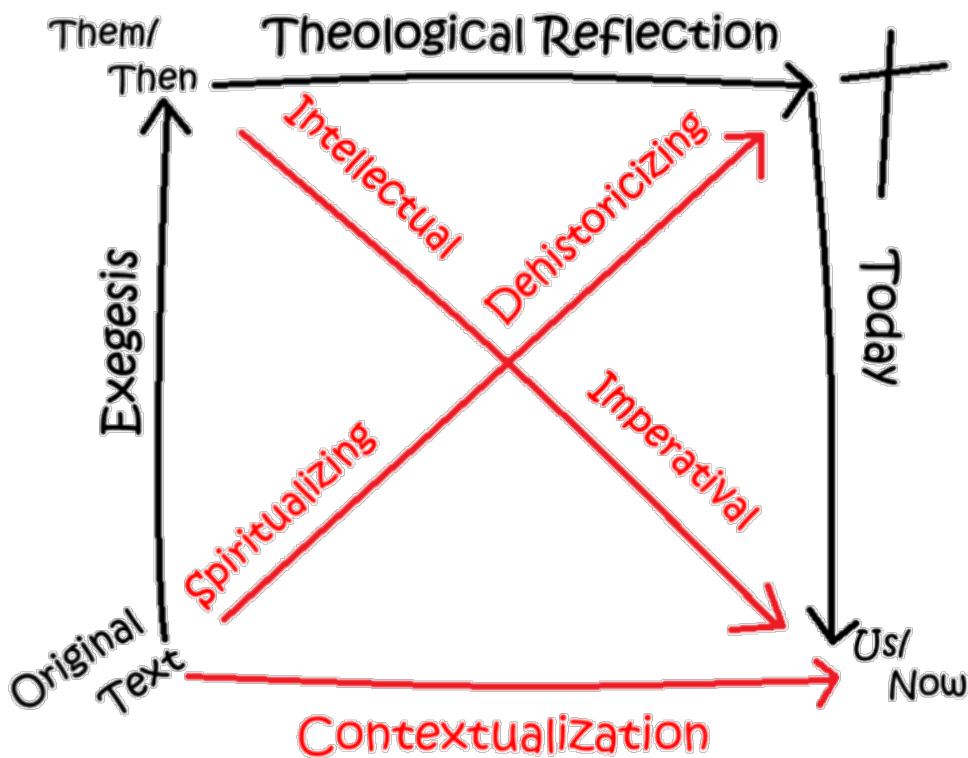


### Lecture 3 (Theological Reflection)

The best sermons are the sermons which are fullest of Christ. A sermon without Christ, it is an awful, a horrible thing. It is an empty well; it is a cloud without rain; it is a tree twice dead, plucked by the roots. It is an abominable thing to give men stones for bread, and scorpions for eggs, and yet they do so who preach not Jesus. A sermon without Christ! As well talk of a loaf of bread without any flour in it. How can it feed the soul?

- C. H. Spurgeon

Having spent much time prayerfully examining what the text says and beginning to understand the “gist” of the what the author is saying (including getting at the dominating theme and “3 am test), we need to move on to our next black arrow in the diagram. If exegesis is determining the “**what**” of the text, our next step is working to understand – and communicate clearly – the “**so what**” of the text. This is where we will need to crystallize our FCF and flesh it out for our hearers. It will also require us fitting our text into and interpreting it through, the overarching theme and purpose of the Scriptures: the gospel of Christ.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Helm says, “What is theological reflection? In simple terms, it is a rigorous and prayerful discipline of taking the time to meditate on my text and how it relates to God’s plan of redemption. It is an exercise that asks how my passage relates to the Bible as a whole, especially to the saving acts of God in Jesus. See Helm, David R. *Expositional Preaching (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (p. 62). Crossway. Kindle Edition.”

Expositional preaching that stops with exegesis becomes merely intellectual or overly imperatival. It becomes academic or moralistic. The next phase of sermon preparation is still required: theological reflection. Without this, you are not yet ready to preach.<sup>2</sup>

From our diagram, we see that without interpreting our text without our gospel glasses on, our messages will tend towards mere intellectualism or legalism. Of course, information and facts about the text are important, and keep us from spiritualizing or allegorizing<sup>3</sup>; however, if all we do is explain the passage, it will leave our hearers merely smarter – yet untransformed – sinners. Worse, we may be training up graceless legalists.

The tension the faithful preacher/teacher of the text must wrestle with is, “How do I reflect theologically on a biblical text without compromising its historical integrity?”

### The Importance of Biblical Theology

Many preachers are bad “proof-texters.” The Bible is not a box of Lego pieces that we can assemble into anything we want, and the faithful preacher will make sure he “follows the instruction manual.”

The discipline of biblical theology asks us to take a step back and look at the big picture of what God has said and done and see how it all relates to the epicenter of his revelation: the death and resurrection of his Son.<sup>4</sup> Or, as one preacher has famously put it: the Bible is the unfolding story of God’s coming kingdom and glory – in and through Christ.”

The best “tool” to acquire a good working BT is to simply read through the Bible. Spurgeon, often criticized for reading Christ into the text, is our best example of how to read – and interpret and preach – the Bible rightly in light of Christ. His secret: he knew his Bible – and not just portions or parts of it – through and through.

One of the best tools to introduce how to use BT in our interpretation and hermeneutics, I heartily commend Vaughn Roberts’ “God’s Big Picture.”<sup>5</sup> Another overlooked resource is simply finding a good preacher who is able to balance using “the historical-critical method” and “Biblical Theology” in their sermons.

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<sup>2</sup> Helm, David R.. *Expositional Preaching (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (pp. 61-62). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Again, Helm says, “If we preach in a way that treats the historical situation of our passage in the Old Testament as irrelevant and merely a springboard to the gospel, then we teach that the Bible is not really interested in history, and the Bible is mere moral mythology and not truth.” In Helm, David R.. *Expositional Preaching (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (p. 65). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Helm, David R.. *Expositional Preaching (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (p. 69). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> For a couple of his important diagrams, see <https://coramdeothelblog.com/resources/bible-timeline-overview/>.

Another important tool is a good reference Bible, especially one that details OT quotes and allusions in the NT.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, an indispensable tool for getting the “big picture” of the text and relating it to the gospel is the ESV Gospel Transformation Bible.

### The Role of Systematic Theology

Helm is once again helpful:

If biblical theology helps you to discern the progressive unfolding of God’s redemption plan in Christ, then systematic theology helps you to synthesize everything that the Bible says in the form of doctrines. It organizes Scripture logically and hierarchically, not historically or chronologically (as you would in biblical theology).<sup>7</sup>

For example, in our practice passage from Philippians 3, Paul is clearly teaching about “justification by faith.” After exegeting the passage (historical-critical), and then fitting it into the unfolding story of God’s redemption in Christ (Biblical theology), the preacher may want to “connect” the theological dots (systematic theology).

- What do the gospels teach about it?
- What about James?
- How about Peter?

Again, a really good cross-reference Bible is an indispensable tool to help us see where the truths of our passage are taught elsewhere.

### One More Step

We see from our preaching diagram that we need to carry out one more step: Application.

God willing, we will work through this in our next lesson.

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<sup>6</sup> Helm writes, “One can hardly flip a page in the New Testament without seeing an explicit reference to something in the Old Testament, not to mention the myriad allusions.” In Helm, David R.. *Expositional Preaching (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (p. 71). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Helm, David R.. *Expositional Preaching (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (p. 83). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Group Assignment: From Philippians 3:7-11:

1. How does understanding the “big picture” of the Bible storyline help us to faithfully determine, preach and apply the truths of our text?
  - For example, is the FCF of the text unique to this passage? Or is it something we could find in Genesis or Isaiah or Matthew?
  - How would tracing the biblical argument from Genesis to Revelation help you to preach and apply this text?
2. Though this passage clearly points to Christ, HOW does Christ fulfill the FCF of the text?
  - Other texts (e.g., OT) certainly find their terminus in Christ, and will require more time and development than passages that explicitly mention Christ and the gospel (e.g., Paul’s letters).
3. What other passages could be used to illustrate or illuminate our text for our hearers?
  - I.e., is there benefit in fleshing out what the Bible teaches about “righteousness” or “justification by faith” elsewhere be of help?