

Bible - Interpretation

What is Biblical theology, and why is it important?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Biblical theology looks at the Bible "as it comes" — book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse. But Biblical theology and systematic theology must go hand-in-hand. A new, illegitimate "Biblical theology" movement rejects systematic theology, and the result is an unbalanced view of the Bible and the spread of false teaching.

A Shared Basic Principle

Like systematic theology, the legitimate discipline of Biblical theology is a method of studying God's Word that is founded on the principle that the Scriptures reveal a single God-ordained, well-ordered, coherent, and unchanging system of doctrine.

Systematic & Biblical Theology Compared

As we saw in a [previous article](#), the discipline of systematic theology looks at the Bible topically, collecting and organizing – not capriciously, but according to sound principles of interpretation – all the Scriptures pertaining to a particular question. (For example, "What does the Bible say about the Holy Spirit?")

On the other hand, Biblical theology looks at the Bible "as it comes" – book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. The study of Biblical theology results in an understanding of each book of the Bible based on questions such as these:

- Who were the human author(s)? (We must also always remember that all of Scripture is inspired by God and has a single divine author, the Holy Spirit.)
- What was the historical setting of the book?

- What was the cultural setting of the book?
- What literary forms are used (e.g., historical narrative, poetry, parable, teaching, prophecy, etc.)?
- What use, if any, is made of symbolism, and how should those symbols be interpreted?
- What is the outline of the book?
- What are its main messages?
- What is its relationship to the other books of the Bible?

When answering these questions, systematic theology must also be in the Bible student's mind. We must maintain an attitude of servanthood and submission to the Word of God by always remembering what systematic theology shows us: The Bible is a unified whole without contradictions, revealing a single God-ordained, well-ordered, consistent, and unchanging system of doctrine.

The "New" Biblical Theology: Man's Word Over God's

In the 20th century, a discipline arose that is also called "Biblical theology" (also known as redemptive-historical theology) which does not adhere to these principles. Instead, the adherents of this illegitimate study method impose their own perspectives upon Scripture, thus placing man's word in authority over God's. Sadly, this is the method increasingly taught in Bible colleges and seminaries today. In our [next article](#), we'll discuss this movement in more detail, and explain its dangers.

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[What does Paul mean by 'rightly dividing the Word of truth'?](#)

Despite what many teach today, the words in the Greek do not mean "to divide the Bible into sections".

What Is Grammatical-Historical Interpretation & Why Is It Important?

You can't know how to apply the Bible to life, unless you understand what the Bible really says.

Is the postmodern Biblical theology movement really Biblical?

The new "Biblical theology", a.k.a. redemptive-historical theology, puts man's wisdom above God's Word.

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