certain of two things: that he would never see his dear friends again (20:25) and that he had been faithful and was guiltless of any man's blood (20:26).<sup>77</sup>

While it may sound like it, this text was not autobiographical but was Luke's perspective on Paul's ministry. It underlined that Paul's manner of life was important to the overall context of his ministry.<sup>78</sup> However, Paul did not hesitate to communicate the nature of his manner of life in his own writings. For example, he mentioned twice in Corinthians that he ministered among them with weakness, with fear and trembling, and with humility and boldness.<sup>79</sup> He also said that believers should follow his life example at 1 Corinthians 11:1 as well as at Philippians 4:9.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, as Paul understood and explained his own ministry, his lifestyle and his theology/preaching went hand in glove. From this context we need to examine Paul's content.

**Content of Paul's Presentation.** A careful examination of Acts 20:20–25 indicates that Paul's preaching included five parts. All these

77. Paul's last statement, about blood, is slightly perplexing. The issue was not whether Paul actually shed someone's blood. While he had persecuted Christians before his conversion, he clearly killed no one in Ephesus. “Guilty of no one's blood” was a thematic connection back to the watchman of Ezek. 33:6: “But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that man is taken away in his sin, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.”

78. Acts 20:18–21 is sometimes titled “Paul's self-defense.” While he may have been presenting a “defense,” given the evident love between Paul and the elders, this part of his speech should not simply be dismissed as a “defense.” See F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. (1952; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 412–13.

79. 1 Cor. 2:3: “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling”; 2 Cor. 10:1: “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!”

80. 1 Cor. 11:1: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Phil. 4:9: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

components were summarized in Paul's powerful statement at Acts 20:27, "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."<sup>81</sup> It would be wise to examine each of the five important elements.

The first was that Paul began with what was profitable (Acts 20:20).<sup>82</sup> Undoubtedly, the meaning of the word is deeper than that which is simply "helpful." In fact, for Paul, all Scripture was "profitable," as he claimed at 2 Timothy 3:16.<sup>83</sup>

The second element embraced the necessity of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). Paul reflected back on Acts 20:21 when he later reported concerning repentance and faith at Acts 26:20.<sup>84</sup>

The third part was "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). He presented parallel themes at Colossians 1:6, 2 Thessalonians 1:12, and Titus 2:11, where "the grace of God" was an equivalent phrase to the gospel. This notion was also reflected at Romans 10:9 and 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:1.<sup>85</sup>

81. Acts 20:27: "all the counsel of God" (KJV); "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (NKJV); "the whole will of God" (NIV); "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (ESV); "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (NASB).

82. Acts 20:20 (NIV): "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house."

83. Some have claimed that the phrase *whole will* or *counsel* of God is that which is simply "profitable" or "helpful" to God's people. For example, Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 415n55: "To Paul 'the whole counsel of God' was the measure of what was truly 'profitable.'" While there is nothing wrong with that interpretation, it is insufficient because of 2 Tim. 3:16 (NKJV): "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." More frequently, Paul used the Greek word (participle) *sumpherontown*, as at Acts 20:20, to describe what was "profitable." He used it both impersonally and personally, when something or someone is helpful. Besides this verse, the word appears in various forms at 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; 2 Cor. 8:10; 12:1; and Rom. 5:3. If Paul had meant simply "profitable," then he could have used other words, as he did at Eph. 4:29: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful [*agathos*] for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (NIV). The phrase "helpful for building others up" has many translations: "but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion" (ESV); "good for edification according to the need of the moment" (NASB); or as translated in the NKJV, "but what is good for necessary edification." The Greek word *agathos*, "helpful," would much better fit the definition of teaching that was "profitable." Furthermore, the context at Eph. 4:29 was a general instruction for all the Ephesian Christians, not only for the elders, as was the specific case in Acts 20.

84. "And also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."

85. Rom. 10:9: "Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." 2 Cor. 5:20–6:1: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf

The fourth part was that Paul preached “the kingdom” (Acts 20:25).<sup>86</sup> Luke helps readers understand this element a few chapters later. After the Ephesian elders returned to their homes, Luke said that Paul went to Rome and taught the Jews there about the “hope of Israel” (28:20) and the “kingdom of God” (28:23), and that when they would not believe, he spoke to all about the “kingdom of God” and the Lord Jesus Christ (28:30–31). This kingdom that Paul (and Jesus!) described was more than a simple set of ethical principles, or some type of ideal moral order. The kingdom is much more; it is nothing short of eschatological realization and consummation.<sup>87</sup> Christ’s earthly suffering and death, his glory and resurrection, all fulfilled the OT covenantal promises and ushered in a new era of salvation.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, he admonished them with tears (Acts 20:20, 21, 24, 25, 31). As a godly pastor, Paul shed tears for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:4) and the Philippians (3:18). The next task is to examine the nature of the whole counsel.

The Greek word *boulh*, translated “counsel” at Acts 20:27, summarized all these points. To comprehend Paul’s meaning, we have to understand the word’s specific context. The Greek word *boulhn* can mean “purpose,” “will,” or “intention.”<sup>89</sup> The meaning can also include the divine plan concerning redemption, but the significance should expand to encompass the entirety of Paul’s preaching.<sup>90</sup>

Unlike Paul, Luke used the term *whole counsel* extensively.<sup>91</sup> He employed it to denote the divine decree concerning redemption at

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of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” See Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 413.

86. As Luke presented it, Paul’s “whole counsel of God” focused on the need for sinners to repent, to have faith in Christ, and to understand the reality of the kingdom of God. See Gaffin, “Whole Counsel of God,” 22.

87. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

88. *Ibid.*, 24.

89. It is good to know how Paul, as well as Luke, who recorded the meeting, used this word in their writings. See Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Chattanooga: AMG, 1992), 346. It can also mean “purpose, intention as the result of reflection; counsel, decree, aim or estimation.” The United Bible Societies’ Greek English Dictionary says “purpose, intention; plan, decision.”

90. See WCG, 1:xxxi: “It seems to be too narrow to limit the content of ‘the whole counsel of God’ to that which is ‘useful.’” See also *ibid.*, 1:xxxin11. For more on God’s will, purpose, and decrees, see also WCG, 1:89–90, 162, 194–201, 338–39, 643–45, 647–50, 655, 660–63.

91. Other places where he used the word are Acts 5:38, “If this plan or this undertaking is of man”; Acts 13:36, “David, after he had served the purpose of God”; and Acts 27:42, “the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners.”

Luke 7:30.<sup>92</sup> Then, at Acts 2:23, he connected the term to Jesus, who was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” Later, at Acts 4:28, Jesus was attacked to fulfill “whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

While Paul did not use the word *boulh* very often, he did at 1 Corinthians 4:5.<sup>93</sup> There he spoke of the “intent” or the “counsels” of the heart. Most scholars consider this “counsel” to be the “most inward intentions of the inner life,” which is a good understanding of the word.<sup>94</sup> To better understand “God’s counsel,” we move from Luke’s account to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians. The passage is particularly helpful, since he was addressing the Ephesian elders in Luke’s narrative, and now he did the same in his own writing.<sup>95</sup>

Ephesians 1:10–11 is a good synopsis of Paul’s thoughts on the content of the whole counsel of God.<sup>96</sup> This is a beautiful presentation of the counsel of God’s will. The passage speaks of redemption in Christ and the unity that the church shares in Christ.<sup>97</sup> It also highlights the eschatological accomplishment, in the fullness of time, of and through Christ.<sup>98</sup> These are theologically comprehensive terms describing Christ’s whole work, our redemption both accomplished and applied.<sup>99</sup>

At Ephesians 1:11, Paul presented the eschatological direction of the whole counsel of God.<sup>100</sup> The list of benefits to believers, including redemption, was part of the new economy that is being realized in Christ.

92. Luke 7:30: “The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God.”

93. 1 Cor. 4:5 (NKJV): “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.”

94. See Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) (hereafter *TDNT*), 1:635.

95. Gaffin, “Whole Counsel of God,” 25.

96. Eph. 1:10–11: “As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

97. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 47.

98. *Ibid.*, 48.

99. Sometimes it appears that Paul used the words *oikoomia* and *boulh* synonymously. He addressed the Ephesian elders in Acts and wrote to them in his epistle, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” It is peculiar that this verse links the *oikoomia* of God with his *boulh*. See G. Schrenk, *TDNT*, 1:636. Eph. 1:1 should be translated “according to the decision [or plan] of his will.”

100. Gaffin, “Whole Counsel of God,” 25.

When combined with what Paul said in Acts, the passage concerns the preaching of God's comprehensive eschatological fulfillment of all his saving promises, focused in Christ. Stated more strongly, the "whole counsel of God" is the proclamation of the kingdom of God with the covenant as the kingdom's administrative structure.<sup>101</sup> The whole counsel of God consists in Christ as the fulfillment of the kingdom through God's covenants.<sup>102</sup> Thus, even though Paul did not use the phrase often, his meaning was clear.<sup>103</sup> Paul's presentation included a call to faith that is incomprehensible if torn from the context of the risen Christ's mediatorial kingship—that is, Christ's present lordship over all of life.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, there was a move from Paul to the elders. He had quite a bit on his mind when he bade farewell to those men from Ephesus. A question that arises from the text is whether there was a connection between what Paul did as an apostle and what the Ephesian elders were to do from the time of the address forward.<sup>105</sup> The answer is that it would be unwise to separate what Paul did in his work at that great city from what the elders were to do without him in their future ministry there. Thus, the Ephesian elders, called by Paul to hear his final exhortation, had similar obligations placed on them: they were to continue in all of Paul's teaching. His successors were to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28), a task that included fighting with wolves (20:29); to discipline and to admonish (20:30, 31); and to minister in prayer as well (20:36). It is as if Paul said to them: "I have done these things" (20:25–27); "now you watch over yourselves—as well as God's flock" (20:28).<sup>106</sup> Paul commanded the Ephesian elders to present "the whole counsel of God" to the people in the future, when Paul knew that he would be absent.

101. *Ibid.*, 26.

102. *Ibid.*, 25.

103. When the Greek word *boulb* ("counsel") is combined with the two Greek words *pasan thn* ("all" or "whole"), Paul's meaning to the Ephesian elders is clear. See Schrenk, *TDNT*, 1:635: "The *Boulb* fills the whole content of apostolic preaching."

104. Gaffin, "Whole Counsel of God," 27. For more information on Paul's gospel, see chapter 5; for more on Christ's mediatorial kingship, see chapter 13.

105. The exegetical issues are whether there should have been a paragraph break between Acts 20:25–27 and 20:28. Stated differently, was Paul certain of actually three instead of two things when he said goodbye: that he would not see them, that he was guiltless of any man's blood, and that he had fully proclaimed God's word?

106. Even though Paul was an apostle, and was used mightily and distinctly, that is how these verses should be read. After a series of three indicatives (concerning himself and what he did), Paul followed with a second-person plural imperative, addressed as a command to them.

By implication, Paul's command to those elders is both a model of contemporary pastoral work and a command for preacher-teachers today. Preachers use every means possible, public and private, to speak of faith and repentance, to teach and encourage the faithful. The exegetical conclusion from Paul, through Luke, is that God has set a task before all his preacher-teachers. Those men need to keep watch over themselves (that is, to guard and maintain their piety) and to give to their people the whole counsel of God. Paul demanded nothing more from them and also nothing less. It is with Paul's words of exhortation ringing in our ears that we should understand the task of true biblical/systematic theology and preaching. It is to give to the people of God the whole counsel of God in a context of humility.

Now we can begin to connect the content of the presentation with the lifestyle or context that went with it. Paul's life was consumed with teaching, testifying, preaching, and shepherding, all wrapped up in tears—both his own and the tears of those who loved him. The true context or lifestyle of the preacher is well summarized at Acts 20:19, “serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials.”

This text admonishes preachers and theologians to deep personal piety. There is an undoubted connection between the person, in this case Paul, who has a message and the message itself, the whole counsel of God. To paraphrase Paul's teaching, the whole counsel of God must be proclaimed by men who are clothed in humility, are bathed in tears, and have endured through difficult trials. Paul did not separate the wonderful content of the gospel from the context of piety. Theology and preaching must be done in humility, as Paul commanded at Colossians 3:12: “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” Paul urged humility at Ephesians 4:2: “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.” At Philippians 2:3, he mandated: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” At Philippians 2:8, he turned his readers to Christ, who “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”<sup>107</sup> From this

107. In the same fashion, Peter said at 1 Peter 5:5: “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

brief analysis of Paul's presentation, we can move toward building a systematic theology.

**Humility in Systematic Theology.** Knowing Paul's commands and personal example, the theologian must find a way to learn and to teach systematic theology in true humility. The whole counsel of God can rightly be proclaimed only by men of deep personal piety. The content of the whole counsel of God must be presented in a context that promotes that true piety. The theological student must submit his or her mind, heart, and hands to God's divine revelation—and the goal of any biblically faithful systematic theology is bound to humility.<sup>108</sup> In heartfelt submission to God, we must conform the content of our teaching, our theology, to Scripture.

Given that personal and methodological submission, granting that theology has been defined in different ways,<sup>109</sup> faithful systematic theology requires exegesis of God's special revelation of himself and necessitates a hermeneutical framework for that exegesis so that it can present a unified system. A proper hermeneutic will acknowledge God as self-revealer and as the ultimate author of the Scriptures of the OT and NT.<sup>110</sup> Theology will offer God's truth as revealed in the Scriptures as a complete system, expositing biblical content and rearranging it to make the content easy for the regenerated person to understand.<sup>111</sup> In other words, systematic theology is the regenerated person's appropriation of the information that God has made of himself for us.<sup>112</sup>

108. WCG, 1:90–92.

109. There are differences even within the Reformed tradition. For definitions from B. B. Warfield, John Murray, David Wells, Harvie Conn, Richard Gaffin, and John Frame, see WCG, 1:25–26. See also Morris, *New Testament Theology*, 10; Donald Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 247–48; Michael S. Horton, "What God Hath Joined: Biblical and Systematic Theology," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 45–46.

110. See WCG, 1:10, 101, for more information on the relationship between biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

111. WCG, 1:76. See the diagram of the relationship between the loci, WCG, 1:69–71.

112. Theology is, as summarized in WCG, 1:24: "the appropriation, by the regenerated mind, of that supernatural/natural information by which God has made himself the object of human knowledge." For a more detailed presentation of parts of this chapter, see Richard C. Gamble, "The Relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," in McGowan, *Always Reforming*, 211–39.

Yet this brief definition of systematic theology recognizes a number of problems that must be solved.

The first problem is that theology, as the study of God to the extent that he has revealed himself to humanity, has to overcome the classic philosophical subject/object problem. The subject/object problem can be approached by using an example of a botanist's study of a plant. The botanist is the subject, who studies an object, the plant. When the botanist examines the plant, one way that the object can be understood is by analyzing its component parts.<sup>113</sup> However, God is not a passive object that someone can simply study!<sup>114</sup> In the case of theology, fallen humanity, the investigating subject, would have no knowledge of God, the object of the study, unless the object graciously granted knowledge of himself to the subject.<sup>115</sup> The situation is made more complex by the philosophically limiting concept of sin; all human investigating subjects now no longer trust the object of their study.

Not only is there need for divine revelation from the object to the subject, but there is need for a new relationship between them. God, the object, is angry with men, the subject, and the subject can do nothing to change the dire situation. For salvific knowledge to occur, God needs to create new "knowing subjects." With that miraculous event accomplished, the regenerated subject can study God's Word and obtain vast amounts of previously unavailable knowledge concerning God, the object.<sup>116</sup>

113. The subject/object problem is complex because *subject* and *object* are distinct but not separable concepts. The botanist (investigating subject) perceives the plant and describes it in an "objective" way (as it really is, not how he would like it to look). His work is not from within his own mind alone—he weighs, measures, and describes that which is external to him. But his perceptions of the plant are also "subjective"; he uses "his" senses, say, to describe the plant's color. Thus, the "objective" or "scientific" knowledge that he has of the plant involves him subjectively.

114. WCG, 1:6: "Theology is different because God has not only revealed himself to humanity, but actually created humanity. . . . Theology as a discipline is unique." For example, C. S. Lewis's story of how the lion named Aslan (who represents Christ) interacted with the children in Narnia is a beautiful picture of this type of relationship.

115. Ibid., 1:7: "Man (the subject) was created and defined by God (the object)!" "Thus, theology is different in many ways from other areas of human study." Paul taught at Rom. 1:18 that a supernatural revelation is required for humans (the subject) to understand any absolutely true and adequate information about divine things (the object).

116. Ibid., 1:8: "Through examination of the deposit of truth found in Scripture, the regenerated mind (subject) can obtain vast degrees of previously unknown knowledge concerning God (object)."

The second problem is how humans are to speak and know about God. The OT taught that humans do not think the way that God thinks. God's thinking is qualitatively different: it is ultimate, absolutely comprehensive, and self-contained. Ours is ethically depraved. We wrongly assume that time and eternity are aspects of each other.<sup>117</sup> We are dependent on God for true knowledge of ourselves and his creation; thus, our knowledge, when true, is derivative.<sup>118</sup> In summary, humanity as created is in a state of "becoming," while God as Creator is not.<sup>119</sup>

The third problem is the relationship between content and context. Paul taught that the whole counsel of God applies to all areas of life. Nevertheless, he did not teach that the meaning of God's divine revelation (content of the gospel) and the application (context of the gospel) are simply two ways of looking at the same thing. As was done in the analysis of Acts 20, it is proper to distinguish between the content of a message and the context in which it is presented.<sup>120</sup> Paul acknowledged that Christ (content) could be preached even by wicked men (context). The gospel of Jesus Christ (content) when preached next Sunday by a sinful preacher in America or somewhere else has a context different from that in which Paul preached that same gospel in Ephesus. Thus, it is not improper to speak of an "objective sense" to the content of the Scriptures.<sup>121</sup> Recognizing this particular difficulty addresses the attacks of postmodernism, which in extreme forms rejects such an objective sense to any content.

Fourth is the presentation problem. Some have viewed theology as simply a topical or thematic presentation of biblical doctrine. Such a topical presentation of doctrine is not only helpful but necessary, particularly in the case of catechisms and historic confessions.<sup>122</sup> The presentation problem in systematic theology is based on how a

117. *Ibid.*, 1:85–87.

118. *Ibid.*, 1:93–94.

119. *Ibid.*, 1:656.

120. *Ibid.*, 1:35.

121. See discussion of the relationship between meaning and application in WCG, 1:35–36.

122. Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," 248. Horton, "What God Hath Joined," 44: "that task of harvesting the results of exegesis in order to display the logical connections and canonical coherence of biblical teaching. To do this, systematic theology often follows a *loci communes* method, whereby harvested exegesis is organized topically. By biblical theology we refer not merely to exegesis per se, but to the attempt to follow that unfolding drama of redemptive revelation in its historical aspect."

theologian chooses and arranges the presentation of his theological topics. Such arranging is a subjective human act that is based on theological presuppositions.<sup>123</sup> In other words, the theologian's cultural, ecclesiastical, and theological context impacts his or her topical arrangements.<sup>124</sup> If he uses a topical or thematic presentation of biblical doctrine, he is obligated to humbly submit the selection of his topics and their arrangement to the scrutiny of Scripture.

Finally, the Bible answers the philosophical "one and many" problem.<sup>125</sup> That is, it instructs believers on how God unites the particulars of their everyday experience into one beautiful, connected whole.<sup>126</sup> One way that this was already illustrated was by how God the Great King revealed his divine law as the perfect guide for human behavior, which then provided the foundation for a unified, true, biblical ethic.<sup>127</sup> In the NT, Christ has revealed the ultimate biblical ethic. Also, it is in God as Trinity, fully revealed in the NT, that believers understand how there can be an equal ultimacy of the one, or the universal, and the many, the particulars.<sup>128</sup>

In conclusion, systematic theology will recognize and deal with the subject/object problem, stay within the limits of creatureliness, distinguish between content and context, and be structured in a fashion that conforms to Scripture and not to foreign philosophical or cultural patterns or frameworks. Systematic theology will present a unified ethical system and stand ready to oppose unbelieving systems. The preacher/theologian will always be humbled through this process because despite any natural abilities, academic skills, and even amount of time put into preparation, his preaching and teaching will always fall short of the perfection for which he yearns. The next task is to recognize the epistemological foundations of systematic theology.

123. WCG, 1:47.

124. *Ibid.*, 1:48: "The culture has affected biblical exegesis and theological method in every age."

125. *Ibid.*, 1:87–88.

126. *Ibid.*, 1:288: "God defined the nature of beauty for humanity and furthermore set up a system of ethics—that is, he showed the nature of good and evil." God's presentation of aesthetics began at Gen. 2:9; some trees were "pleasing to the sight" and thus beautiful by definition. See *ibid.*, 1:288n38.

127. *Ibid.*, 1:82, 173: "God's command (his law) to Adam and Eve was meant to determine the course of their lives. It gave them their understanding of themselves. God's command was comprehensive and could not be questioned." See also *ibid.*, 1:175.

128. See analysis in *ibid.*, 1:88.

**Epistemological Foundations of Systematic Theology.** A God-honoring theology has complex epistemological foundations, and understanding those principles is another step toward creating a biblically faithful theology.<sup>129</sup> Good Reformed theologians want the particulars of the Christian narrative to determine their theology's shape. However, even to say something like "God is love" requires the use of what is termed *metaphysics*.<sup>130</sup> Thus, faithful systematic theology needs a faithful Christian metaphysic.<sup>131</sup> Such a biblically faithful metaphysic recognizes that the OT already taught that God's existence was a given, that the created universe was not ultimate, that the natural man living in God's creation was depraved, and that God could still be known by sinful men and women.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible taught that God was too great to be totally comprehended by his creatures. In other words, that God's existence is philosophically necessary.<sup>133</sup>

God's existence requires his prior knowledge of himself, which is also philosophically necessary for human knowledge. The reason for this need on man's part is that human knowledge is dependent on God's knowledge.<sup>134</sup> More than that, men and women need knowledge of God for a proper self-identity.<sup>135</sup>

With that firm foundation in the OT, the NT advanced and nuanced those teachings. Now we know that Jesus the Christ is the Ruler and Sustainer of his universe, has fully revealed the Father, and has fulfilled all the great covenant promises.<sup>136</sup> He has demonstrated that men and women truly understand themselves when they are in union with him. Also, from the Creator/creature distinction, believers should not expect—and do not find in the NT—a univocal, identical point of coincidence in the knowledge of God and man relative to truth. God's

129. *Ibid.*, 1:82. Analysis began with the subject/object and meaning-application discussion.

130. Metaphysics is the study of the fundamental nature of being and the world that encompasses it.

131. According to Horton in "What God Hath Joined," Van Til's theological method "offers a model of how a genuinely Christian metaphysics can challenge the modern and postmodern orthodoxies of our day" (62).

132. WCG, 1:84–86.

133. *Ibid.*, 1:88–89: "Thus, God is the *principium essendi*, the first and most essential element of knowledge, for humanity."

134. *Ibid.*, 1:84, 89: "God's existence makes human knowledge possible and knowledge of him possible."

135. *Ibid.*, 1:175.

136. *Ibid.*, 1:83.

revelation of himself to finite men and women cannot exhaust God's being or knowledge. In that sense, God remains incomprehensible.<sup>137</sup> This background information on epistemological foundations can move us toward a definition of theological method.

A good theological method will always be multifaceted.<sup>138</sup> A theologian's method depends on his or her definition of theology, ability to face the various problems connected to constructing a theology, and understanding of the epistemological foundations for that theology. However, overarching the process must be the knowledge that a definition and methodology must be biblically based. In fact, like all parts of well-formulated doctrine, a theologian turns to the Bible to learn how to create a theological method.<sup>139</sup>

The first characteristic recognizes that the method that the biblical authors used when they wrote can be called *ectypal* or *analogical*. The Bible teaches that there are two levels of knowledge: God's comprehensive and self-contained level (the archetype) and the human's derivative knowing (ectype).<sup>140</sup> Thus, humans think in part like God, yet also unlike him.<sup>141</sup> Ectypal or analogical theology copies the wisdom found in God as he has revealed himself.<sup>142</sup> This theological method is founded on Scripture's strong and important teaching that there is a Creator/creature distinction.<sup>143</sup> This method structures theology with

137. See the analysis in John Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 109.

138. Gaffin, "Vitality," 5–6, recognizes three "facets" of systematic theology: the exegetical-hermeneutical, the contemporary-contextual, and the doctrine-historical.

139. WCG, 1:95: "The Bible tells us how to create a theological method."

140. *Ibid.*, 1:87, 88: "God's knowledge, in contrast to human knowledge, is exclusively analytic, that is, self-dependent."

141. *Ibid.*, 1:89.

142. In the history of Reformed theology, Junius said that "we must speak analogically about God's theology and understand that theology that he reveals to us is an analogue of what is proper to God." Ectypal theology is "as he reveals it to creatures." Polanus followed Junius's lead and asserted that ectypal theology is true and complete. Wollebius defined ectypal theology as "a kind of copy (effigies) of archetypal theology which is first of all in Christ the God-Man and secondarily, to be sure in the members of Christ." For more information, see R. Scott Clark, "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 157–60. See Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 1:235; Horton, "What God Hath Joined," who states, "If all theology is analogical, the alternative to univocal rationalism need not be equivocal agnosticism" (62). For the exegetical foundation, see WCG, 1:95–96.

143. As hinted at earlier. For more on the Creator/creature distinction, see WCG, 1:85–86, 93–94, 656.

the realization that while God is incomprehensible in his being, yet he has still lovingly communicated himself to sinful believers. The knowledge that believers have of God, while limited, is nevertheless true.<sup>144</sup> Conversely, the Bible and Reformed theology reject any method, such as medieval dualisms, that would assume that some part of human thinking is ultimate or would permit giving priority to an abstract ontology.<sup>145</sup> They reject the notion, in both method and technique, of any type of independent knowledge base or science used to structure theology.<sup>146</sup>

A second characteristic of a faithful theological method particularly relative to NT biblical theology will underline the importance of the role of the covenant and kingdom.<sup>147</sup> From the time of the Reformation, Reformed dogmatists have been convinced that covenant theology came from the biblical text itself and was not a foreign imposition on it.<sup>148</sup> Contemporary theological method should incorporate covenant and kingdom as a fulcrum for dynamic theological analysis.<sup>149</sup>

Third, flowing from the previous, a proper method will map out the historical order of events of divine revelation, noting phases of advance and decline as judged by Scripture's own standard from within that historical period.<sup>150</sup> Yet this task is much easier for the OT, which covers such a vast sweep of time.<sup>151</sup> Focusing on the NT, a good model

144. WCG, 1:89.

145. Horton, "What God Hath Joined," 49, 61, 62: "They were articulating a new method with a distinct aim: ontology was to take a backseat to redemptive action and revelation."

146. WCG, 1:92. See Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 96–97: "These other sciences may be helpful as servants, but hold no authority over theology and its task."

147. WCG, 1:254: "God revealed himself through covenants. These covenants were God's gracious promises to his people." "God's covenantally structured history of redemption was communicated verbally, in propositional truth, sometimes from the voice of God himself" (255). See also "Revelation and Redemption: The Covenant," in WCG, 1:282–88. "The Davidic throne then became a permanent office of mediation. . . . [David] functioned as both mediatorial king and psalmist. The two tasks went together" (547). "Like Psalter eschatology, New Testament eschatology is theocentric or 'kingdom eschatology'" (555). "The kingdom is in its intent an instrument of redemption as well as the embodiment of the blessedness of Israel," says Vos. 'To it the Messianic expectations attach themselves.' It was not an accidental development. 'It touches, through the kingship of Christ, the very acme and perfection of the Biblical religion'" (573).

148. Horton, "What God Hath Joined," 49, 52.

149. *Ibid.*, 66: "as the dramatic structure for the integration of both logical relations and descriptive analysis with the dynamic play of the narrative."

150. See analysis of John Owen's *Biblical Theology* at WCG, 1:90–93.

151. For discussion of OT biblical theology, see WCG, 1:23–24, 27–31, 41–50.

acknowledges doctrinal interrelatedness presented by diverse human authors writing in a distinct cultural setting.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, having a proper definition and method, there are also biblically faithful theological goals. A primary goal should be the preacher/theologian's own advance in personal and public piety, and Paul's words at Acts 20:19, 21 are a great summary of that work in that his presentation of the whole counsel was in the context of great personal humility.<sup>153</sup> A fruitful public ministry comes only when the theologian's heart is sanctified to the Lord.<sup>154</sup> Thus, the goal of a godly theological method will promote piety by articulating that systematic theology is both descriptive and prescriptive.<sup>155</sup> Rightly, seminaries have for centuries set a goal that their students lead a more holy life, to advance in what some have termed "sanctified wisdom."<sup>156</sup>

Yet the topic of piety, or sanctification, is considered by some to fall under the heading or to be a category of practical, not of systematic, theology. Nevertheless, the church has long recognized that good preaching is a primary means of pastoral care, thus connecting systematic and practical theology.<sup>157</sup> Going beyond that truth, investigating the relationship between systematic and practical theology, at least in seminary curriculums, demonstrates that practical courses are usually segregated from what are categorized as the "academic" courses.<sup>158</sup> However, in light of Paul's model in Acts 20 of theological

152. For example, on both theoretical and practical levels, anthropology and theology are intimately connected. Paul at Rom. 1:17–18 taught that all people know that God exists but suppress that knowledge in unrighteousness. Thus, all men and women not in an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ are conflicted and psychologically in trouble. See WCG, 1:67–69. Another example is the close connection between Christ's resurrection and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, WCG, 1:69: "In Ephesians 2:5ff., Paul asserts that believers have been raised up into heaven with Christ. Christ's resurrection affects every part of theology, including the Lord's Supper." Figure 6 (WCG, 1:68) shows the complexity of doctrinal interrelationship, and there are six theses that summarize theological method at 1:72.

153. See William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 102. This was also one of the main themes of the Old Princeton theologian Charles Hodge; see WCG, 1:73.

154. Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 151: "Let them not think that their golden words will do as much good as their dead lives will do harm."

155. See WCG, 1:92–93; *NTBT*, 5.

156. Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xlvi: "The man who is not inflamed with divine love is an outsider to all theology!"

157. See Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," 262.

158. Dennis E. Johnson, "On Practical Theology as Systematic Theology," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 102–4.

content (the whole counsel of God, presented in a distinct context of humility), it would seem wise to consider practical theology not as separate from but as similar and integral to systematic theology.<sup>159</sup>

For example, evangelistic work, considered by many to be the height of practical theology, requires serious engagement in systematic theology for it to be done well.<sup>160</sup> If practical theology is a fruit of reflection on biblical doctrine, then the theory of biblical doctrine and the practice of doing evangelism are necessarily united.<sup>161</sup> Stated another way, since the covenant, or the unfolding of God's kingdom in history, can rightly provide a structure for systematic theology and preaching, the biblical theologian can consider those doctrines not simply as abstract concepts but as divine action. The flow of covenantal history recorded in Scripture is the application of God's promises to men and women in time. When theologians call on men and women walking in darkness to apprehend those covenant promises (the theological foundation) for themselves (the practical application), they have in fact united systematic and practical theology.<sup>162</sup> Comparing the tasks of the preacher and the theologian, the heavy moral requirements for true godliness found in the able preacher must also apply to the life and teaching of the theologian.

Therefore, if a minister must be holy in heart and unblamable in life, then the theologian must be more so.<sup>163</sup> If the preacher must speak with such spiritual power so that all who hear him know that it is not man but God himself who is teaching them, then so must the theologian.<sup>164</sup> While the preacher must certainly be well schooled, he must demonstrate that beyond human learning he has been taught by the Spirit of the living God, and so must the theologian.<sup>165</sup> While the preacher's brain must be full, his heart must have received the mark of God's finger engraving the law upon it—the theologian more so.<sup>166</sup> God's people cannot be sanctified by the ministry of an unsanctified

159. *Ibid.*, 114.

160. A pastor soon realizes when he prepares an evangelistic team from his congregation that he has to provide a theological context for their work. Reflection on the content of the message as well as the context is the work of systematic theology.

161. See Johnson, "On Practical Theology," 116.

162. See Horton, "What God Hath Joined," 67.

163. Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 72–73.

164. *Ibid.*, 86.

165. *Ibid.*, 90.

166. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

man, and seminary graduates will destroy churches unless they have grown in piety as well as learning during their years of training under godly theologians.<sup>167</sup> Preachers must have godly fear at the Holy One of Israel and amazement for God's glory and greatness, but so much more should theologians.<sup>168</sup> Theologians and preachers must sanctify themselves by repentance: like those of the OT prophets, preachers' weaknesses should be before their eyes.<sup>169</sup> Dead lives can do more harm than brilliant words can do good, and if sin reigns in the minister's life, no eloquence can overthrow the sins in the people.<sup>170</sup> Thus, having established the need for humility, the next step is to examine the tasks and temptations of creating, teaching, and preaching systematic theology.

**Tasks and Temptations.** Since this book is written by a seminary professor active in the church and pulpit and will be read by those studying for and engaged in pulpit ministry, it seems methodologically wise to begin by examining the similarities and differences between the work of the theologian in a textbook or classroom and the labors of a preacher in the pulpit.<sup>171</sup> De facto, there are differences between the tasks of preacher and theologian: the two groups address different audiences; seminarians or highly motivated learners versus a congregation. Yet all theologians who teach or write view their students and readers in a similar fashion as the pastor considers his congregation.

Because of its supreme importance for a pastor and theologian, the next step is to define the nature of preaching.<sup>172</sup> The hope is that *The Whole Counsel of God* will help to mold and inform solid preaching. Turning to the last decade of the sixteenth century, the Puritan William Perkins defined preaching as "prophesying in the name and on behalf of Christ," and he added that God's Word should be preached "in its perfection and inner consistency."<sup>173</sup> Later, one of the Westminster divines said that true preachers proclaim God's Word when they "ground what they preach upon the Scripture, and deliver nothing but

167. *Ibid.*, 92.

168. *Ibid.*, 127–28.

169. *Ibid.*, 134.

170. *Ibid.*, 151.

171. See WCG, 1:75.

172. For more information, see "Means of Grace: Preaching" in chapter 21.

173. Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 7, 9.

what is agreeable thereunto.”<sup>174</sup> These definitions of preaching, speaking Christ's Word in Christ's name, can also describe a good systematic theology. Furthermore, the preacher's homiletical rules of interpretation apply to the theologian as well.<sup>175</sup> Put another way, the rules of systematic theology, determining the actual message of the text by comparing Scripture with Scripture, apply to the rules of homiletics.<sup>176</sup>

Granted, some have argued that preaching has different methods and goals than does theology. While they concede that the theology should be the same in the pulpit and the seminary classroom, the method of communication is supposedly not.<sup>177</sup> Thus, Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), outstanding leader of the Free Church of Scotland, underlined that the main concern of the pulpit was “to apply doctrine in a hortatory and practical way.” Preaching was not academic exposition, but practical influence. “In other words,” said Chalmers, “the pulpit aims to make people personally and actually Christians.”<sup>178</sup>

Acknowledging that much has changed in the world since Chalmers's time and that there are differences between the podium and pulpit, nevertheless Chalmers's bifurcation may not be as self-evident as he asserted. While his seminary in Edinburgh a century and a half ago required, and good seminaries today still require, a recommendation by church sessions for admission, it is possible for the professor to have unsaved students in the classroom.<sup>179</sup> Also, there is no reason why a theologian's heart should not yearn for each student in a large classroom to understand how theology applies to the student's life. While good preaching is designed to move the will and emotions in conjunction with the mind, a faithful theologian should also want to apply the doctrine he is teaching in the classroom.<sup>180</sup> If application in sermons is a process that is both mental

174. William Gouge, as cited by Dennis J. Prutow, *So Pastor, What's Your Point?* (Philadelphia: Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 2010), 28.

175. Perkins gave examples of “general rules” and “genus and species” (*Art of Prophesying*, 26, 50).

176. Macleod, “Preaching and Systematic Theology,” 252.

177. *Ibid.*, 264–66. Macleod said that the perspective is totally different in preaching relative to applying the doctrine to the individual.

178. Thomas Chalmers, *Select Works* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable & Co., 1856), 8:239, as cited by Macleod, “Preaching and Systematic Theology,” 265.

179. Two colleagues (one already with his Lord) have publicly admitted that they were unsaved as students at the seminary where I first taught.

180. Prutow, in *So Pastor, What's Your Point?*, 27, rightly defined preaching as “God . . . communicating His truth in our world . . . through human instruments in order to change their

and practical, there is no reason why the theologian's heart and mind should not labor to have such application as part of the formal theology classroom or systematic theology text.<sup>181</sup> In conclusion, the seminary lecture assumes specific educational and linguistic tools that are not enjoyed by members in the congregation, but the task is much more similar than it is different. In fact, formal theology and preaching are so closely related that it can be legitimately argued that the theological process does not exist for itself but as preparation for preaching.<sup>182</sup> As the tasks of theology and preaching are similar, so are the temptations.

As preachers grow in age, in reputation, and in the estimation of many in the broader church, they face temptations to arrogance, but so much more do their teachers. With abundant natural blessings come temptations to pride and to hold too high an opinion of oneself. In fact, when a systematician has abilities and learning, then he is all the more tempted to use those fleshly weapons in what is actually a great spiritual warfare.<sup>183</sup> As holiness without deep learning is insufficient, so a Ph.D. from a great university has never qualified a man for preaching or teaching systematic theology. As the gospel minister must recognize his call to ministry as almost as amazing as a wretched sinner's call to salvation, so also the systematician has to cry out to God that he is undone in the face of the enormity of the work.<sup>184</sup>

There should be what has been termed a "demonstration of the Spirit" in the pulpit as well as in systematic or biblical theology.<sup>185</sup> Such a demonstration is possible only in the combination of learning and humility.<sup>186</sup> The theological student must submit his mind, his heart, and his hands to God's divine revelation and the discipline of his Holy Spirit.

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thinking, bridle their emotions, and alter their wills." See further analysis in chapter 21 of this volume.

181. See, for example, Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 64: "When it [mental application] involves doctrine, biblical teaching is used to inform the mind to enable it to come to a right judgment about what is to be believed." "These different kinds of application can be employed with respect to every sentence of the Scripture" (65).

182. Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," 264: "If it is content to be silent or to be confined to the groves of academia, it has lost its prophetic character, and with that its integrity." For the beauty of theology, see WCG, 1:75-76.

183. Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 129.

184. *Ibid.*, 131.

185. The term was introduced by Perkins, *ibid.*, 71-72.

186. Paul told the Colossians to put on humility; he admonished the Ephesians to bear with each other in humility. Theologians are to count others as more significant than themselves in Philipians.

Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders opening the whole counsel of God illustrated similarities between serving the Lord in the great task of preaching and in teaching/learning systematic theology.<sup>187</sup> Having examined the nature of biblical and systematic theology, in continuity with the method described in the first volume as well as these opening pages, we need briefly to turn to the intertestamental period so as to transition from the OT to the NT.

## KEY TERMS

archetype  
biblical metaphysic  
covenant  
ectype  
God's accommodation  
grammatical-historical exegesis  
historic-organic nature  
literary genre  
"one and many" problem  
postmodernism  
redemptive process

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the characteristics of NT special revelation?
2. How would you define NT biblical theology?
3. How did biblical theology develop?
4. Who is Rudolf Bultmann, and did he advance NT scholarship?
5. What is postmodernism, and is it advantageous to NT biblical theology?
6. What are some of the methodological questions that we face as we want to create a NT biblical theology?
7. In what ways is biblical theology helpful to pastors and theologians?
8. What are some of the characteristics of the whole counsel of God?
9. Why is humility important to systematic theology?

187. See *WCG*, 1:xxix–xxxii. "This volume is founded upon, and is intended to examine and to elaborate, what Paul calls 'the whole counsel of God'" (5).

10. What is meant by an epistemological foundation for theology?
11. Why is an epistemological foundation helpful or necessary?
12. What is the philosophical subject/object problem relative to the study of Scripture?
13. What are some of the tasks and temptations of theology?
14. Is knowledge of God necessary for a true anthropology?
15. What role will the notions of covenant and kingdom play in constructing a biblically faithful theology?
16. What are some of the goals of a biblically faithful theology?
17. What are some of the differences and similarities between the work of the theologian and that of the preacher?

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. A massive examination of NT biblical theology from a scholar who has spent a lifetime under the authority of God's Word and who has had decades of fruitful academic teaching.

For background information that has shaped this chapter, see "The Nature and Method of Theology," in *WCG*, 1:5–24; "How Shall We Structure Systematic Theology?," in *WCG*, 1:25–72; and "The Idea of Systematic Theology," in *WCG*, 1:73–99.