

Introduction to Theology
New Testament Studies
Article 1
Why All Christians Should Care about Biblical
Theology
[Miles V. Van Pelt](#)

Crucial for the Health of the Church

Biblical theology is crucial for the health of the church because the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” ([Eph. 2:20](#)). Additionally, this Word upon which the church is built is both living and life-giving ([Ps. 119:25, 50](#); [2 Tim. 3:16](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)).

It is the record, the deposit, the testimony of God’s good news in Jesus Christ. It is a legal, objective, public document that describes and explains the covenantal relationship by which God has condescended and united himself to his people through Jesus Christ, our eternal high priest.

What Does Biblical Theology Do?

Simply put, the discipline of biblical theology works to make sense of God’s Word for God’s people. It does this by asking two basic questions:

What is the Bible about?

How does the Bible work?

Simply put, the discipline of biblical theology works to make sense of God’s Word for God’s people.

To answer these questions, we study the biblical text and, by way of submission to that text, allow it to establish its own theological categories and promote its own theological message.

Biblical theology also bridges the gap between exegesis (our study of texts) and systematic theology (our formulation of doctrine from the text). It provides context for exegesis, teeth for systematic theology, and depth for practical theology and Christian living.

While the answers to the two questions above are debated, Luke offers some help in [Acts 28](#). At the end of this chapter, Luke summarizes Paul's two-year curriculum in the following manner:

From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ([Acts 28:23](#); see also 28:30-31)

If we pay attention, we will come to understand that Luke, through Paul, has provided us with the answers to these two fundamental questions.

What Is the Bible About?

First, what is the Bible about? It is about Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus functions as the theological center of biblical theology. He is the sum and substance of the biblical message. He is the goal, the point, and the significance of every text. He is God's gospel and, as the theological center, provides unity and meaning for all of the diversity found in the biblical record, from Levitical underwear in [Exodus 39](#) to the new heavens and earth in [Revelation 21-22](#).

The kingdom of God functions as the thematic framework for biblical theology. This is the theme within which all other themes exist and are united. It is the realm of the prophet, priest, and king; the place of wisdom and the scribe; the world of the apostles, and now elders and deacons in the church. Every biblical theme is a kingdom of God theme. If Jesus is the theological bull's eye on the biblical target, then the kingdom of God travels on the path of redemptive history to arrive at that target. If Jesus as the theological center gives meaning to the biblical message, then the kingdom of God as the thematic framework provides the context for that message.

How Does the Bible Work?

Now that we understand that the Bible is about Jesus and his kingdom, how then does the Bible work? It works in the categories of the Law and the Prophets or, in its full form, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or Writings; see [Luke 24:44](#)).

Here, Luke is referring to the arrangement of the Old Testament in its original, three-fold division. These divisions are covenantal in nature, and they ultimately apply to both the Old and New Testaments as the covenantal structure of the Christian Bible.

In the Law, we have the covenant itself, filled with the life and teachings of the covenant mediators—Moses in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament. In the Prophets, we have the history of the covenant and the prophetic interpretation of that history (covenant history). Finally, in the writings, we have those practical books that teach us how to think and live in light of the covenant (covenant life).

Much more work needs to be done trying to understand how the Bible works. This important question is often neglected in church life, and it has yet to receive adequate attention from biblical theologians. [This chart](#) helps to capture the unity and design of the Christian Bible from a covenantal, biblical theological perspective.

Thinking and Living Biblically

With the discipline of biblical theology, we come to understand that the Bible has a theological center, a thematic framework, and a covenantal structure. When asked about the Bible's content, we can answer with confidence: Jesus and the kingdom of God.

When asked about the nature of the Bible, or how it works, our answer is simple: covenant.

This three-fold perspective for biblical theology provides unity and comprehends diversity. It sets us on the road to good, robust biblical thinking and living.

That's why biblical theology is crucial for the health of the church.

Miles V. Van Pelt Ph.D.

Article 2

Why Charismatics Need to Study Theology

1st September 2018 [Lucy Peppiatt](#), who teaches at [Westminster Theological Centre](#) and is the author of [Unveiling Paul's Women](#)

A Charismatic Journey

I remember very clearly, in my 30's, realizing that I wanted to study theology at degree level. I had no idea that it would end with me doing a PhD, leading a college, writing books, and teaching. It hadn't been a "career move"! I thought I was studying theology so that I'd be a better co-pastor with my husband and because I loved it. I also thought then that these were good enough reasons for all that study and investment, and I still think they are.

I couldn't fail to notice, however, that I was in a minority in my church circles. In fact, I didn't personally know any other women (and knew only a handful of men) involved in our world of charismatic Christianity in the UK who were studying or had studied theology to PhD level. And the ones who had pursued higher degrees had done it as part of ministerial training. I was a layperson who didn't really think I was being 'trained.' I was simply learning, and loving it.

Historically, evangelical charismatics have carried a suspicion of formal theological education. The fears were that you might become too critical, too jaded, too cynical, too cerebral to be fit for anything practical, or worst of all, lose your faith. Negative experiences of young people going off to study theology at university, only to be deconstructed and left in pieces, scared off the older generation all together and they warned young people not to pursue theology. Even I encountered this in my 30's from some well-meaning advisors. Thankfully, the mood has shifted a bit, both in the university and in the church. I meet more and more Christians in the evangelical charismatic world who really don't need to be persuaded that studying the Bible, Christian doctrine, and church history in an academic setting is a good thing! I also think that the academy has become more, not less, respectful of faith positions.

There's still more work to be done though, in persuading Christians that study and learning should be a normal part of their discipleship and growth in the faith. I don't really understand the resistance, but I still see it around me, so these are some of mine and others' thoughts on why all Christians should study some theology.

Perspectives: a professor

I listened to an [interview](#) recently with D. Stephen Long (Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University), who began by saying that the main reason

to study theology, the science of God, is because the study of theology is ‘a useless discipline.’ He goes on to explain what he means by that. He’s noticed over the years that, ‘If I need to give students a reason why that matters, then often those reasons become more important than the subject matter itself.’ The reason to study theology, the study of God, is to study God, and ‘Knowledge of God is an end in itself, it is not a means to something else. ... As Augustine put it, “God is to be enjoyed, not used.”’

His second reason though is that the uselessness has a ‘use function.’ (Useless doesn’t mean pointless.) The contemplation of truth, beauty, and goodness is part of the essence of what makes us more human.

In addition to this, he notes that there’s always been an awareness in the church that faith drives us to seek wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. This has been mine and countless others’ experience. You can’t know God and not want to know him more. Charismatics are great at singing about it—“I wanna know you more...”—not so great at engaging with the multiple ways that God has given us to do it!

The way to know God more in order to love him more, is to learn more about him. Of course that means seeking him and his presence in prayer, worship, and contemplation, and asking the Spirit to reveal the mysteries of God to our hearts, but it also means applying our minds in ways that we apply them to learning any subject: learning the original languages of the Bible, reading books, researching meaning, listening to teachers who are more learned than we are, asking questions, etc. The two pursuits should go together, and when they do, there are so many reasons why this helps us to be better Christians and more effective disciples.

Perspectives: a student

Out of interest I asked a bunch of charismatic Christians in their 20’s who had either studied academic theology, or were in the process of studying, or were about to start studying, why they had chosen to do what they were doing. Here’s what they came up with – and this is in no particular order.

It helps you to learn from others’ mistakes.

It gives you the ability to speak more precisely and truthfully about God.

It challenges your assumptions, which strengthens your ability to rebut sceptics/skeptics.

It gives you an idea of what the non-negotiables of the Christian faith are.

It keeps you from error and believing nonsense.

It means you can study your own traditions and learn about where you fit in in church history.

It gives you the opportunity to think about the pastoral implications of what you believe.

The truth sets you free and studying good theology sets you free.

It enables you to have an answer for the hope that's within you.

It shapes your character because what we believe defines us.

It feeds your mind and your spirit.

It gives you more confidence when people ask you questions about the Bible and your faith.

The church has often abused its power. It's important for all people to know what they believe and not leave it up to the leaders.

You have a duty and obligation to study your faith.

It's arrogant to assume you know all there is to know already, or that it's irrelevant to you, or that it might be at your fingertips should you want it.

It takes discipline and work and that's a good thing.

It deepens our worship of God.

It can be deeply moving and illuminating (someone remembered a story of a young man who just wept in response to understanding the implications of the incarnation).

It gives you tools for further learning, you find out where to look for more information and who to turn to for answers.

It is inspiring to know the stories and thinking of so many men and women through the ages who have known Jesus.

It's humbling to find that there's so much to discover, to realize that you don't know it all, and that no, you weren't the first person to think that.

I think that was most of what they said. Clearly, these are the comments of young people who have been strengthened and equipped by their studies for mission and discipleship, not disempowered. They came up with loads more than I had first had in my little list. There are only two things I would add. In my experience, it helps you to know why you disagree with other Christians and so hopefully, to disagree better. And they implied this, but I want to spell it out—good theology leads you to love God and love your neighbor better.

Those are a lot of good reasons! I want to add another perspective and that is from my experience as both a theology student, now a teacher myself, and a pastor of young people.

Perspectives: a pastor

There is something that grows in Christians, which happened to me and I've seen in others, which is a hunger for depth and substance that can only be met by intentional and disciplined study. Of course you can read books on your own, but it's not the same as being in a classroom, learning from someone who knows more than you, whose faith you respect, and whose character you admire. There is something compelling, in a world where the Christian faith is so often disparaged or dismissed, about a man or woman who has turned their impressive intellect into seeking God, studying the scriptures, turning over stones, considering other possibilities, and coming up with reasoned, intelligent, and biblically based answers for why you should put your whole trust in the person of Jesus Christ and your whole life into his hands.

Further to that, there's a delight you experience when someone takes a Bible story and explains the background, or the meaning of a word that you wouldn't have known otherwise, when they use their scholarship to bring the Bible to life. Or when someone shows you God in a different light that suddenly makes so much more sense to you because you feel maybe you knew it deep down but you couldn't have articulated it. Or when someone tells you about a time in church history where you see exactly the same issues that you're facing going around again and it helps you to work out what you think and how you should respond. Or when you hear a theologian's

comments on the society that you live in and you're able to step out of your culture for a second for a better and more enlightened perspective. Or when you read the writings of a Church Father or Mother on the nature of God that becomes an outpouring of praise and worship and you feel that too. If you're a Christian, it's about bringing all the aspects of your life together with time to reflect and think about who God is, why we think and do what we do, and how that might affect the world. It's the stuff of life.

I know that studying theology isn't always like that. Some books/authors can be dull, pompous, obscure, irritating, and just plain wrong ... but that is also half the fun of it! And I also know that if we had amazing teaching programmes in all our churches and all our conferences that we could maybe find those things there, but we all know that it's not like that. There's a more serious side to this conversation because the truth is that I was bored and frustrated in the charismatic church. I was bored of the talks that were just one story after another. I was tired of repetitive and me-centred worship. I was frustrated by simplistic answers that I knew weren't well thought through and were going to be pastorally disastrous. I think I was in danger of mentally drifting off and becoming disengaged. Theology won me over and kept me in the centre of the church in a way that I needed.

One of my little group of 20's said that he'd been warned off thinking too much on the grounds that if you engage your mind, you short-circuit the work of the Spirit. He joked that his church culture had taught that we're transformed by the removal of our minds! We don't want this. We don't want a brain drain. We need to attract and to keep the curious, the questioners, the seekers, the hungry, the bored. We need to feed them, nurture them, and engage them. We need to realize that teenagers and young people need more than cool youth leaders and worship songs. They need depth and good answers to their questions. I hope that WTC will be part of a change in culture in the charismatic church where it will become the most natural thing in the world for Christians to be educated in their faith.

WTC

Why do people not study? There's always the time and money thing, and I get that, but I think there are two bigger barriers. The barriers I see most are that theological study is seen as either intimidating or irrelevant—the stumbling blocks of the under- and over-confident!

We are doing everything we can at WTC to eliminate the stumbling blocks. We've created a place where it's not intimidating, it's not irrelevant, and where

it is affordable and accessible. We're trying to make sure that there are no more excuses, unless someone finds they are still too far from a Hub, and we're working on that.

I love our students and the enormous variety of people that turn up. All of them are Christians wanting to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of their faith, but for very different reasons. The majority of our students are from almost any sphere of work you could think of: the health service, accountancy, caring, farming, business, the charity sector, etc. They generally say they 'want to go deeper with God.' Others want to study to enrich their ministries in the local church. Some are paid by the church, are church leaders, or are preparing for church leadership. Still others are in recovery from addiction or building a new life having served a prison sentence. It all makes for interesting discussion in the classroom!

These are mostly people who come just to study applied kingdom theology for life and work. But we're also branching out in 2019 to begin two new vocational programmes in 'Kingdom Theology and Student Ministry' and 'Kingdom Theology and Church Planting and Leadership.' These are exciting new ventures and will offer more focused training.

I've already said that I really don't understand why someone wouldn't want to study theology, but I hope that this post will help those who are wondering why you would, what you'd get out of it, and if it's for them. I hope in a small way I've described why studying and teaching theology, the science of God, is challenging, exciting, and endlessly fascinating.

Article 3

10 Things You Should Know about Biblical Theology

February 10, 2017 by: [Chris Bruno](#)

1. Biblical theology is different than systematic and historical theology.

When some hear "biblical theology," they might assume that I'm talking about theology that is faithful to the Bible. While its goal is certainly to reflect biblical truth, the discipline of biblical theology is different from other theological methods. For example, the goal of systematic theology is to gather everything the Bible teaches about a particular topic or issue. For example, studying everything the Bible teaches about God or salvation would be doing

systematic theology. When we are doing historical theology, our goal will be to understand how Christians throughout the centuries understood the Bible and theology. So we might study John Calvin's doctrine of Christ. While both systematic and historical theology are important ways to study theology, biblical theology is a different and complementary theological discipline.

2. Biblical theology emphasizes God's progressive revelation.

Rather than gathering everything the Bible says about a particular topic, the goal of biblical theology is to trace the progressive revelation of God and his saving plan. For example, in [Genesis 3:15](#), God promised that the offspring of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent. But it is not immediately clear what this will look like. As this theme is progressively revealed, we find that this offspring of the woman is also the offspring of Abraham and the royal Son who comes from the tribe of Judah, Jesus the Messiah.

3. Biblical theology traces the storyline of the Bible.

Closely related to the previous point, the discipline of biblical theology also traces the unfolding story of the Bible. The Bible tells us one story about our Creator God, who made all things and rules over all. Our first parents, and all of us since then, rejected God's good rule over them. But God promised to send a Savior—and the rest of the Old Testament after [Genesis 3](#) points forward to that coming Savior. In the New Testament, we learn that the Savior has come and redeemed a people, and that he is coming again one day to make all things new. We can sum up this story in five words: creation, fall, redemption, new creation. Tracing this story is the task of biblical theology.

The Bible tells us one story about our Creator God, who made all things and rules over all.

4. Biblical theology uses the categories that the writers of Scripture themselves used.

Rather than looking first to modern questions and categories, biblical theology pushes us toward the categories and symbols that the authors of Scripture used. For example, the backbone of the biblical storyline is the unfolding revelation of God's covenants with his people. However, in the modern world, we don't tend to use the category of covenant very often. Biblical theology helps us get back to the categories, symbols, and ways of thinking that the human authors of Scripture used.

5. Biblical theology values the unique contributions of each author and section of Scripture.

God revealed himself in the Scriptures over the course of about fifteen hundred years through around forty different authors. Each of those authors wrote in his own words and even had his own theological emphases and themes. While all of these complement each other, a great advantage of biblical theology is that it provides us with a method for studying and learning from each author of Scripture. It can be helpful to harmonize the Gospels, but we also have to remember that God did not give us one Gospel account. He gave us four, and each of those four add a rich contribution to our overall understanding of the whole.

6. Biblical theology also values the unity of the Bible.

While biblical theology can provide us with a great tool for understanding the theology of each author of Scripture, it also helps us to see the unity of the Bible in the midst of all of its human authors across the centuries. When we view the Bible as a series of fragmented stories spread across the ages, then we fail to see the main point. As we trace the themes of the Bible that connect across the ages, we will see that the Bible tells us one story of one God who is committed to saving one people for his own glory.

7. Biblical theology teaches us to read the whole Bible with Christ at the center.

Since the Bible tells one story of the one God saving his people, we must also see Christ at the center of this story. One of the goals of biblical theology is learning to read the whole Bible as a book about Jesus. Not only must we see the whole Bible as a book about Jesus, but we must also understand how that story fits together. In [Luke 24](#), Jesus corrects his disciples for failing to see that the unity of the Bible actually points to the centrality of Christ. He calls them foolish and slow of heart to believe the Bible because they did not understand that the whole Old Testament teaches that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer for our sins and then be exalted through his resurrection and ascension ([Luke 24:25–27](#)). Biblical theology helps us understand the proper Christocentric shape of the whole Bible.

8. Biblical theology shows us what it means to be a part of God's redeemed people.

I noted above that biblical theology teaches us the one story of the one God who redeems one people. This discipline helps us understand what it means to be a member of God's people. If we keep tracing the promise of redemption from [Genesis 3:15](#), we find that this theme ultimately leads us to the Messiah Jesus. We also find that God's one people is not a single ethnic group or political nation. Instead, God's people are those who are united by faith to the one Savior. And God's people discover their mission by following in the steps of Jesus, who both redeems us and empowers us to continue his ongoing mission.

This accessible overview of biblical theology traces the development of sixteen key themes from Genesis to Revelation, showing how each theme contributes to the one main storyline of Scripture.

9. Biblical theology is essential for a truly Christian worldview.

Every worldview is really about identifying what story we live in. Our lives, our hopes, our plans for the future are all rooted in a much bigger story. Biblical theology helps us understand the story of the Bible clearly. If our story is a cycle of life, death, reincarnation, and rebirth, this will affect the way we treat others around us. If our story is part of a larger random pattern of unguided naturalistic evolution and eventual decay, this story will define the way we think about life and death. But if our story is part of the larger story of redemption—the story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation—then this will affect the way we think about everything around us.

10. Biblical theology leads to worship.

Biblical theology helps us see the glory of God across the Scriptures more clearly. As we see God's sovereign plan of redemption unfold in the single unified story of the Bible, as we see his wise and loving hand guiding all of history to bring it to his intended goals, as we see the repeated patterns in Scripture that point us to Christ, this magnifies God and helps us see his great worth more clearly. As Paul traced the history of God's plan of redemption in [Romans 9–11](#), it inevitably led him toward worship of our great God:

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” ([Romans 11:33-36](#))

So also for us, God’s glory must be the ultimate aim and goal of biblical theology.

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