

Biblical-Theological Exposition and Hermeneutics

The Bible is a big book. It contains 66 books written by many different human authors over a wide range of time and in diverse geographic, cultural, political, and religious circumstances. There are two main sections to our English Bibles – the Old and the New Testament. There are several different genres of literature in the Bible – e.g., narrative/history, law, poetry, prophecy, gospels (i.e., theological biographies), epistles, and apocalyptic. These factors make interpreting the Bible a difficult task at times. Those who do not view the Bible as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant written Word of God often use these factors to pit one section of Scripture against others. They do not see it as containing a system of doctrine. System, in their thinking, is impossible due to the various human authors and other factors mentioned above. Denying divine inspiration, there is no reason to expect a cohesive story-line and doctrinal continuity.

Those of us who view the Bible as the written Word of God, however, are committed to allow it to speak authoritatively on anything and everything it comments upon. And one of the things the Bible comments upon is itself. In other words, texts often pick up on previous texts and further explain their meaning. This happens with words, phrases, verses, passages, persons, events, institutions, places, and concepts. When this occurs, it is the divine use or interpretation of a previous divine revelation. In other words, the Bible sometimes interprets the Bible for us and when it does, the way subsequent revelation interprets and applies antecedent revelation gives us (at least in part) the divinely intended meaning of the antecedent text. This is not to say that the interpreter of a text cannot find out its meaning unless the Bible interprets it for us, but it is to say that when the Bible interprets itself, the interpretation is infallible and reflective of the divine intention for and use of that text. Because the Bible is divinely inspired, a whole-Bible hermeneutic is crucial in understanding both the parts and the whole of Scripture.

Our seventeenth-century forbears knew this well. The Reformed orthodox were exegetically driven and their hermeneutic was a whole-Bible hermeneutic, evidenced in such concepts as their highly nuanced view of *sensus literalis* (literal sense), *analogia Scripturae* (analogy of Scripture), *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith), and *scopus Scripturae* (scope of Scripture).¹ It is of vital importance to understand the nuances involved with these concepts in order to properly understand how our Confession comes to the conclusions it does and, more importantly, to interpret the Bible properly. But this is

¹ J. I. Packer lists six governing principles of interpretation for the English Puritans: 1. Interpret Scripture *literally and grammatically*. 2. Interpret Scripture *consistently and harmonistically*. 3. Interpret Scripture *doctrinally and theocentrically*. 4. Interpret Scripture *christologically and evangelically*. 5. Interpret Scripture *experimentally and practically*. 6. Interpret Scripture *with a faithful and realistic application*. Cf. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 101-05. Cf. also Barry Howson, "The Puritan Hermeneutics of John Owen: A Recommendation," *WTJ* 63 (2001): 354-57.

beyond the scope of our study. However, a brief introduction may help at this point. We will now look at two crucial hermeneutical concepts.

Two Crucial Hermeneutical Concepts

- *Analogia Scripturae*

Analogia Scripturae (analogy of Scripture), as defined by Muller, involves “the interpretation of unclear, difficult, or ambiguous passages of Scripture by comparison with clear and unambiguous passages *that refer to the same teaching or event*” (emphases mine)² This can be illustrated by the synoptic Gospels. But it can also be illustrated by Paul’s explanation of the relationship between Adam and Christ in Romans 5.

- *Analogia fidei*

Analogia fidei (analogy of faith) is broader than *analogia Scripturae*. It refers to

the use of a general sense of the meaning of Scripture, constructed from the clear or unambiguous *loci...*, as the basis for interpreting unclear or ambiguous texts. As distinct from the more basic *analogia Scripturae...*, the *analogia fidei* presupposes a sense of the theological meaning of Scripture.³

This principle aids us in understanding why certain acts were considered wrong prior to the promulgation of the Decalogue. Why was murder wrong prior to a law forbidding it being explicitly revealed by God and inscripturated? If the narrative of Genesis assumes it’s a sin, upon what basis does it do so? The answer lies in subsequent revelation which often makes explicit what is implicit in antecedent revelation. While the narrative of Genesis assumes some actions to be wrong, it is the function of other parts of the Bible to tell us why.

Both of these interpretive concepts presuppose “the canonical character of the whole of Scripture and the assumption that the canon, as such, was inspired and the infallible rule of faith.”⁴ In other words, we ought to derive Bible doctrine not only from individual biblical texts but from the totality of the entire text as a completed whole.

Five Ways the Bible Interprets Itself

There are several key hermeneutical principles embedded in Scripture that are essential to understand and apply when doing biblical-theological exposition. Our Confession recognizes this in 2LCF 1:9, which says:

² Muller, *Dictionary*, 33; cf. Muller, *PRRD*, II:490-91, and 493-97.

³ Muller, *Dictionary*, 33; cf. Muller, *PRRD*, II:491-92 and 493-97.

⁴ Muller, *PRRD*, II:474, 492.

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.

Here the Confession asserts a principle of pre-critical biblical interpretation. The Bible comments upon the Bible. Though it does not list *how* the Bible interprets itself (that is beyond the purpose of a confession), it recognizes *that* it does. This brings rise to an important question: In what ways does the Bible interpret the Bible? There are at least five technical terms that seek to identify the ways the Bible interprets itself. We will discuss each briefly.

- **Intertextuality**

The *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies (PDBS)* defines intertextuality as follows:

The phenomenon that all texts are involved in an interplay with other texts, which results in the interpretive principle that no text can be viewed as isolated and independent. This interplay is particularly true of biblical literature, since each document, or text, is self-consciously part of a stream of tradition. The study of intertextuality pays attention to the fragments, or “echoes,” of earlier texts that appear in later texts, examining texts that share words and themes.⁵

The basic thought here is that all biblical texts are, at some level, involved with all other biblical texts in revealing a cohesive story. This is illustrated, for instance, in the sharing of words, phrases, concepts, and/or themes from antecedent revelation by subsequent revelation. With reference to the Bible, intertextuality is assured by the fact of inspiration. We will see the concept of intertextuality many times in our subsequent studies.

- **Inner-Biblical Exegesis**

The *PDBS* defines inner-biblical exegesis as follows:

An approach to the text that seeks to address the re-interpretation and reapplication of earlier biblical texts by later texts. The detection of inner-biblical exegesis is more developed in OT studies, largely due to the monumental study by M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (1985). Direct quotations are the most obvious application of this method, but inner-biblical exegesis also looks at glosses⁶ in a text, the

⁵ *PDBS*, 63.

⁶ A gloss is “[a] name given to words, phrases or verses that first appeared as clarifications or corrections in the margins of a text but then were added or incorporated secondarily into the text itself. For example, the clarification that a scribe placed into the margin at John 5:3-4, regarding the stirring of the water at the pool of Beth-zatha, was eventually brought into the text in several manuscripts (see NRSV footnotes).” Cf. *PDBS*, 50.

arrangement of material in its present form, and the use of words, themes and traditions in other texts. For example, a scholar studying inner-biblical exegesis might examine the relationship of Isaiah 2:2-4 to Joel 3:10 and Micah 4:1-3, or the use that Hosea puts to the traditions of Genesis 32 regarding Isaac and Esau. This approach to texts shares features with interpreting “Scripture in the light of Scripture” but focuses more on the literary and historical relationships rather than the theological or spiritual ones.⁷

The basic thought here is that the Bible sometimes interprets and applies the Bible. We will see this fleshed-out below.

- **Allusion**

G. K. Beale defines New Testament allusion as “a brief expression consciously intended by an author to be dependent on an OT passage.”⁸ Differentiating between quotation and allusion, he says, “...allusions are indirect references.”⁹ There are hundreds (and hundreds?) of scriptural allusions in the Bible. One thing that allusions teach is that the writers of Scripture possessed a canonical consciousness. They realized that God had revealed his mind to us. The Old Testament is full of allusions of itself. It frequently gives indirect reference to antecedent events, institutions, places, and/or persons. For instance, when the Old Testament mentions God as creator (i.e., Psa. 19:1-6; 33:6ff.), it is alluding, at least implicitly, to the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 1 and 2 is foundational to the Bible’s doctrine of creation and other doctrines, such as anthropology, soteriology, and Christology.

A New Testament example of allusion can be seen in Matthew 1:1. There are at least five allusions to antecedent revelation in this one verse. Can you name them?¹⁰ Another New Testament allusion is found in John 3:14. How many allusions to the Old Testament are in this text?¹¹ Another New Testament example of allusion may be in Colossians 1:6 and 10. Is Paul alluding to antecedent revelation? Prior to answering that question, take into consideration these words from G. K. Beale:

the mandate of Gen. 1:28 is repeated throughout the OT – for example, Gen. 9:1, 6-7; 12:2; 17:2, 6, 8; 22:17-18; 26:3, 4, 24; 28:3-4; 35:11-12; 47:27; Exod. 1:7; Lev. 26:9; Ps. 8:5-9; 107:38; Isa. 51:2; Jer. 3:16; 23:3; Ezek. 36:10-11, 29-30, most of which contain the actual terminology of “increase and multiply,” and several of which have the phrase “all the earth”...¹²

⁷ PDBS, 63.

⁸ G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 31.

⁹ Beale, *Handbook*, 31.

¹⁰ Genealogy, Jesus (Joshua), Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham.

¹¹ I think there at least three: 1) Numbers 21:6-9; 2) Daniel 7:13-14 [and Psa. 8:4?]; and 3) Isaiah 52:13-15.

¹² G. K. Beale, “Colossians” in G. K. Beale and D. A. Caron, eds., *Commentary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 844.

What is Paul alluding to in Colossians 1:6 and 10?¹³

The last two examples of allusion are very interesting in light of our study. If John 3:14 is alluding to Psalm 8:4 (through Daniel 7:13-14) and taking into consideration that Hebrews 2 seems to connect it to Christology and if Colossians 1:6 and 10 allude to Genesis 1:28, this would indicate the importance of creation as the temporal foundation of the relationship between Adam and Christ. If this is so (and I think it is), then understanding Adam's constitution and vocation is vital for a proper understanding of the Bible. This reminds me of a conversation I once had with Dr. Vern Poythress. I said, "Dr. Poythress, is it true that if you get the Garden wrong, you get eschatology wrong?" He answered, "If you get the Garden wrong, you get everything wrong." Understanding protology, the first words of the Bible, is crucial if we are to understand anthropology, soteriology, Christology, and eschatology. Dr. Poythress was right.

- **Echoes**

G. K. Beale thinks the term *echo* and the concept it embodies is not that helpful and does not warrant a distinct category.¹⁴ What is meant by echo, according to Beale, is "a subtle reference to the OT that is not as clear a reference as an allusion."¹⁵ I agree with Beale. If an echo is a weak allusion then it's an allusion.

- **Typology**

I want to offer some brief thoughts on typology as an introduction to this important hermeneutical issue. First of all, typology is not allegory. Allegory does not respect the historical reality of the text of Holy Scripture and thus finds meanings in texts with no analogy in Scripture. Typology, however, assumes the historical reality of the text and that God intended to typify something by the text that can be known by us due to a subsequent analogy or subsequent analogies in Scripture.

A few introductory thoughts on typology

First, a type is a historical person, place, institution, or event that was designed by God to point to a future historical person, place, institution, or event. An example would be the sacrificial system revealed to us in the Old Testament. That institution was designed by God to point to Christ's once for all sacrifice.

Second, that to which types point is always greater than the type itself. In other words, there is some sort of escalation in the anti-type. For example, "the blood of bulls and goats" could point to Christ but they could not and did not do what Christ's sacrifice did – take away sins.

¹³ Cf. Beale, "Colossians," 842-846 for his extended argument seeking to prove that Paul has in mind the Genesis mandate as carried out by Christ, the Last Adam, and his bride, the Church.

¹⁴ Beale, *Handbook*, 32.

¹⁵ Beale, *Handbook*, 32.

Third, types are both like and unlike their anti-types. There is both correspondence and escalation. The blood of animals was shed; the blood of Christ was shed. The blood of animals did not take away sins; the blood of Christ takes away sins.

Fourth, anti-types tell us more about how their types function as types. The blood of Christ takes away sins; the blood of animals pointed to that.

Adam and Christ as an example of biblical typology

I think you will see the importance of understanding the typological relationship between Adam and Christ for our purposes. This is why I chose to include this section. Adam was the first sinner, the first transgressor of God's law. Christ, as anti-typical new Adam, secures justification and eternal life via righteousness. This has much to do with the law of God as will be seen below and in subsequent discussions.

Adam was "a type of Him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14). Adam was a type of Christ in his prelapsarian state. He did not become a type of Christ after his fall into sin and certainly not until Paul penned Romans 5:14. Adam was a type of Christ as a public person (1 Cor. 15:22); he represented others. Adam's failure is seen in the fact that he disobeyed or he failed to obey (Rom. 5:12ff.). But what if he had obeyed? Would he have stayed in the state in which he was created - able to sin and able not to sin? I don't think so and, I think, for good reason. This is no mere speculative or abstract question. The Bible does give us answers to this question and understanding the typological relationship between Adam and Christ is one key (the key?) that unlocks the answer for us. And, as stated above, this is related to the subject we are studying. Let's think through this together.

In Romans 5:21, God says, "even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ." Note the prepositional phrases: "*through* righteousness *to* eternal life *through* Jesus Christ." The righteousness that is "to eternal life" comes as a gift to sinners and is based on Christ's obedience or "through [His] righteousness." The life-unto-death obedience of Christ constitutes a righteousness "to eternal life." In other words, in his sinless human nature as the anti-type of prelapsarian Adam, Christ earned eternal life for us. Listen to Guy Waters on this passage:

The fact that Christ purchased eternal "life" for his own, and that he did so for those who were eternally "dead" in Adam means that Christ's work was intended to remedy what Adam had wrought (death), and to accomplish what Adam had failed to do (life). Paul emphasizes disparity in his argument precisely in order to underscore the breathtaking achievement of what Christ has accomplished in relation to what Adam has wrought. This means that if Adam by his disobedience brought eternal death, then his obedience would have brought eternal life. In other words, Christ's "obedience" and its consequence ("eternal life") parallel what Adam ought to have done but did not do. The life that Adam ought to have attained would have been consequent upon Adam's continuing, during the period of his testing, in obedience to all the commands set before

him, whether moral or positive. This life, it stands to reason, could be aptly described "eternal."¹⁶

Eternal life was earned by Christ for us and given by Christ to us. The quality of life Christ attains for us and gives to us is not what Adam had and lost but what Adam failed to attain. Adam did not possess "eternal life." Listen to Robert Shaw, commenting on the Covenant of Works:

There is a *condition* expressly stated, in the positive precept respecting the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God was pleased to make the test of man's obedience. There was a *penalty* subjoined: 'In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.' There is also a *promise*, not distinctly expressed, but implied in the threatening; for if death was to be the consequence of disobedience, it clearly follows that life was to be the reward of obedience. That a promise of life was annexed to man's obedience, may also be inferred from...our Lord's answer to the young man who inquired what he should do to inherit eternal life: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17); and from the declaration of the apostle, that 'the commandment was ordained to life' (Romans 7:10).¹⁷

Just as Adam's disobedience brought upon him a status not his by virtue of creation, so Adam's obedience would have brought upon him a status not his by virtue of creation. Christ as anti-typical Adam, the last Adam, takes his seed where Adam failed to take his, and He does this via obedience.

Consider the fact that Adam sinned and fell short of something he did not possess via creation, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). We know that, in Paul's writings, Adam was the first man who sinned. The first man sinned and fell short of the glory of God; he fell short of something he did not experience via his created status. He was not created in a state that could be called "glory" and he fell short of that state by sinning. He failed to attain to that state because he sinned. In other words, Adam was created in a state that could have been improved. Listen to John Owen:

Man, especially, was utterly lost, and came short of the glory of God, for which he was created, Rom. iii. 23. Here, now, doth the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God open itself. A design in Christ shines out from his bosom, that was lodged there from eternity, to recover things to such an estate as shall be exceedingly to the advantage of his glory, infinitely above what at first appeared, and for the putting of

¹⁶ Guy P. Waters, "Romans 10:5 and the Covenant of Works" in Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen, Editors, *The Law is not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 230.

¹⁷ Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Geanies House Fern, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 124-25.

sinner into inconceivably a better condition than they were in before the entrance of sin.¹⁸

For Owen, “the glory of God” here does not refer exclusively to what God possesses, but what God confers.

Listen to Paul in Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God...and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” Charles Hodge says:

It is a[n]...exultation, in view of the exaltation and blessedness which Christ has secured for us. ...The glory of God may mean that glory which God gives, or that which he possesses. In either case, it refers to the exaltation and blessedness secured to the believer, who is to share the glory of his divine Redeemer.¹⁹

We get glory because it is conferred upon us and that because of what Christ has done for us. This is that to which Adam fell short.

The Old Testament spoke about the Messiah who would come, suffer (due to Adam’s sin and us in him), and enter into glory (Luke 24:46; Acts 26:19-23; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). The Son of God incarnate both suffered and entered into glory, which I think means a glorified state in his human nature after his sufferings via his resurrection and due to his obedience. In other words, his human nature became what it was not at the resurrection. Sufferings and glory is another way of saying humiliation and exaltation. Paul speaks of the Son’s humiliation and exaltation in Romans 1:1-4 and Philippians 2:6-9. His representation in the state of humiliation started at his conception and ended at his death-burial. Upon his death-burial, because of his obedience to the point of death, “God highly exalted Him...” The incarnate Son of God obeyed and suffered due to sin; he entered into glory as a result or reward for his obedience and he did both as the last Adam representing those given to him by the Father before the world began.

Adam failed to comply with the condition of the covenant God imposed upon him and brought with that the ruin of the human race. He fell short of the glory of God, a state of permanent existence in God’s special presence he did not possess via creation. But here is the good news – another came, the last Adam, the anti-type of the first Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered, then entered into glory at his resurrection, who will bring many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10) who will also “gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14). Listen to Owen on 2 Thessalonians 2:14, ““The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,” or the obtaining a portion in that glory which Christ purchased and procured for them...”²⁰ Christ purchased glory for all he came to save. He did so as the anti-typical, last Adam. He suffered to take care of the justice of God and his obedience unto death got him exalted, entering into glory, and all those who are his will enter into

¹⁸ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Volume II (Edinburgh, Scotland and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprinted 1990), 89.

¹⁹ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Edinburgh/Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 133.

²⁰ Owen, *Works*, XI:203.

glory as well. The last Adam takes his seed where the first Adam failed to take his. The anti-type is better than or greater than the type.

In this brief discussion, we can see that both Adam and Christ were historical figures, Christ is greater than Adam, Christ is both like and unlike Adam, and Christ as anti-type (and the explanation of his work by the biblical writers) helps us understand Adam's function as type better.

Conclusion

Having discussed the biblical-theological interpretive method assumed in what follows, it is now time to look at the Bible on the functions of the law in biblical history. Before we do that, however, I hope you are beginning to see how important our hermeneutical principles are in understanding the Bible, and especially the first few chapters of the Bible. While the narrative of Genesis 1-3 (and elsewhere in Genesis) might be sparse on details, we have Genesis 4-Revelation 22 to help us interpret it and fill in the theological gaps.

Our brief analysis of the typological relationship between Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ brings rise to some interesting questions: *first*, what was the rule of righteousness Adam was under; *second*, how does that rule of righteousness function after the fall in Adam and the rest of mankind; *third*, is that rule of righteousness revealed in the Bible and if so, where; *fourth*, how does that rule of righteousness relate to the work of the Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ; and *fifth*, does that rule of righteousness relate to believers in Christ and if so how? These are important questions. To varying degrees, the answers to these questions will be provided in the rest of our study.