

The Whole Counsel of God

Westminster's Integrated Curriculum



ΠΑΣΑ
ἡ ΒΟΛΗ
ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ



*Beale | Oliphint | Powlison
Tipton | Van Dixboorn | Duguid*



WESTMINSTER
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

EST. 1929

“

*“We endeavor to produce
specialists in the Bible . . . to
proclaim the whole counsel
of God.”*

— J. GRESHAM MACHEN, 1929



INTRODUCTION



Rigorous Training for a Rigorous Calling

To choose Westminster Theological Seminary is to choose a curriculum that since 1929 has been devoted to applying the highest quality of reformed scholarship to the task of ministry. Several fundamental principles underlie the curriculum:

Your studies at Westminster will be thoroughly exegetical. Nearly every degree requires students to work in the uniqueness of the original biblical languages. This requirement is necessary, not only for New Testament and Old Testament classes, but also for the other disciplines: apologetics, systematic theology, preaching, and the rest. We aim to equip you in such a way that your entire ministry will be shaped by careful exegesis of God's Word.

Your studies at Westminster will be thoroughly integrated. The theology of each of our departments depends on the others. Because each discipline derives its content and methodology from Scripture, each discipline necessarily draws on, as well as informs, all the others. The content and character of your apologetics courses will shape your counseling courses. You will become a better preacher while in your church history courses. You will become a better Old Testament exegete in your systematic theology courses. Our goal is for the whole counsel of God to shape your whole education—and therefore your whole ministry.

Your studies at Westminster will be thoroughly practical. Scholarship exists to serve the church. Every class is designed to strengthen your ministry. Although classes often will be rigorous as they engage numerous, important topics, they all have far-reaching impact for ministry. The further you engage the depth of God's Word, the more prepared you will be to lead God's flock through that Word.

A Single Choice for a Lifetime of Ministry

Over the course of only a few years, your seminary studies have the potential to impact the rest of your life and ministry. The faculty, the lectures, the reading lists, the study groups, the internships—everything will dramatically shape your understanding of the gospel and your effectiveness in ministry. A theological education is not only a profound opportunity, but also a critical choice. The character of your ministry will follow the character of your seminary education.

One of the most important decisions, then, that you can make for your ministry is to challenge yourself with a seminary education that aspires to the quality and goals that the Bible requires. Scripture commends to us the “noble task” of ministry (1 Tim 3:1). Scripture cautions us with the high responsibilities of the calling (James 3:1; Acts 20:27–28) and the critical role of right theology for the sake of effective ministry (1 Tim 4:6–7, 16).

Many factors matter in committing to seminary. Location matters. Cost matters. Time matters. Westminster offers convincing value in each of these. But more than these, content matters, because content is what you will take to your flock. The content you receive from the quality of faculty and theological training matters most, because it will shape your teaching, preaching, counseling, study, and ministry for all of the decades that follow. The following pages are intended to offer a taste of the training that students receive while at Westminster.



“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”

1 Corinthians 2:12–13



COVENANTAL APOLOGETICS





apologetics is not the foundation for Scripture; Scripture is the foundation for apologetics. A true apologetic is one that is built upon a philosophy according to Christ, rather than human tradition. Any defense of the Christian faith that is built upon Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Kant, or any other philosopher is not a Christian apologetic. The power to convict us of our sin and give true understanding resides in the gospel alone. Therefore, no matter how articulately unbelief is presented, thorough knowledge of God's Word is the best preparation to demonstrate the deceitfulness of human wisdom.

Covenantal apologetics is not a formula that is merely rehearsed when someone questions the truth of God's existence. A covenantal apologetic brings the manifold wisdom of God to the many ways people suppress the truth in unrighteousness. It seeks to display how our suppression of the truth always reveals itself in both our words and deeds. Covenantal apologetics presents true wisdom—which is rooted in Christ. The following pages demonstrate Westminster's unique approach to apologetics.



THE IRRATIONALITY OF UNBELIEF

by K. Scott Oliphint



Every single individual, universally and eschatologically, either remains covenantally bound to Adam or is, by faith, covenantally bound to Christ.

In the latter half of Romans 1 and into Romans 2, Paul has one overarching concern, which is to explain just how the wrath of God is made manifest among those who are outside of Christ, those who remain in Adam. In order to make clear the effects of God's wrath as it is now revealed, Paul directs us both backward, to the beginning of creation itself, and forward, to the outworking of God's wrath for those who are covenant-breakers in Adam.

There are a number of helpful and enlightening projects that could be pursued with great benefit, both theologically and apologetically, in this passage. Given the limitations of space, however, we will confine ourselves in this brief study to those aspects of Paul's analysis that will help us understand how unbelief is inherently irrational. In order to do that, we should begin with the cause of God's wrath in the lives of those who remain in Adam, and then show the effects of that cause.

As noted, when Paul begins his discussion of the revelation of God's wrath from heaven, he has two primary aspects of that

wrath in view: the cause and the effects. He gives the universal scope of the cause itself in Romans 1:18. God's wrath is revealed from heaven "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." It is ungodliness (*asebeian*/ἀσεβείαν) and unrighteousness (*adikian*/ἀδικίαν) against which God's wrath is revealed. But Paul goes on to define in a striking way what motivates God's wrath toward all who are in Adam, all who are covenant-breakers. He introduces a specificity to this unrighteousness; it is an unrighteousness that is defined essentially as a suppression of the truth.¹

Verse 18, then, is a general announcement of the fact that God's wrath is revealed, and of the reason for that wrath. The cause of God's wrath toward us is our unrighteous suppression of the truth. In other words, God's wrath is revealed from heaven because, in our wickedness and unrighteousness (in Adam), we hold down (in our souls) that which we know to be the case. Within the context of this general announcement, however, Paul knows that he has introduced two concepts, suppression and truth, that will necessarily need clarification. In verses 19–23 (and, to some extent, v. 25 as well), Paul develops and amplifies the notions of "suppression" and of "truth."

If we take verses 18–32 as a unit, we can see how Paul puts flesh on his (so far skeletal) notion of "truth" as he reiterates what he means by truth in verses 19, 20, 23, and 32 (with v. 25 simply repeating the notion of "the truth of God"). In each of these verses, Paul gives more specificity to the concept of truth mentioned in verse 18. We shall take these verses together in order to understand what Paul means by "the truth" that is suppressed.

In verse 19, Paul tells us that by "truth" he means that which is "known about God." The truth that is suppressed, therefore, is specifically truth *about God*. The way in which we come to know this

truth is twofold. We come to know it, in the first place, because it is evident (*phaneron*/φανερὸν) among us. Paul will expand this idea in the next verse. Before that, however, he wants us to understand just how this truth, this knowledge of God, is evident or clear among us.

This is vitally important for Paul. It is vitally important, as we will see, both because Paul is concerned with *God's* activity in revealing himself (more specifically, his wrath) and, in tandem with that, because Paul wants to highlight the contrast between what *God* is doing in this revelation, on the one hand, and what we (in Adam) do with it, on the other.

So, Paul says immediately (even before he explains the sweeping scope of what is evident among us) that the reason that God's revelation is evident among us is that *God has made it evident to us*.

We should be clear here about Paul's emphasis. What Paul is concerned to deny in this context is that we, in our sins, as covenant-breakers in Adam, would ever, or could ever, produce or properly infer this truth that we have, this knowledge of God, in and of ourselves. Paul wants to make sure that we are not tempted to think that the truth of God, as evident among us, is evident because we have marshaled the right arguments or have set our minds in the proper direction. His point, at least in part, in this entire section, is to remind us of the devastating effects sin continues to have on our thinking (in Adam). The truth that we know—that we retain, possess, and suppress—therefore, is truth that is, fundamentally and essentially, *given* by God to us. God is the one who ensures that this truth will get through to us. It is his action, not ours, that guarantees our possession of this truth.

The truth that we all, as creatures in Adam, know and suppress is a truth about God. Even more specifically (v. 20), it is a truth con-

cerning the “invisible” things of God, his eternal power and deity. What might Paul mean by this description? While it is perhaps not possible to be absolutely definitive, it seems that Charles Hodge is right in his assertion that what Paul has in mind here are “all the divine perfections.”² Had Paul wanted to limit his description, he would more likely have delineated exactly what characteristics of God were known through creation.

This truth that we all know, then, is the truth of God’s existence, infinity, eternity, immutability, glory, wisdom, and so forth. As Paul is developing this thought in verse 23, he speaks of this knowledge of the truth as “the glory of the incorruptible God.” It is this that we all know as creatures of God. It is this that God gives, and that we necessarily “take” as knowledge, which comes to us by virtue of his natural revelation.

Two important aspects of this knowledge of God are crucial to see. First, we should be clear about the context for this knowledge. It is not knowledge in the abstract of which Paul speaks. He is speaking here of a knowledge that ensues on the basis of a real relationship. It is not the kind of knowledge we might get through reading about someone or something in a book or in the newspaper. This is relational, *covenantal*, knowledge. It is knowledge that comes to us because, as creatures of God, we are always and everywhere confronted with God himself. We are, even as we live in God’s world every day, set squarely before the face of the God who made us and in whom we live, move, and exist. This, then, is decidedly *personal* knowledge. It is knowledge of a person, of *the* Person, whom we have come to know by virtue of his constant and consistent revealing of himself to us.

This personal aspect of the knowledge we have is made all the more prominent in verse 32. This verse serves as a transition between Paul’s exposition of God’s wrath revealed in chapter 1,

and the revelation of God's law in chapter 2. Notice that Paul can affirm that those who are in Adam “know the ordinance of God.” This knowledge of the ordinance (*to dikaiōma*/τὸ δικάϊωμα) of God is coterminous with our knowledge of God. To know God, in the way that Paul is affirming here, is to know (at least something of) God's requirements. Along with the knowledge of God, in other words, comes the knowledge “that those who practice such things are worthy of death.” Instead of repenting, however, we, in Adam, rejoice in our disobedience and attempt to gather others who share in our rebellion. Therefore, because this knowledge is a relational knowledge, and because the relationship is between God and the sinner, God ensures that we all know that the violations of his law in which we willingly and happily participate are capital offenses; they place us under the penalty of death. Our knowledge of God is a responsible, covenantal knowledge that brings with it certain demands of obedience.

Second, Paul is emphatic that this knowledge of God, as given to us, is abundantly clear and is understood. There is no obscurity in God's revelation. It is not as though God masks himself in order to keep himself hidden from his human creatures. The problem with the natural revelation of God—and on this we need to be as clear as possible—is *not* from God's side, but from ours.

With the preceding discussion in mind and in the background, we can move to the material in Romans 1 that bears more directly on our announced topic, the irrationality of unbelief. In clarifying what is meant by “truth” in verse 18, Paul at the same time begins to clarify what he means when he says that, in Adam, we *suppress* that truth. It is this suppression, we will begin to see, that is the cause of, and the impetus behind, the irrationality that is our sin.

As Paul is explaining what he means by truth, he is also pouring content into the notion of suppression that he introduced in verse

18. It is in verses 22, 23, and 26 that we see Paul explaining what suppression is. What we immediately notice in these verses is that the notion of suppression is characterized by what Paul calls an *exchange*. The suppression, which is part and parcel of our own sinfulness, is worked out, says Paul, by the fact that we take this glory of God (which is the truth we have from him) and exchange it for an image.

This, then, begins to explain the utter irrationality of creatures who remain in Adam. We have, as creatures made in God's image, the truth of God. To use Paul's strong and decisive terminology, we *know* God. We have this knowledge of the truth by virtue of his (merciful) revelation to us. This knowledge of God comes to us through everything that God has made (which is as universal as one can imagine, since it includes everything but God himself). Yet, instead of acknowledging God's revelation (and repenting on the basis of it), we twist and pervert it, turning it into (exchanging it for) something false, something of our own imaginings, something that we ourselves have invented. We take this truth, which should cause us to bow down and worship God, and to be thankful (v. 21), and we fashion it into an idol. All of us, in Adam, are experts at inventing idols.

We should remember here that our idolatry stems not from ignorance, not from a futile attempt to fill a void in our lives. It results always from a perversion of the truth, a twisting of reality. It stems from denying the way things are and attempting to create a world of our own making. It is idolatry, therefore, that lies at the root of our sin, and thus at the root of our irrationality. In Adam, we convince ourselves that what we know to be the case is untenable. What we necessarily understand, we sinfully attempt to hold down. We sinfully exchange our true knowledge of God, which he graciously gives, for false gods and images.

These images, Paul wants us to remember, are not simply things that we make and leave behind. Images, as idols, are not decorative mantel pieces or innocuous statues. Paul makes clear, in strong religious language, that, as a matter of fact, these images are made in order that we might worship (*sebazomai*/σεβάζομαι) and serve (*latreuō*/λατρεύω) them (v. 25). We should see, then, that the activity in which we are engaged as sinners apart from Christ is an activity that is rooted and grounded in an illusion. Instead of worshipping God, we make other things that we can worship. We bow down to those things as if they were the true God, and thus we create for ourselves a complex web of self-deception.

This is why Paul notes, in verse 25, that our suppression involves an exchange of the truth of God for a lie. However much we might want to retain certain elements of the truth we have been given, we only retain that which will serve our own idolatrous purposes. The whole of our lives, in sin, is seen to be a running away from the obvious, a holding down of what is in front of us always and everywhere, in order to build a world based on lies and deception.

If we think, therefore, of irrationality as a disjunction between ourselves and the world as it really is, this pattern of exchange and illusion is a quintessential expression of such a disjunction. It is what robs us of being truly human—it is what is always at work to dehumanize us.³

Lest there be any questions about the irrationality of this idolatry, Paul turns us to the effects of God's wrath on those who persist in it. In his discussion of God's-wrath-as-a-result-of-suppression, Paul outlines the general parameters of the effects of this suppression in the lives of those who are covenant-breakers in Adam. In this discussion, a general pattern emerges. The pattern looks something like this: suppression (*katechō*/κατέχω, v. 18) is essentially an exchange (*allassō*/ἀλλάσσω, v. 23; *metallassō*/μεταλλάσσω, vv. 25, 26),

which brings about God's giving over (*paredōken/παρέδωκεν*, vv. 24, 26, 28) those who are in Adam to more and more sinful behavior.

But Paul does not want us to think that only the most obvious of perversions qualify as irrational. He gives us an impressive list of all kinds of sins, so that we might see, as Jesus himself said, that it is out of the heart (of suppression and exchange) that evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, and other sins come (see Matt 15:18f.). All sin, *as sin*, is rooted in an irrationality that seeks in earnest to deny what is obvious and to create a world that is nothing more than a figment of a sinful imagination.

The apologetic implications of this passage are deep and wide. Among the most important is the fact that every person on the face of the earth is, by virtue of being created in God's image, a God-*knower*. No person operates in a religious vacuum. No person is outside the bounds of God's covenant relationship. Those who are in Adam are, nevertheless, in a covenant-breaking relationship with the God who made and who sustains them.

In our defense of Christianity, therefore, we may be confident in the fact that, even before we begin our defense, God has been there, dynamically and perpetually making himself known through every single fact of the unbeliever's existence. Our apologetic is, then, in a very real sense, a reminder to the unbeliever of what he already knows to be the case.

Much more needs to be pursued, but space constraints draw this to a close. We should note, however, in conclusion, that the end result of God's revelation to his human creatures is that they are rendered, centrally and essentially, without excuse. The word Paul uses here (used here alone in the New Testament) can be rendered, literally, "without an apologetic" (*anapologētos/ἀναπολογήτους*, Rom

1:20). If we think of what it means to have no excuse, no defense, we realize that there is, as a matter of fact, no reason to be given for a particular offense or violation. This is Paul's meaning here. In spite of any attempt to explain or give a rational account of sin, those outside of Christ will never be able to find a reason for the rejection of the obvious. The irrationality of unbelief, as Paul will go on to explain in the book of Romans, finds its only terminus in its own demise. That demise is met at the cross and becomes ours through faith in Christ.

The *mysterium iniquitatis*, as the suppression and grotesque exchange of the knowledge of God, is only defeated in the Great Exchange of the gospel, the *mysterium Christi* (Col 1:27).

Dr. Scott Oliphint is professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. BS, West Texas State University, 1978; MAR, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1983; ThM, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1984; PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1994.

¹ We are taking the prepositional phrase *en adikia* to be instrumental rather than adverbial. See John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

² Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 37.

³ So, says Ridderbos, "as communion and life with God imply true manhood, so alienation from God means the corruption, indeed the destruction of human existence." Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 112.



We have compiled a list of resources that you may use to find more detailed information on specific subjects that were covered in this article.



FURTHER READING



Oliphint, K. Scott. *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Oliphint, K. Scott, and Lane Tipton, ed. *Revelation & Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007.

Oliphint, K. Scott. *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006.

Van Til, Cornelius. *The Defense of the Faith*. Edited by K. Scott Oliphint. 4th edition. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.

Van Til, Cornelius. *Christian Apologetics*. Edited by William Edgar. 2nd edition. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003.

Edgar, William. *Reasons of the Heart*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996.

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998.

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*. Edited by Joel McDurmon. Braselton, GA: American Vision, 2010.



“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 4:15–16

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD



BIBLICAL COUNSELING





Scripture knows man better than man knows himself. The Word of God speaks to every form of human sin and suffering. It accurately reveals our true problem: guilt before a holy God. And it accurately reveals the only solution: faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No secular theory crafted by man—whether by Freud, or Skinner, or Frankl, or anyone else—has the piercing, diagnostic insight of Jesus Christ. Christ and his Word alone can pierce the depths of the human psyche. No matter how simple or complex the situation, confidence that we truly move toward people with wisdom comes only when we move toward them with Scripture and the gospel.

Biblical counseling is not the application of a step-by-step formula aimed at behavior modification, or a positive reinforcement model hoping to boost self-esteem. Biblical counseling is the application of a Person to the details of someone's life. It is based on a relationship aimed at heart modification, in humility and esteem toward God. This relationship offers true sanity—that which dwells in Christ alone. The following pages demonstrate our unique approach to counseling.



A BIBLICAL COUNSELING VIEW

by David Powlison



Christian faith *is* a psychology. A coherent, comprehensive understanding of how people work is intrinsic to thinking Christianly. The revelation of Jesus Christ offers a distinctive interpretation of the “thoughts and intentions of the heart,” those schemata and motivations that structure and animate human behavior. Scripture offers a distinctive interpretation of “nature” (i.e., constraints and potentials of the body) and of “nurture” (i.e., enculturating voices and interpersonal experiences). God reveals a distinct image of human flourishing toward which counseling aspires, and a distinctive change process by which we move toward that ideal. A Christian understanding systematically differs from how other psychologies explain the same phenomena.

Christian ministry *is* a psychotherapy. Intentional, constructive conversation is indispensable to practicing Christianly. The revelation of Jesus Christ creates a distinctive understanding of methodology, a distinctive social location for counseling practice to flourish. This care and cure for the soul systematically differs from how other psychotherapies deal with the same problems in living.

This is not to say that a Christian psychology and psychotherapy come ready-made in the pages of the Bible. Nothing comes ready-made. Biblical counseling wisdom is an ongoing construction project,

like all practical theological work. It is one outworking of biblical faith into the particulars of our time, place, problems, and persons.

Our call to do this work raises the question of how Christian faith and practice relate to other psychologies and psychotherapies that inhabit our sociocultural surroundings. What are the similarities and differences between other psychologies and Christian faith, between other psychotherapies and Christian practice? How do other psychologies and psychotherapies challenge us? What helpful things can we learn from them? (Christians ask these questions.) What should they learn from us? How do we challenge them? (To their detriment, non-Christian psychologists don't ask these questions.) We share all things in common regarding subject matter. We share a desire to help make right what goes so wrong in personal and interpersonal life. Yet we see with different eyes and proceed with different intentions. The similarities, analogies, and commonalities create reasons for extensive interaction, expecting to learn from each other. The differences, disparities, and antinomies create reasons for thoughtful disagreement, seeking to persuade each other.

This article will mention several underlying assumptions of a Christian point of view and indicate orienting implications for how we understand and help people.

“Believe so that you may understand,” as Augustine put it. Disbelieve, and you discard the key to true knowledge. Misbelieve, and you systematically deviate from reality. Unbelieve, and you forfeit even “the beginning of wisdom.” Believe so that you may understand, or Jesus’s words will bite: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?” (Luke 6:39). Wisdom keeps the true God consciously in view when considering humankind. You may accumulate an infinitude of psychological facts, encyclopedic information about people, but without keeping God in view, T. S. Eliot’s (1963) words will bite: “Where is the wisdom

we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" Wisdom is the crown jewel: "nothing you desire can compare" (Prov 3:15).

Believe so that you may understand. This is obviously the case when it comes to knowing God. But it equally applies to understanding persons who intrinsically *are* image of God, accountable to God, deviant from God, and renewable by God. The psyche's dynamics operate Godwardly—whether we know it or not, whether a theory reckons with it or not, whether a therapy addresses it or not.

Let's briefly orient to underlying assumptions of this Christian point of view, noting a few psychological implications. We'll start by considering three strands of the Nicene Creed.

First, we believe that God is the *maker of all that is*. By implication, we have been handmade by a Person, down to the idiosyncrasies of personal history and social location; of genetic code, hormone levels, disease process, and dying; of individual quirk, character, and bent of heart. Every person exists as a dependent and operates vis-à-vis this Person of persons to whom we owe our lives. To be fully human is to know and love this Person to whom we owe our lives. To be fully human is to know and love this Maker by name. Such knowing is the pervasive psychological reality in a sane human being: heart, soul, mind, and might. Such sanity fully takes to heart the interests and welfare of other persons besides oneself. Christian faith understands psychology and psychotherapy as implications and outworkings of this God-centered point of view. We are told about God and we realize the God-referential psychodynamic running through every human heart. When other psychologies abstract people out of this true context, they theorize about an abstraction, never quite seeing the person. They will manufacture, research, and counsel a humanoid, while the essential humanity slips through their fingers.

Second, we believe that the Lord is *judge of the living and the dead*. By implication, we are thoroughly known and evaluated: the innermost thoughts and intentions; the cries of anguish, confusion, outrage, fear, or joy; every casual word or habitual choice—always amid the threats, pains, and constraints, the hopes, felicities, and opportunities of physical and social circumstance. The one who searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought, the one to whom we must give account, misses nothing and considers everything (1 Chr 28:9; Heb 4:13). Actual psyches love either God or something else. A fierce Christlessness is the universal, obsessional neurosis. God is jealous for our loyalty, and he notices whenever other choices condition current psychological reality. He finds us wanting, fatally flawed by self-serving bias as the pervading psychological reality. Life and death hang on what happens next.

Third, most wonderfully, we believe that Christ *came down for us and for our salvation*. By implication, we've not been left to ourselves and our fate. God pursues us in person. All that goes wrong—our sins and miseries, a body breaking down, a social world breaking down, the madness in our hearts (Eccl 9:3)—can and will be made right by Christ. “He restores my soul” (Psalm 23:3). The restoration of our humanity involves restoring our primary relationship. The restoration of our humanity is a psychological reality, among other things, engaging every aspect of psychological functioning: sense of identity, operations of conscience, thought, feeling, choice, memory, anticipation, attitudes, relationships. Psychotherapy ought to restore your soul. It ought to cure you of your variant on the universal, obsessional neurosis and make you sane.

Maker, Judge, and Savior, orient us as we seek to make sense of the psychological functioning of creatures who are made, judged, and redeemable. The implications hold true down to the microscopic individual details of human psychology. Of course, this credo supplies none of the myriad psychological facts and details—far

from it. There's work to do and much to learn from many sources. But the credo orients, teaching us to see facts in their true context.

Dr. David Powlison is executive director and professor of biblical counseling at CCEF and adjunct professor of practical theology at Westminster. AB, Harvard College, 1971; MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980; MA, University of Pennsylvania, 1986; PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 1996.



We have compiled a list of resources that you may use to find more detailed information on specific subjects that were covered in this article.



FURTHER READING



Powlison, David. *Seeing with New Eyes*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003.

Powlison, David. *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010.

Poirier, Alfred. *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006.

Welch, Edward T. *Blame it on the Brain: Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998.

Welch, Ed. *When People are Big and God is Small*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997.

Lane, Tim, and Paul Tripp. *How People Change*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008.

Smith, Winston. *Marriage Matters: Extraordinary Change Through Ordinary Moments*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010.

Emlet, Michael R. *Descriptions & Prescriptions: A Biblical Perspective on Psychiatric Diagnoses and Medications*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2017.



“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

2 Timothy 1:13–14



CHURCH HISTORY





Ministry is never done in a vacuum. Understanding where the church has been in the past is vital to understanding where it is in the present. Thus, every pastor, teacher, or counselor for the church must have knowledge of the heritage passed down from generation to generation. This is not to say that the creeds and confessions of men are as authoritative as Scripture. Yet it is short-sighted and against biblical wisdom to neglect the great advances and tragedies the church has experienced through the ages. Christ's presence with his people, guiding them in truth, did not begin yesterday.

Since this is the case, a mere survey of church history will not suffice in training future church leaders. Our understanding of church history must be thorough. Idolizing those who came before us is not beneficial to training for pastoral ministry; we must highlight the strengths and weaknesses of our heritage. Prideful hindsight must also be challenged when studying church history—many sacrificed more than will ever be asked of us. It is through the faith and witness of our church fathers that we shall continue to follow the patterns of sound words and guard the good deposit handed to us.



CONFESSING CHRISTIANITY: YESTERDAY'S REFORMATION FOR TODAY'S REFORMATION

by Chad Van Dixboorn



The word “confessing,” I confess, is a little bit vague. We use the word when we are admitting that we could have done better, or when owning that we’ve actually done wrong. In places where a life dedicated to Christ is unappreciated or even illegal, confessing to Christianity means confessing to a crime—at least in the eyes of our opponents.

By confessing Christianity, I mean something at once more positive and more precise. I am thinking of confessing as professing. I want to make the case for a Christian faith that affirms an allegiance to Christ, but also affirms a body of truth that we love and teach because of Christ. I mean something like “creedal Christianity” and, if I was having better day, I might have picked those words as the title to this reflection. But maybe not. Because a creed is a short statement about the Christian faith and a confession is a longer one—and my main point is that churches today need more truth, not less, to confess.

The great creeds were written in the early centuries of the church, and are almost universally accepted. The great confessions came into their own during the Reformation and, while accepted by a smaller subset of Christians, they enjoy the advantage of speaking a higher quantity of truth. But already I’m talking as though there

are only two options! As though each of us, as we reach the end of this chapter, will have the opportunity to choose either a creed or a confession. We all know that this is too simplistic, for there is a third option.

For our convenience, I've given the third option a kind of fancy "in-house" label, trusting you'll pardon the professional jargon: this third way is called the "ten-bullet-points-on-the-website" option. And I'm guessing readers know what I'm talking about: it's a brief list of basic Bible doctrines, like believing in the Bible and loving Jesus and four steps to becoming a Christian.

Now these are enormously important bullet-points! And churches that choose to use ten-bullet-points-on-the-website (or TBPOTW for our convenience) have this in common with churches using creeds and confessions: they are aiming to be honest, especially about what is most important for us to believe. Honesty is the original impulse behind almost every statement of faith. Cults hide what they believe until you're so far in to the riptide that you can't do anything about it. Honest churches do the opposite: they announce what they do believe (in the best creeds and confessions) and even a few things that they don't. We could say more: the best doctrinal summaries also promote church unity. They help us to identify, through a common set of priorities and teachings, what we have in common with other Christians. And even that is not all. In the third place, these summaries also have the potential to create peace in the church, since people coming to the church will readily be able to see what it teaches, and will be able to compare it with the Scriptures, which is the only basis on which Christian teaching should be built.

Not long ago a friend asked what I'd say if I had thirty seconds with someone in an elevator and had to explain why I think confessing Christianity is important. I've not yet had that happen, but

I think I know what I'd say: (1) its honest; (2) it promotes church unity; and (3) it promotes truth. If my conversation partner was heading to the tenth floor, I'd add a fourth reason: (4) that a good confession makes a great teaching tool.

Now to be fair, and as I've already hinted, I don't think that these different types of doctrinal summaries are all created equal. Creeds have the highest chance of bringing people together since they are so old, (the creeds, not the people) and so widely accepted, that almost any Christian can sign on the dotted line. Website summaries are the least useful for unity. They are like snowflakes. Each of them is beautiful; no two are alike.

Of course traditional creeds and website creeds can be used for teaching, and many pastors will use such summaries to organize an annual sermon series on what the church believes. But although they are much better than nothing, they don't do much for the peace of the church. Although they say what is true, they don't say very much truth. Indeed, they sometimes state only one or two of those truths with any precision. It seems possible that congregations and their leaders would be better served with fuller statements of faith. Among the benefits that we might mention in conjunction with fuller statements of faith, there is this: churches looking for a pastor will be able to say what they want him to believe, and pastors looking for churches can point to what they are eager to teach.

Having said all that, I might as well tell you what I really think. I could be wrong—I often am—but it appears to me that evangelicals have been deliberately minimalistic with their doctrine in order to unite us in what we think are our most important endeavors. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say this as everyone is very much caught up in the current political situation, but it sometimes seems that what we truly want are moments of buoyant hope in the arena

of politics, and thus we don't want to be weighed down with too much doctrine in our ecclesiastical settings.

Unfortunately, it takes more than a few doctrinal points hastily batten down to help us survive the storms of life. And what is true on an individual level is also true on a corporate level. The church is often at sea, tossed about by every wave of change. Of course longer creeds are not the panacea to all the church's problems, not least because there are some long creeds that are incorrect. And yet while any single-cause explanation to a problem is suspicious, I do wonder if one of the problems with the church in the English-speaking world is that it has so little weight, no anchor to keep it still so that we can see and analyze and respond to the powerful currents in the culture around us.

Admittedly, the church's experiment with doctrinal minimalism has only been conducted for about a century. Not all the data is in, and the results might look better in a few decades. But perhaps it's time for the church to tinker with theological maximalism. I think the case can be made that we need a confessing Christianity with some real substance.

That is why this brief reflection has a subtitle: it's because I have become convinced that the most useful material for life today can be found in the confessions of the Reformation. As an historian, and as a Christian, I have an appreciation for a number of the classic statements produced during the Reformation, from the mid-1500s to the mid-1600s (all of which are now available in English).

But I've come to identify with one of these confessions more than the rest. The Westminster Confession of Faith, written at the very end of a long Reformation, holds out a large faith for Christians to own. It extends a welcome introduction to the triune God and his work, an unusually robust statement of the gospel of Christ,

a celebration of very good news that is not too good to be true.

Now let me be quick to say that in commending this classic creed and commenting on it, I am not writing as someone without sympathy for modern conversations in theology. Nor do I think this confession is flawless. Nonetheless it is very good. It is a text rich in theology, offering a wealth of biblical and doctrinal reflection. It is a text from which all evangelical Christians could derive much benefit if it was carefully studied. It is a text that leads us back to Scripture, back to God himself. And due to the unusual circumstances surrounding its creation, this text has a surprising vitality and relevance for our own ecclesiastical and cultural moment.

But I'm not apologizing for a text produced in 1646. I consider its age to be more of a benefit than a liability; it is good to study texts that remind us that Christianity was not invented during the Bush administration. And the vintage of this text has only given it time to mature, and to be appreciated by millions of Christians around the world who are united by the doctrines it teaches.

Clearly I'm lobbying for the Westminster Confession of Faith, although I think it's the kind of lobbying that evades the force of the Lobbying Disclosure Act: I used to live near Washington, DC, but I'm not trying to get my government to adopt a confession for everyone, only to get more Christians to consider it for themselves.

That said, this confessional text and its catechisms have relevance to those in public life, including those in government. The Confession contains chapters explicitly about communal concerns, such as the civil government, oaths and vows, or marriage. It offers discussions on "Christian liberty" and "church-state relations"—discussions that are better in the American revised version than in the original British version. And then there are theological topics with public relevance as well.

If I may choose an ugly topic, let me mention, by way of example, the subject of sin. No ten-line summary of the Christian faith is complete if it does not mention sin as a problem that is solved by Jesus on the cross. Such a summary is true, gloriously true, so far as it goes. For all who will trust in the holy person and sacrificial substitution of Jesus Christ, the guilt and penalty and shame of sin is wiped away; on the judgement day, the accuser will have no arguments to match our advocate, for the wounds of our risen Savior will eloquently plead our case. That is the best part of the story, but it is not the whole story. Regrettably a fuller summary has to go on to say that it is also the case that a “corruption of nature, during this life, remains in those that are regenerated.”

In other words, the problem of sin remains even with the most saintly. It is a simple fact. It has profound implications. It means that Christians have a point of contact with non-Christians. It means that we have a lot in common with people with whom we disagree, and that when we see their faults or their foolishness, we are reminded of our own. Ongoing sin means that if we are on a better course, it must be due to the ongoing graciousness of God and not something for which we should be patting ourselves on the back.

There is so much more that could be said. I could mention the doctrine of creation, and what it means for men and women to be made in the image of God. I could mention the ethics of the Westminster standards—perhaps its reflections on truth-telling, on speech, on deliberately building up the names of others rather than tearing them down. Surely these teachings of Scripture, so aptly summarized here, have relevance for all us—indeed, they have relevance for conversations in Westminster or Washington, and for the way in which people run their campaigns.

I think the Westminster Confession of Faith is the fullest and finest

of confessions. But what about those briefer options? As it happens, many churches use both creeds and confessions, and summarize their main teachings in a few basic points in their promotional literature. This is good. It can even be helpful. Creeds, confessions, and TBPOTWs are not mutually exclusive options. Nonetheless, I need to say that our churches are stronger when we hold and teach a more robust confession. I think it is worth saying that the trajectory of confessional churches tends to trend badly when they permit website summaries to offer, in practice, the only real guiding principles for the church.

It was about 100 years ago, around the time of the First World War, that doctrinal austerity measures were unofficially adopted by leading evangelical denominations. Decreasing the church's doctrinal diet was seen as a necessary step; it would help Christians band together in its battle against declining morals and eroding peace. Interestingly, some of these churches in the early 20th century had a heritage of a confessional Christianity. In minimizing their doctrine they did not get rid of their confessions. But they reduced what was important to believe to a few basic points, and their confessions to a paper fiction.

Without even examining the priorities of Woodrow-Wilson-era evangelicals, which is a discussion in itself, it seems evident that their "war for righteousness" did not advance as planned. Quite the opposite seems to be true. We've tightened our doctrinal belt for decades and now America is populated by people bored with God, and with truth-starved Christians unable to say or to identify what is right or wrong. We are so theologically impoverished that we think that once we've devoured our congregation's ten points there is nothing left to chew on.

If you would indulge a moment of personal reflection, this is why I wrote a commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. I

didn't want myself or others to become so doctrinally emaciated that we'd lose our appetite for God himself. This rich confessional text stirred up a hunger for the One who is "most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." As I read and wrote, I found myself wondering at the "God who has all life, glory, goodness," and "blessedness, in and of Himself"—the One who "is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made." Eventually, I came to the point where I became concerned with doctrinal summaries that leave us without aspirations; statements of faith that present God as a mere fact, a point one or two on a ten-point list.

I'm not expecting everyone to love the Westminster Confession of Faith, or even to like longer confessions more than shorter ones. But I do like historic texts that offer food for doxology. After all, as the apostle Paul once wrote to the Romans, and as a good Confession might remind its readers, we serve the One from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom 11:36). Christians celebrate the One in whose "sight all things are open and manifest," whose "knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of anything in his creation." That's why I treasure words that leave me speechless before a Triune God who is "most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands"—the one to whom "is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require."

Dr. Chad Van Dixboorn is professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. MDiv Westminster Theological Seminary, 1999; PhD, University of Cambridge, Selwyn College, 2005.



We have compiled a list of resources that you may use to find more detailed information on specific subjects that were covered in this article.



FURTHER READING



Van Dixhoorn, Chad. *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014.

Van Dixhoorn, Chad. *God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2017.

Nichols, Stephen. *Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.

Lindberg, Carter. *The European Reformations*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. London, Penguin Books, 1993.

Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Hart, D.G. and John Meuther. *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007.

Gaffin, Richard B., Jr. *God's Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and the Doctrine of Scripture*. Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008.



“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

Luke 24:25–26



CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING





Christ should be central to all preaching exactly because he is central to all of Scripture (Rom 1:1–4; Gal 3:1–9; 1 Pet 1:10–12). A sermon’s doctrine, application, organization, and delivery must rest upon the proclamation and explication of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). What a great calamity it would be if we crafted beautiful sermons, but remained “foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25).

At Westminster, we strive in our preaching to begin “with Moses and all the Prophets” (Luke 24:27), interpreting all of Scripture in relation to our Lord’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension. This christocentric approach to preaching does not ignore linguistic features, historical backgrounds, or any other exegetically relevant information. Rather, this approach places that information within the context of the redemptive work of God in history, which climaxes in the person and work of Jesus Christ.



PREACHING CHRIST

by Iain Duguid



One of the most precious lessons I learned as a student at Westminster Theological Seminary was how to preach Christ from all of Scripture. I can recall vividly the first time I listened to a sermon by Ed Clowney. I was sitting in the basement of the library with an old cassette recorder and clunky headphones. From his introduction (in which he delivered an ancient Egyptian poem in the style of a contemporary pop song) to his Christ-centered conclusion, I was captivated. From then onward, my lifelong quest has been to learn how to preach Christ like that, and my education at Westminster was crucial to that pursuit.

In this short essay, I want to think about the goal of preaching: to glorify God by unfolding the gospel as the way *to* life for those who are not yet Christians and the way *of* life for those who are believers.

First, my goal in preaching is to glorify God. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, that is to be my goal in all of life, and my life in the pulpit is no exception. My first goal is not to convert sinners or sanctify saints. Those are legitimate secondary goals, but it is important to keep the first thing first if we are to avoid confusion and frustration. As I look around me in ministry, I see many frustrated pastors. In seminary, they dreamed about a church like the one in Acts 2, where the people were devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, and to outreach. But when

they got out of seminary, they discovered that the church that called them was actually more like the church in Corinth or, worse still, the church in the days of the Judges, in which each man did what seemed right in his own eyes. These frustrated pastors hear and read about other churches doing all kinds of innovative ministries, apparently packed with seekers and inquirers, while their own churches consist of the same 75 sheep they have had for the past ten years. And they get discouraged because they expected bigger and better things.

Whether you are preaching to ten people or to ten thousand people, you need to remind yourself each Sunday: “Whatever happens while I preach is God’s work, not mine, and he receives all the glory.” That will help you not to get unduly puffed up when people’s lives are dramatically changed and your church grows. After all, you are just God’s divine messenger boy. If God can speak through a donkey, as he did to Balaam (see Numbers 22), there’s no great credit in delivering a message that he then makes effective by his Spirit. This reminder will also help you not to be unduly cast down if people do not seem to be particularly changed by your preaching. Unless God opens up their hearts and makes his Word effective in their lives, nothing you do will bring about change. For your own sake, you need to be clear that the chief end of your preaching is the glory of God.

Having the goal of preaching for the glory of God is also vital for your people’s sake. The preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones had a remarkable impact on J. I. Packer when Packer first heard it: it brought him, Packer said, “more of a sense of God than any other man.” That impact was not accidental. Lloyd-Jones would have thoroughly agreed with the New England Puritan Cotton Mather’s statement: “The great design and intention of the office of the Christian preacher [is] to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men.”¹ The reason is that this truth—the throne

and dominion of God—is the very heart of the gospel.

The gospel is not an announcement focused on us, with instructions about what we need to do to be saved. Rather, it is an announcement *to* us about God: who he is and what he has done to make our salvation sure and certain, in spite of our repeated sin and failure. We constantly need to be reminded that “Your God reigns.” The original context of that declaration in Isaiah 52:7 makes it evident that “Your God reigns” is not simply a private announcement for the encouragement of the oppressed covenant community of Isaiah’s day. The goal of God’s deliverance of Israel is that “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa 52:10). Preaching for the glory of God therefore involves both proclamation and acclamation. In acclamation, the covenant community accepts and reaffirms for itself that “Our God reigns,” while proclamation is our witness to others that “Our God reigns.” Preaching ought to be both evangelistic and edifying, and it will be if it is aimed at bringing glory to God.

One central way to achieve the goal of our preaching is through the unfolding of the gospel story. The statement “Your God reigns” has a context and a history that make it “good news.” The context in Isaiah 40–55 is one of profound exile and alienation from God. Joy is gone, and dancing is turned to mourning (Lam 5:15). In the midst of the pain, though, there is also a recognition that Judah’s calamity was a consequence of her own sin. Herein lies hope. If tragedy is not random but the result of God’s sovereignty, then there may be hope of a new beginning, based on God’s covenant faithfulness. God had committed himself to his people in a way that must find fulfillment in spite of their sin. “Your God reigns” is good news to those who know that God is for them. This is precisely what Isaiah goes on to proclaim: Israel’s reigning God would accomplish their salvation by means of a suffering Servant. Their iniquity would be laid on him, their transgression placed

on his back: by his stripes, they would be healed (see Isaiah 53).

But the Babylonian exile was simply a recapitulation of an older story. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden by eating of the forbidden fruit. As a result, they were alienated from God, exiled from the garden, and made subject to the power of sin and death. We have been in bondage ever since, unable to make our own way back to God, unwilling even to seek him.

Yet exile and alienation would not be the end of our story. Rather, God promised he would place enmity between humanity and the serpent and that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). Though that first sin had deep and profound consequences, nonetheless God would ultimately transform the curse into blessing. This is the context and history of the announcement "Your God reigns" in our preaching also. Unless people grasp the depth of their prior alienation from God, there is little good news to celebrate in their reconciliation to God.

In addition to unfolding the gospel story, preaching must also apply the gospel to the whole person and to the whole of life, answering the question, "So what?". Preaching is always inherently applicatory, or it is not preaching. J. I. Packer puts it like this:

The purpose of preaching is not to stir people to action while bypassing their minds, so that they never see what reason God gives them for doing what the preacher requires of them (that is manipulation); nor is the purpose to stock people's minds with truth, no matter how vital and clear, which then lies fallow and does not become the seed-bed and source of changed lives (that is academism). The purpose is, rather, to reproduce, under God, the state of affairs that Paul described when he wrote to the Romans, "You whole-

heartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted” (Rom 6:17). The teaching is the testimony, command and promise of God. The preacher entrusts his hearers to it by begging them to respond to it and assuring them that God will fulfil His promises to them as they do so.²

Under application, I am including both edification and equipping, both the correct response of the mind to biblical truth and the correct response of the life to the gospel realities. The goal is to be hearers and doers of the Word, as James 1:22–25 reminds us. Simply hearing the word of truth is not enough. That is self-deception. Preaching is not effective if it is not first remembered and then second put into effect.

So our task as preachers is always to apply the Word of God with the goal that people’s lives are changed as a result. God’s truth is never simply to be admired; it is to be absorbed and lived by. Nor is this something unconnected to what we have said already, as if the sermon glorifies God, declares the gospel, and equips the saints as three essentially different movements. No, just as in Paul’s writings the imperative commands that typically make up the second half of his epistles build on and flow out of the gospel indicatives that begin his epistles, so too in our preaching the indicative and the imperative moods belong together, with the imperative flowing out of the indicative. The gospel is the root and foundation of all true moral reformation, the heart of our justification and our sanctification. God is glorified when we believe the gospel and live a life that is in line with it.

This truth is not always well understood in the church today. When I was writing a commentary on Ezekiel, my editor was concerned that this “gospel-centered” approach to the Old Testament was selling short the ethical imperatives of the prophet. I responded

with three simple points.

First, the good news about Jesus's death and resurrection is not merely the power by which dead sinners are raised to new life; it is also the power by which God's people are transformed. The gospel is not simply the starting point from which we move on to ethics; it is the heartbeat of our lives as Christians. That is why Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Presumably, Paul is not saying that he only preached evangelistic sermons, while ignoring the task of discipleship. Rather, he means that every sermon he preached had a focus on the cross of Christ, the implications of which he then drew out for every area of life. To put it simply, he never preached Ephesians 4–6 (the ethical imperatives) without Ephesians 1–3 (the gospel indicative). All of his preaching was Christ-centered, because our sanctification and justification flow out of our union with Christ.

Second, the Christ-centeredness of the Bible is not only the case for the New Testament but also for the Old Testament. Recall the words of Jesus on the Emmaus road. When Jesus caught up with the two despondent disciples, who were leaving Jerusalem unaware of the resurrection, he took them back on a tour of the Old Testament Scriptures, saying:

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

According to Jesus, we should expect the message of all of the Old Testament to be Jesus Christ! The disciples' response was not to

be amazed at his cleverness in uncovering references to himself in such a wide range of sources. Rather, they were astonished at their dullness in not having perceived before what these familiar books were about. Nor was that simply his message on one particular occasion to those two disciples. Luke 24:44–47 gives us the substance of his teaching to all the disciples in the climactic forty-day post-resurrection period:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

This is Jesus’s master class in Old Testament interpretation. Notice the comprehensiveness of the language that Jesus uses: “Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” These make up the three comprehensive divisions of the Old Testament, what Luke later designates “the Scriptures.” In other words, the focus of Jesus’s teaching was not a few “messianic” texts here and there but rather the entire Old Testament. According to Jesus, the whole Old Testament Scriptures are a message about Christ’s sufferings, his resurrection, and the proclamation of the gospel to all nations.

Nor was the teaching of Jesus lost on his disciples. In 1 Peter 1:10–12, Peter explicitly formulates the principle that the central message of the prophets is Jesus’s suffering and the glories that would subsequently flow from that event:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Paul's testimony before King Agrippa emphasizes the same message:

I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles. (Acts 26:22–23)

For Jesus and the apostles, the message of the Old Testament is Jesus, and specifically “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” To be sure, understanding this gospel will lead to a new morality in the life of believers, it will motivate and empower them for meeting the needs of a lost world, and it will engage their passion for the return of Christ. But the heart of the Old Testament is a witness to Christ, which centers in on his suffering and glory, his death and resurrection.

Third, this Christ-centeredness of the whole of Scripture is important in our contemporary context because it is the gospel alone that has the power to change the heart. Most Christians know a great deal about how they ought to live. Their problem is that they don't live up to what they know. The gap is not in their knowledge but in their obedience. John Newton addresses this

problem in his letter “On the Inefficacy of Knowledge.” He urges us to notice the amazing difference between our knowledge and our actual experience. For example, we may be firmly persuaded that God is omnipresent, but we don’t act as if that were true. The presence of another human being—even a child—may lead us to restrain our actions and behave well, yet our committed belief in the presence of God Almighty doesn’t seem to hold us back from sin.³ Knowledge of the truth is not enough.

How do we address this gap between knowledge and obedience? Ethical sermons, no matter how accurately biblical their content, tend simply to add to the burden of guilt felt by the average Christian and yield little by way of results. The gospel, on the other hand, has the power to change lives at a deep level, as men and women come to see both the depth of their sin and at the same time the glorious good news that Jesus is their substitute, who has taken upon himself the punishment their sin deserved and has lived the perfect life in their place. Freed from their guilt, freed from their fear of failure, freed from their love of reputation, people are now equipped to change. It is the expulsive power of a new affection, as Thomas Chalmers once dubbed it,⁴ that brings about real, deep, and lasting change in people’s lives, and to kindle this deep affection there is nothing better than a constant focus on the mysteries and marvels of sovereign, divine grace in all its richness and depth.

So then, to sum up, biblical preaching is much more than instruction. Its goal is doxological: that men and women might be brought to see in a new way the glory of God and to bow their hearts in adoration and praise. Such preaching will certainly change lives, but it will be concerned even more fundamentally that God should be glorified and the gospel of grace magnified. Like the apostle Paul, we pray:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than
all that we ask or think, according to the power at work

within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ
Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Dr. Iain Duguid is professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. BSc, University of Edinburgh, 1981; MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989; PhD, University of Cambridge, 1992.

¹ See John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 25.

² J. I. Packer, “Why Preach?” in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 9–10.

³ John Newton, “On the Inefficacy of Knowledge,” in *The Works of John Newton* (repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985), 1:245–253.

⁴ Thomas Chalmers, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,” in *Sermons and Discourses* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1877), 2:271–277.



We have compiled a list of resources that you may use to find more detailed information on specific subjects that were covered in this article.



FURTHER READING



Duguid, Iain. *The Gospel According to the Old Testament Series*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999–2013.

Clowney, Edmund. *Preaching Christ in all of Scripture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Johnson, Dennis E. *Walking with Jesus Through his Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015.

Johnson, Dennis E. *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007.

Kim, Julius. *Preaching the Whole Counsel of God: Design and Deliver Gospel-Centered Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.

Keller, Timothy. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. London: Penguin Books, 2016.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

The Whole Counsel of God

Copyright © 2018 by Westminster Theological Seminary

Published by Westminster Seminary Press
P.O. Box 27009, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118
wsp@wts.edu

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment.

Cover design: Jessica Shapiro, Westminster Theological Seminary

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture quotations in the first five chapters are from the translations in which they were quoted in the original publications of the texts found in this anthology. Scripture quotations in the sixth chapter are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Chapter 1 is adapted from K. Scott Oliphint's "The Irrationality of Unbelief: An Exegetical Study," in *Revelation and Reason*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton, 59–73. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006. ISBN 978-0-87552-596-9. Used by permission. P&R Publishing Co. P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865.

Chapter 2 is adapted from David Powlison's "A Biblical Counseling View," in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson, 2nd ed., 245–248. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010. Used by permission.

Chapter 3 is adapted from G.K. Beale's *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, 241–247. Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2011. Used by permission.

Chapter 4 is adapted from Lane G. Tipton's "Union with Christ and Justification," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, 24–34. Great Britain: Mentor, 2007. Used by permission.

Chapter 5 is adapted from Chad Van Dixhoorn's "Confessing Christian: Yesterday's Reformation for Today's Reformation" on Reformation21.org, March 2016. Used by permission.

Chapter 6 is Iain Duguid's "Preaching Christ." Iain Duguid © 2016. Used by permission.

This collection of articles from the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary provides a glimpse into the seminary's commitment to biblical exegesis and practical theological application. Each of these essays explores the theological distinctives of Westminster's integrated curriculum while shedding light on how careful exegesis makes the fulness of Scripture come alive in every facet of education, ministry, and life.

In each of their essays, Drs. Beale, Duguid, Oliphint, Powlison, Tipton, and Van Dixhoorn explore a different facet of Reformed theology and Westminster's exegetical foundations. From biblical and systematic theology to preaching and counseling, their collected wisdom brings Scriptural application to the forefront not only of Westminster's curriculum but also of how we, as Christians, understand how our lives interact with Scripture.

Westminster Theological Seminary
wts.edu