

Editorial: Preaching the Glory of Christ from a “Whole Bible”

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In all of Scripture, there is no greater subject matter than our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture speaks about many crucial issues, but none so important, glorious, and central than the person and work of Christ. Even a cursory reading of the NT reminds us that our Lord Jesus is the heart and center of the Bible's entire story, and thus central to the “whole counsel of God” and a proper understanding of the gospel. In fact, apart from Christ Jesus, we cannot understand the “whole” of Scripture along with its “parts,” its promises, and its main point.

The apostle Paul repeatedly underscores this truth in his letters, especially, for example, in Ephesians 1:9-10. In Christ, Paul reminds us, the “mystery,” or revelation/self-disclosure of God's eternal plan, is revealed so that we discover that all history is centered and “summed up” in him. This should not surprise us given who our Lord is. As John 1:1 reminds us: Jesus is the divine Son/Word who has been in relation with the Father

and Spirit from all-eternity. Through him, as Colossians 1:16 reminds us, the triune God created *all* things: “things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and *for him*.” And it is *this* Son who took on our human nature for our salvation (John 1:14), and in his life, death, and resurrection, and pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost has accomplished our eternal salvation. In fact, apart from him, there is no salvation and no eternal life: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:5).

Scripture is clear: in Christ alone, “all the promises of God find their “Yes” and “Amen” (2 Cor 1:20). In fact, one cannot understand God’s promises in the OT apart from him. Jesus himself reminded us of this fact. For example, Abraham not only believed God’s Word (Gen 15:6) but he also longed to see Jesus’s day (John 8:56; cf. Heb 11:13). Moses too wrote of Christ, and Jesus reminds the religious leaders that in reading the Torah, they should have now recognized him! (John 5:46-47; cf. 5:39). To emphasize the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture does not, as some think, downplay the centrality of the triune God since to be Christocentric is not anti-Trinitarian. Instead, to be Christ-centered reminds us that in God’s triune plan and work, there is a centrality to God the Son, and apart from him, we have no gospel *and* we cannot fully grasp the meaning of God’s Word.

What these truths entail, then, is that it is not only the NT that teaches us of Christ Jesus our Lord, but also the OT. Our Lord does not come to us in a vacuum. *He* is presented to us in light of the OT and the Bible’s entire storyline including the covenantal unfolding of Scripture starting in creation and culminating in the new creation. This is why Jesus reminded the two downcast disciples on the way to Emmaus that the entire OT spoke of him in terms of his death and resurrection (Luke 24:45-46). In the Son’s incarnation and work, the word of the prophets is now fulfilled (Heb 1:1-3; 1 Pet 1:10-12). After Pentecost, this truth about Christ is precisely what the apostles preached. All of them preached that “God foretold by the mouth of *all* the prophets that his Christ would suffer” (Acts 3:18; cf. 3:24), and thus demonstrated from the OT that its great subject matter was none other than Christ. In fact, Paul reminded Timothy that it was the Scripture (namely, in this context, the OT) that was able to make him wise

to salvation in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15-17). From the OT, then, Christ was to be preached and taught. Only in Christ, Paul reminded the Corinthian church, that the veil of the OT could be truly lifted, and that apart from Christ, the OT remained vague and opaque (2 Cor 3:14–15).

But this raises the important question: Given what Scripture teaches, how do we rightly preach Christ from the OT? Scripture assumes that we can, but the answer to the question often leads to a divergence of viewpoint even among evangelicals who affirm a common view of Scripture. Most evangelicals agree that a proper interpretation of Scripture must be true to the Bible’s own terms, but it is precisely over the Bible’s “own terms” that we disagree. Minimally, evangelicals agree on the following three points about Scripture. First, we agree that Scripture is God’s inspired, authoritative Word written through human authors and as such it is a unified, coherent, true revelation of God’s plan. Second, we agree that Scripture has come to us over time and thus in our reading of it, we must do justice to the unfolding nature of God’s plan, which ultimately reaches its fulfilment in Christ. Third, we further agree that we discover God’s intent through Scripture’s authors, and that as God’s plan is disclosed over time, later revelation helps clarify earlier revelation. This is why most evangelicals agree that the NT’s interpretation of the OT is crucial in helping interpret the details of the OT, since later revelation brings with it greater clarity, yet not in such a way that contravenes the earlier revelation. Instead the NT author’s develop the OT in ways that are consistent with the OT understanding, yet we do not fully grasp the meaning of the OT texts apart from their fulfilment in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the most part evangelicals agree on these basic points. So why is there still disagreement on how to interpret Scripture, especially regarding how we “find” Christ in the OT? The answer is multifaceted, but it is certainly worth reflecting on, especially its importance. In this issue of *SBJT*, we begin to tackle this question by listening in on the conversation between three well-known and respected evangelical scholars who tell us how they preach Christ from the OT. By listening in, we discover some of the reasons for the differences among us on this issue, thus becoming more aware of where we agree and disagree and why.

Our three main authors are Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress, who all presented a version of their articles at the National

Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November, 2017. Each author approaches Scripture with a commitment to its full authority, yet each differs on how they “find” Christ in the OT and apply a specific text, namely, Genesis 15:1-6, to us today in light of Christ. Daniel Block and Elliott Johnson both strongly emphasize that faithful Bible readers must interpret OT texts in light of their OT contexts, hence a strong commitment to grammatical-historical exegesis. Both are concerned to read Scripture according to human authorial intent and to avoid the danger of appealing to allegory or typology and thus potentially reading Christ “into” the OT in ways that violate the intent of the OT author. Block contends that we should preach the OT Christotelically instead of Christocentrically. Johnson, similar to Block, reads the OT in light of God’s first promise given in Genesis 3:15 which ultimately finds its fulfillment in Christ. Poythress’s approach, although similar in some respects to the other authors, is also different. Poythress stresses that OT texts can be appropriated in a multiplicity of ways, an approach he labels as Christocentric.

In addition, to thinking through the three approaches of our main authors to how we preach Christ from the OT, we also invited ten respected scholars to interact and respond to our main authors. When all is said and done, this issue of *SBJT* not only allows the reader to wrestle with the Christocentric vs. Christotelic vs. Christo-promise approach of our main authors, but also to learn from well-respected evangelicals who offer perceptive critiques and evaluations of each of these approaches. Ultimately, our goal and prayer is that this issue of *SBJT* will renew our commitment to rightly preaching Christ from a “whole Bible” for the life and health of the church.