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# BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Introduction to the Bible  
Pastor Bucey

## INTRODUCTION

- Apart from God’s covenantal condescension unto us, we would never know him as our blessedness and reward.
- Everything we know is a result of revelation.
  - God serves as the foundation and ultimate reference point of all knowledge.
  - We come to know things truly, but always analogously to the way in which God knows.

## STUDYING THEOLOGY

- God’s revelation is the foundation for all our knowledge of God. Because of that fact, we must also recognize that the various theological disciplines relate to one another.
  - We cannot consider them independent silos of knowledge.
  - Rather, the subject matters interrelate and inform one another deeply.
- Systematic theology is concerned with asking the following: What does the Bible *as a whole* teach about any specific subject?
  - In other words, systematic theology seeks to organize the content of revelation topically. Traditionally, theologians have grouped these topics into several large divisions, called the theological loci<sup>1</sup>.
  - Whether systematic, historical, or practical, all theology must be a product of *exegesis*.
- There is a related discipline, which rarely ever receives its own department. It is known as “biblical theology”—a most curious name, since all theology should be “biblical.”
  - Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) is recognized as the father of Reformed biblical theology. Vos was the first professor to occupy the chair of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.
  - He battled the influence classic liberalism and modern biblical criticism.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIBLICAL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

- Johann Gabler (1753–1826) believed biblical theology was purely descriptive of the beliefs of the biblical authors.
- If we seek to organize the content of Scripture topically with no regard to the particular setting of Scripture, we may end up with a bare abstract conclusion that has little or nothing to do with actual covenant history.

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<sup>1</sup> “Loci” is a Latin word. It is the plural form of locus, which means “center” or “source.”

- Systematic theology must always be anchored by the concrete redemptive-historical context of Scripture. Scripture exists as an unbreakable unity, which forms the foundation requisite for systematic theology.
- If Scripture were not united, then we would have no proper basis to rest our abstractions and topical analyses.
- Scripture cannot be treated as a bare or flat compilation of discreet data. It is an organic, progressively unfolding, history of divine special revelation.
  - It's dynamic, and we cannot treat it as a static collection of truth independent of the times and places in which it was revealed.
  - God chose to speak to his people in varied ages and places as a means of nurturing his covenant communion bond.
  - Treating Scripture exclusively as a static whole would be to neglect this essential aspect of its character, and therefore it is important to take methodological steps to prevent such mishandling.
- To describe the history of special revelation, Vos used the metaphor of a seed.
  - As the seed is nourished, it begins to blossom eventually yielding a beautifully developed flower.
    - The principle and promise of the flower is there all along; it is *organic* to the process. That is, is the natural and intended result inherent within the seed.
    - Even while the *line* was being drawn, *circles* were being drawn as well.
  - Vos writes, "It should be remembered that on the line of historical progress there is at several points already a *beginning of correlation* among elements of truth in which *the beginnings of the systematizing process can be discerned.*"<sup>2</sup>
- We have already addressed the danger of abstracting the content of Scripture without reference to the concrete particulars of redemptive history. Another danger would be to concentrate on the individual concrete events of covenant history without respect to the whole.
  - This is an atomistic approach to Scripture in which every occasion is unrelated to the others. But you cannot read Scripture faithfully while wearing such blinders.
  - This is one way that systematic theology can regulate biblical theology.
- Systematic and biblical theology are not antagonistic.
  - Both rely upon exegetical theology, and they mutually contextualize, regulate, and inform each other.
  - Systematic theology should never be engaged apart from biblical theology, and *vice versa*.

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<sup>2</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 16.