

**Roots of a Different Tree:
Theological Hermeneutics¹**

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“Whether we mean to or not, and whether we like it or not, all of us read the text as interpreted by our theological presuppositions...The very possibility of understanding anything depends on our prior framework of interpretation.”²

“This insistence on making the path between exegesis and theology a one-way street is untenable and unwise.”³

This one-way street, which DeYoung critiques in the above text, is the idea that Biblical exegesis should be separate, and not dependent on one's theological system. Instead, DeYoung and Silva, for example, would advocate for the position that not only does systematic theology and exegesis go hand in hand, but systematic theology should govern or inform exegesis. “To put it in the most shocking way possible: my theological system should tell me how to exegete.”⁴ This chapter explores theological hermeneutics which is an interpretive approach dependent upon and informed by one's system of theology. It is important to note, this hermeneutic is not confined to one system of theology over another, but instead is simply the notion that systematic theology in general should inform one's exegesis.⁵ Considering this interpretive method, we will explore five areas in this chapter: (1) its place in worldview, (2) the organization and structure of the hermeneutic, (3) the claimed bases for legitimacy, (4) the essential principles of the system, and (5) the necessary outcomes and implications.

PLACE IN WORLDVIEW

Moises Silva, co-editor of *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, writes a chapter entitled, “The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics.”⁶ He begins the chapter by acknowledging the ambiguity in the title but does so purposefully. Silva utilizes John Calvin as a case study for the legitimacy of the theological hermeneutic. He begins by saying,

¹ This paper is a published chapter in *The Green Tree and Hermeneutic Roots for Biblical Faith and Practice*.

² Moises Silva, Walter Kaiser Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 306.

³ Kevin DeYoung, “Your Theological System Should Tell You How To Exegete,” accessed April 05, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/your-theological-system-should-tell-you-how-to-exegete/>.

⁴ Silva, *Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 305.

⁵ For example, one can note claims found Michael Williams book, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, or Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard's book, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Louis Berkhof's, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, etc. Few are as bold to claim this hermeneutic outright such as Silva, but this hermeneutic can be found in practice through many different theologians, some to be explored and quoted in this work.

⁶ This chapter will be especially valuable when handling the Reformed Hermeneutic in a later chapter. This value is seen in Silva's question on page 295, “Or does the title refer to the system of theology that, originating in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, was brought to full expression a century later by the Westminster Confession of Faith?”

The ambiguity is deliberate, since one of my aims here is to stress the close connection between biblical interpretation and systematic theology...but one must recognize that during the course of over two decades, Calvin's theological thought guided his exegesis, while his exegesis kept contributing to his theology.⁷

While the above quote is pertinent to discussing the bases for legitimacy, it also provides an essential foundation by which Silva presents his case. It drives one to explore the views of John Calvin, who is very transparent about his position on epistemology within the study of worldview.

Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by discussing issues of knowledge – more specifically, the bases of knowledge. Rightfully so, Calvin holds that knowledge begins with the fear of the Lord, namely, the right perspective of Him. Calvin seems to ground this ideology in the fact that mankind was created in God's image, reflecting Him and resulting in the idea that “no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God.”⁸ While this might seem anthropocentric, Calvin also states in the next section, “it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”⁹ Ultimately, while trying to answer the question, “which comes first – knowledge of self or God?” it is explicit that both deal with the perspective one has of God, because the knowledge of one's self points to God, and the knowledge of God points to a right perspective of self. “Hence that dread and wonder with which Scripture commonly represents the saints as stricken and overcome whenever they felt the presence of God.”¹⁰ Calvin has a broadly theocentric understanding of epistemology,¹¹ and echoes the Solomonic wisdom, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”¹²

Calvin also makes the connection between God and the Scriptures, stating, “Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.”¹³ As Calvin begins his *Institutes* with the topic of theology and the role of epistemology, it would seem that Calvin places epistemology as the starting point of any worldview, or more specifically, the Biblical worldview.¹⁴ Understanding how one knows

⁷ Ibid, 295.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 35.

⁹ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰ Ibid, 38–39.

¹¹ In fact, Calvin also concludes, “however the knowledge of God and of ourselves may be mutually connected, the order of right teaching requires that we discuss the former first, then proceed afterward to treat the latter” on page 39.

¹² Proverbs 1:7; All Scripture quotes will be in the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 74.

¹⁴ It is important to note the jump from theology to worldview. While theology and worldview are certainly different areas of thought, they are intrinsically linked (as opposed to the notion they are counterparts to each other) as Biblical theology is that information that makes up the Biblical worldview. If one is to have a Biblical theology, this information is that which one finds within the Biblical Worldview.

truth is foundational and is a necessary task for every worldview. As one views the world, one must understand how to understand that which one views.¹⁵

It seems, however, Calvin does not explicitly state where hermeneutics fits within the worldview framework. While it is undeniable that Calvin in his writings credits the authority of his worldview to God, he does not give much attention at all to the role of hermeneutics.¹⁶ In the Calvinist tradition, this is also noticeably absent from Cornelius Van Til's work, *Reformed Epistemology*.¹⁷ This is a foundational problem that leads to the theological hermeneutic. In fact, Van Til makes the claim,

...we would appeal to the Cahier's men, to Wiersinga and to others, *to build their hermeneutical procedures on the theology of Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, etc.*, and then in terms of it to challenge all men to repentance and faith in the self-identifying Christ of Scripture instead of making compromise with unbelief."¹⁸ [emphasis found in source]

Silva also makes the claim regarding Calvin's hermeneutic,

The first edition of the *Institutes* was published when Calvin was a very young man, and the subsequent revisions and expansions reflect both *his growing knowledge of historical theology* and his greater attention to exegetical work. No one is likely to argue that these two sides of his work were independent of each other..." [emphasis mine]

¹⁵ Note Christopher Cone's article on the matter: <http://www.drcone.com/2017/03/22/interconnectedness-philosophy-theology-worldview/> Of particular interest is the last paragraph, and more pointedly, "In a Biblical approach, philosophy and theology are interconnected, and in some cases even interchangeable. This close relationship between the two disciplines of philosophy and theology invites inquisitiveness and pursuit of knowledge in every area, and nothing about the Biblical approach to these disciplines would restrict or de-incentivize learning and discovery."

¹⁶ Although, undoubtedly, many have made an effort to systematize Calvin's hermeneutic, Calvin did not speak much into the matter in any systematic way. Calvin's most remarked principle of interpretation is *Brevitas et facilitas*. Calvin believed God communicated plainly and simply, leading to a sort of brevity and clarity. These principles are typically pulled from Calvin's commentary. For an example of this see, <https://www.thepoorinspirit.com/post/64917950898/hermeneutics-john-calvin>. Though, while a system can be formed by examining his results, the place of hermeneutics in worldview is of great importance. This is seemingly absent from Calvin's writings.

¹⁷ See "Two Deficiencies of Reformed Epistemology: A Brief Commendation and Critique of Cornelius Van Til's Epistemology" at <http://www.drcone.com/2014/04/28/two-deficiencies-of-reformed-epistemology-a-brief-commendation-and-critique-of-cornelius-van-tils-epistemology/>. In this article Christopher Cone states, "In fact, in his Th.M thesis, "Reformed Epistemology," he never once even discusses Biblical interpretation. Much of his critique of other thinkers, like Kant, includes considerable discussion of their deficiencies in the interpretation of experience, but not a word about interpretation of Scripture. Not one."

¹⁸ Christopher Cone, "Two Deficiencies of Reformed Epistemology: A Brief Commendation and Critique of Cornelius Van Til's Epistemology," accessed on April 13, 2020, <http://www.drcone.com/2014/04/28/two-deficiencies-of-reformed-epistemology-a-brief-commendation-and-critique-of-cornelius-van-tils-epistemology/> citing *The New Hermeneutic*, Van Til, 180.

Much like Van Til credits historical theology¹⁹ as the basis for hermeneutics, Silva affirms Calvin's similar approach.²⁰ In this approach historical theology then becomes the authority over one's hermeneutic. While Van Til and Calvin alike assert that God is the authority of knowledge, in actuality that authority is usurped by historical theology when hermeneutic method is assumed by other theologians as part of metaphysics doctrine without the necessary epistemological warrant.²¹ This system of interpretation places systematic theology as both presuppositional and metaphysical. While God has undoubtedly established reality, no matter how humanity perceives it, worldview requires a *viewer* and a *viewing*. Thus how one understands reality is of primary importance, positioning epistemology as the first pursuit of worldview.

Much of what has been stated thus far pertains to foundations of worldview in Calvin's and Silva's perspectives. However, Silva suggests that these foundations are applicable far beyond any particular theological system, "But even if one has little use for Calvin's system, I suggest that exegesis stands to gain, rather than lose, if it consciously done within the framework of one's theology."²²

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

Kevin DeYoung in his article "Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete"²³ describes, like Silva, the antithesis of the theological hermeneutic by using the analogy of a "one-way street." On the other hand, critics of the theological hermeneutic would affirm that the relationship between exegesis and systematic theology is absolutely a one-way street in that exegesis should inform systematic theology while systematic theology should *never* inform exegesis. Still, the theological hermeneutic advocates a two-way street between theology and exegesis: one's systematic theology should inform one's exegesis while one's exegesis should also inform one's systematic theology. DeYoung writes, "We all know exegesis should inform systematic theology, but should our theological systems also inform our exegesis?"²⁴ He agrees with Silva, concluding in the affirmative.²⁵ This two-way street concept is the key premise of the theological hermeneutic.

Because the theological system exercises authority over the interpretive process, it predetermines the interpretive results based on the theological presuppositions. Silva recognizes the tension this creates:

¹⁹ Ryrie gives a good definition of historical theology in his work, *Basic Theology* (p. 14), "Historical theology focuses on what those who studied the Bible thought about its teachings either individually or collectively as in the pronouncements of church councils."

²⁰ It's worth noting that Silva also adds "his greater attention to exegetical work." This fits Silva's central thesis, as theology and exegesis work together.

²¹ One could argue that those such as Silva are stating that systematic theology acts as a presupposition to worldview as it informs exegesis or interpretation of one's authority, which is the reason for labeling hermeneutics being placed in an "odd place."

²² Silva, *Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 303.

²³ DeYoung, "Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete."

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ DeYoung cites Silva's work *Interpreting Galatians*, 207. A very similar quote is found from Silva in his work *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 304-305.

We are much more likely to be conscious of those [theological] preconceptions if we deliberately seek to identify them *and then use them* [Silva's emphasis] in the exegetical process. That way, when we come across a fact that resists the direction our interpretation is taking, we are better prepared to recognize the anomaly for what it is, namely, an indication that our *interpretive scheme is faulty and must be modified* [emphasis mine].²⁶

This is brought to light further when Silva recommends that when students of the Bible approach a detail that does not fit their theological system, they should make it fit. Silva suggests this as a method for ongoing modification of one's system of theology.²⁷ The fallacy is evident when the system of theology is a presupposition to one's interpretive method while using interpretation to modify the theological system.²⁸ The question should be asked, "which comes first – exegesis or theology?" Theology and exegesis are certainly not interchangeable terms, one must precede the other, as DeYoung admits: "As a Christian I hope that my theology is open to correction, but as a minister I have to start somewhere. We all do. For me that means starting with Reformed theology and my confessional tradition and sticking with that unless I have really good reason not to."²⁹ DeYoung starts with the system of theology and reads the text of Scripture in light of that system.

Michael Williams states in his opening chapter of *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens*, "Reading the Bible through the Jesus lens is reading it the way it was intended. It keeps our reading, understanding, teaching, and preaching properly focused on *God's grand redemptive program* [emphasis mine] that centers on his own Son."³⁰ Williams utilizes the centrality of the redemptive program (a theological construct) as the lens through which the rest of the Bible is read – his theology comes first and governs his exegesis.

In defense of a "Legitimate Reader-Response Interpretation," Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard write, "Biblical texts *must be understood within the context and confines of the believing community in which each interpreter resides*, [emphasis mine] though, admittedly, these interpretations will differ among communities."³¹ They use Christian baptism and eschatology as examples of how this principle plays out. In this context Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard discuss readers "creating" meaning, still the comment above points to their affinity for the theological hermeneutic. Within Klein's example of baptism, he footnotes the significance of this discussion within Reformed communities.³² The implication is that one's preunderstanding (better known in this context as theology) comes prior to one's exegesis.

²⁶ Silva, *Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 306.

²⁷ Silva, *Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 307.

²⁸ It is important to note the interchanging use of "interpretive framework" and "systematic theology" within the work of Silva.

²⁹ DeYoung, "Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete."

³⁰ Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens*, (Michigan, Zondervan, 2012), 9.

³¹ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 139. It is important to note that Klein, et al do not support a readers response hermeneutic in the sense that a form of the Literal Grammatical-Historical is completely thrown away. Instead they would state, "The sky is not the limit for possible meanings...properly informed, readers may *not* discover meaning unrelated to the intention of the author or the historical meaning of the texts to be interpreted."

³² Klein, et al., *Intro to Biblical Interpretation*, 140.

BASES FOR LEGITIMACY

At this point, one might wonder upon what grounds these positions are held. Silva defends his position with three claims. First, Silva recommends that, “we should recognize that systematic theology is, to a large extent, an exercise in contextualization...”³³ Those who disagree with Silva may not argue against this point. Kaiser (as Silva’s co-author) agrees with the statement but places theological work later in the process of exegesis, effectively removing it as a presupposition/lens upon which his exegesis rests.³⁴

Ryrie provides a helpful definition of systematic theology which can serve as a basis of understanding the discussion: “Systematic theology correlates the data of biblical revelation as a whole in order to exhibit systematically the total picture of God’s self-revelation.”³⁵ Ryrie affirms the place of systematic theology as the product of exegetical work. Ryrie’s approach shows the relationship between exegesis and theology with which Kaiser might agree. Despite protests to the contrary, advocates of a theological hermeneutic disagree in practice.³⁶ DeYoung writes,

Exegesis is what you do when you look at a single text of Scripture and try to understand what the author – speaking in a specific culture, addressing to a specific audience, writing for a specific purpose – intended to communicate.³⁷

DeYoung’s definition here is accurate and may be agreeable even to those who disagree with his advocacy of the theological hermeneutic. However, the problem is again apparent in the relationship DeYoung proposes between exegesis and theology.

Silva’s second major claim in defense of his theological (Calvinistic) hermeneutic is that “We should recognize that systematic theology is to a large extent an exercise in contextualization, that is, the attempt to reformulate the teaching of Scripture in ways that are meaningful and understandable to us in our present context...Our evangelical view of the unity of Scripture demands that we see the whole Bible as the context of any one part.”³⁸ It is evident in the context that Silva includes his systematic understanding of the whole Bible as *part* of the Biblical context. It is at this point that systematic *theology* seems to be a device read back into the text. Certainly, if God has self-revealed in a unified way, the

³³ Silva, *Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 305 – For further clarification on Silva’s position, in his commentary on Galatians (*interpreting Galatian*, p. 208), he writes similarly, “In the first place, we should remind ourselves that systematic theology is, to a large extent, the attempt to reformulate the teaching of Scripture in ways that are meaningful and understandable to us in our present context.”

³⁴ See Kaiser’s notes on p. 90 of *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*.

³⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, (Illinois: Moody Press, 1999), 15.

³⁶ It is important to note here; DeYoung and Silva alike would not disagree with this sentiment completely. For example, DeYoung states, “Good systematic theology will be anchored in good exegesis. The sum of the whole is only as true as the individual parts.” (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/your-theological-system-should-tell-you-how-to-exegete/>) Where the departure comes into play is whenever he questions whether this is it; does it stop here? Is there another aspect to the relationship between exegesis and systematic theology?

³⁷ Kevin DeYoung, “Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete.”

³⁸ Silva, *Intro to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 305.

Scriptures should be studied as a whole, not as individual parts alone. Berkhof emphasizes this when he says, “Both the Old and the New Testament form essential parts of God’s special revelation. God is the Author of both, and in both has the same purpose in mind. They both contain the same doctrine of redemption, preach the same Christ, and impose upon men the same moral and religious duties.”³⁹ As Peter and Paul affirm, in a sense, the Bible maintains dual authorship.⁴⁰ God is the ultimate Author who utilized men to write the inspired words of the Bible. More specifically He used, “men moved by the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ The Bible is composed of sixty-six books, written over roughly 1500 years by approximately 40 authors to diverse audiences and for different purposes. The Divine Author brings unity to the Scriptures as one book covering all of human history and more (from eternity past to eternity future). God’s self-revelation is diverse but unified. The unity of Scripture is obvious, but only extends to the contents within. If Silva means systematic *theology* when describing a systematic *understanding* of the Bible (as it seems he does), then the immediate context of the Biblical passage being observed is compromised.

Silva’s third claim in defense of the theological hermeneutic “...as a matter of fact, everyone does it anyway. Whether we mean to or not...all of us read the text as interpreted by our theological presuppositions.”⁴² This last point cannot be completely understood until a sufficient look at what has been called the hermeneutical spiral⁴³ for the same model can be applied to the theological hermeneutic. The hermeneutic circle⁴⁴ is that which the hermeneutical spiral sought to correct.⁴⁵ The idea states that,

Every interpreter begins with a preunderstanding. After an initial study of a Biblical text, that text performs a work on the interpreter. His or her preunderstanding is no longer what it was. Then, as the newly interpreted interpreter proceeds to question the text further, out of this newly formed understanding further...answers are obtained. A new understanding has emerged. It is not simply a repetitive circle; but, rather, a progressive spiral of development.⁴⁶

Grant Osbourne puts it a different way, and his comments are worth repeating here,

A spiral is a better metaphor because it is not a closed circle but rather an open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader. I am not going round and

³⁹ Berkhof, *Principles of interpretation*, (US: Louis Berkhof, 1950), 135.

⁴⁰ 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16.

⁴¹ 2 Peter 1:20-21.

⁴² Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 306 – Interestingly, it is challenging to understand Silva’s position on presuppositions – or at least what he would contribute to qualifying as presuppositions. It seems that at times, he would attribute one’s theological system as a theological presupposition, but in other places does not. The thesis Silva makes would seem to point that direction, while others, such as Vanhoozer in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* states explicitly on page 19, “Theological interpretation of the Bible is not an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text.” Such a claim must be viewed in practice, which is accomplished later in this chapter.

⁴³ Klein, et al, p. 114; Osbourne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*.

⁴⁴ The hermeneutic circle was created with the New Hermeneutic and corrected by Grant Osbourne because “...such a closed circle is dangerous because the priority of the text is lost in the shared gestalt of the ‘language event’”.

⁴⁵ Grant Osbourne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22.

⁴⁶ Klein, et al., *Intro to Biblical Interpretation*, 114

round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiraling nearer and nearer to the text's intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations, then to guide my delineation of its significance for my situation today. In this sense it is also critical to note that the spiral is a cone, not twirling upward forever with no ending in sight but moving ever narrower to the meaning of the text and its significance for today. *The sacred author's intended meaning is the critical starting point but not an end in itself. The task of hermeneutics must begin with exegesis but is not complete until one notes the contextualization of that meaning for today.* (emphasis mine)

At this point, it is crucial to distinguish the definition of meaning and significance. It is the task of exegesis to discover meaning. Once that meaning is found, significance or application can then be recognized. E.D. Hirsch Jr. gives sufficient definitions for both of these terms,

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; *it is what the signs represent.* Significance, on the other hand, *names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation or indeed anything imaginable.* [emphasis mine]⁴⁷

Exegesis has to do with meaning and is foundational for finding a proper significance. Proper significance is not ascertainable before meaning, or the significance is not founded upon any trustworthy foundation – certainly not an infallible or authoritative one. While meaning undergirds significance, significance does not likewise effect meaning.

The relation between the hermeneutical spiral and the theological hermeneutic is clear in Silva's statements. As Silva presses that everyone understands the Biblical text based on theological presuppositions, those presuppositions guide – or further inform – one's interpretation of any given text. Ideally, that text would then inform or change one's theological presuppositions appropriately. While readers certainly bring presuppositions to the text – and should be transparent about them, the hinge of this discussion is the definition of those presuppositions. Can presuppositions be established Biblically? Can the first principles be derived from the Scriptures themselves?⁴⁸ Within the theological hermeneutic, it seems those presuppositions equate to the system of theology, hence Silva's conclusion, "my theological system should tell me how to exegete." According to the theological hermeneutic, this is unavoidable.

⁴⁷ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1967), 8.

⁴⁸ For further discussion on this matter, see <http://www.drcone.com/2012/09/23/presuppositional-dispensationalism-part-1/>, and <http://www.drcone.com/2014/03/13/epistemological-foundations-for-a-biblical-theology> – Christopher Cone shows much respect for the work of Van Til, but rightly concludes that Van Til's presuppositional epistemology falls short in that it does not address hermeneutics and leaves hermeneutics to Historical Theology, which is the root and foundation by which the theological hermeneutic is founded.

Where does one get this theological system in order to guide the exegesis? Typically, the system of theology is derived from past theologians, with historical theology as the root system of the interpretive process.

This is evident in Kevin DeYoung's interpretation of the 144,000 found in Revelation 7,⁴⁹ in Louis Berkhof's view of the Law in relation to the covenant of grace,⁵⁰ and Robert Saucy's progressive view of Israel and the Church.⁵¹ Theological frameworks (such as a redemptive or kingdom focused theme), greatly impact their interpretations of key passages.

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

The very premise of a theological hermeneutic is that exegesis and systematic theology interrelate as a two-way street, with the exegesis undergirding the system of theology while the system of theology informs one's exegesis. This circular understanding represents a kind of hermeneutic circle or hermeneutic spiral. An example can be found in the writings of Richard Gaffin Jr., who divides his hermeneutic into six principles: (1) found in the context of general revelation, special revelation is twofold: redemptive (or deed) and verbal (or word); (2) redemption and revelation are found within a completed history;⁵² (3) this redemptive history finds its culmination in the person and work of Jesus Christ; (4) the subject matter is redemption; (5) the Scriptures are the only revelatory access to the history of redemption; (6) "As revelation is the interpretation of redemption, so the interpretation of Scripture is always derivative, the interpretation of interpretation."⁵³

Gaffin then points to Hebrews 1:1-2 to undergird his proposed principles. In defense of his position (equating the revelation found in Jesus with salvation) Gaffin quotes Hebrews 2:3, stating,

The focus on Christ, as comprehensive and completing as it is unifying, shows clearly that the history of postfall revelation, considered in terms of its subject matter, is in fact the history of *redemption* [emphasis Gaffin's]. God's speech 'in the Son' is

⁴⁹ Kevin DeYoung, "Theological Primer: The 144,000", accessed on April 12, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-144000/>; The only reason to stylize the list or spiritualize the meaning of "the sons of Israel" would be due to his precommitment to his Reformed tradition. The amillennial position would not allow for Revelation 7 to actually be 144,000 men from the tribes of Israel. Instead, this number must be a general number, the sons of Israel must be God's elect in general, and the sealing is simply the calling out of the elect.

⁵⁰ Berkhof, *Principles of interpretation*, 135; Berkhof would argue that the Mosaic law is subservient to the covenant of grace. If the covenant of grace could be biblically supplied, it does not seem there is any Biblical evidence to support the relationship of the law and this covenant. However, the covenant of grace cannot be exegetically derived but is instead the product of one's system of theology.

⁵¹ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 9; Saucy has eliminated the distinguishment between Israel and the Church, at least to the degree that there is not two distinct "purposes and plans." This is founded upon his commitment to a particular redemptive history.

⁵² Gaffin notes that redemption here is referencing the completed salvation. He makes a specific note of interest: This history begins in Genesis 3 with the fall of mankind. The history of verbal revelation is found within the history of redemption.

⁵³ Richard Gaffin, "Redemptive Hermeneutics" in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley Porter (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 89.

‘salvation...spoken through the Lord’ (Heb 2:3), with both its realized and still future (Heb 9:28) aspects.⁵⁴

This jump is seemingly unjustifiable from the text in Hebrews – at the very least it is incomplete. While the gospel is certainly a vital component of the revelation given through Jesus Christ, the premise that the gospel focus is the sum of revelation leads to a blanket theology placed on all of Scripture. Instead of pointing to a redemptive-historical approach, Hebrews 1–2 points to the nature of Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God. The Scripture is God’s revelation⁵⁵ which is certainly focused on Jesus Christ,⁵⁶ the second person of the trinity – namely, “the image of the invisible God,”⁵⁷ “the exact representation of His glory,”⁵⁸ and indeed, the great “I AM” Himself.⁵⁹ Because of the deity of Jesus, revelation through Him (and that word which He commissioned) is the most complete, for “he who has seen Me [Jesus] has seen the Father.”⁶⁰ The theological precommitment to redemptive centrality in the Scriptures leads Gaffin seemingly to an anthropocentric view of Scripture, God’s purposes in revelation, and of Jesus Himself.

In contrast to such a view Mal Couch writes, “The interpreter must realize that all of the Word of God points to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Redemption is a central theme of Scripture, but it is not the only one. The Bible also contains a vast storehouse of other truths and revelations that God wishes to convey to mankind.”⁶¹ John 5:39 tells us that the Scriptures attest to Jesus, but to consider everything within the Scriptures to have a redemptive history limits the scope of the Scriptures (and of Jesus’s ministry) beyond what they were intended.

NECESSARY OUTCOMES

Herein is the main issue: how can one exegete when filtering that process through the lens of one's system of theology – that which is supposed to be informed by one's exegesis? The answer is simply that *it cannot be done*. Exegesis is the discovery (not determining) of meaning of that which was communicated. If the communication under consideration is the Biblical text, how can reading that text through the lens of a system of theology produce *exegesis*? It does not. The result is *eisegesis*.

An example of this is evident in A. W. Pink’s handling of 1 John 2:2.⁶² The question at hand is what is meant by *the whole world* (ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου)? Pink suggests, “when John added,

⁵⁴ Porter, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 95.

⁵⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16.

⁵⁶ John 14:6, 1:14.

⁵⁷ Colossians 1:15.

⁵⁸ Hebrews 1:3.

⁵⁹ John 8:58; John 1:1, 14, 17:5; Philippians 2:5-9.

⁶⁰ John 14:9.

⁶¹ Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation*, Kindle Edition, Location 292.

⁶² A. W. Pink, “1 John 2:2” accessed on April 17, 2020, <http://articles.ochristian.com/article12562.shtml> – It’s also interesting to note the incredible parallel which John MacArthur gives in a sermon given here:

‘And not for ours only, but also for the whole world’, he signified that Christ was the propitiation for the sins of Gentile believers too, for, as previously shown, ‘the world’ is a term contrasted from Israel.”⁶³ He gives seven reasons for defining *the world* this way. Perhaps the two most compelling of these reasons related to the original audience being Jewish and the seemingly parallel passage in John 11:51–52.

If the audience is Jewish (and there is good reason to believe it is) does this warrant a qualification or limitation on *the whole world*? Does this provide that *the whole world* should be understood as simply “Gentile believers scattered throughout the earth?”⁶⁴ Consider this silly illustration: Bob has a wife, two sons, and two daughters. One evening he tells one of his daughters, “everyone will be cleaning the house today.” Is there any way that the daughter to whom Bob is talking should understand what he says to mean that *only* the other daughter will be cleaning? Is there any textual reason to qualify “everyone?” The same is the case in 1 John 2:2.

A. W. Pink qualifies *the whole world* from a distant context. Pink appeals to John 11:51–52, “...he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”⁶⁵ The passage does parallel with 1 John 2:2, but does this warrant a qualifying of *the whole world* in 1 John 2:2? The argument equates *the whole world* with the children of God who are scattered abroad. However, is this maneuver warranted? Though Jesus died “to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad,” this does not negate (or address at all) the idea that Jesus died for the whole world. Christopher Cone writes,

But not only is the passage distant in context from John’s letter, but the assertion that the passage proves Jesus did not die for the non-elect is grounded on nothing but an assumption. Further, that assumption is read back into 1 John 2:2. Finally, this interpretive justification violates the principle that the exegete must deal with the immediate context before invoking distant contexts.⁶⁶

Cone recognizes the tension created by the theological precommitment, but the theological hermeneutic assumes both the precommitment and the interpretive maneuver, thus eliminating the tension (again, based on the precommitment).

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/62-10/the-sacrifice-that-satisfied>; For an exegetical look at the passage, see <http://johnoglesby.org/index.php/2020/02/04/an-exegetical-paper-on-1-john-21-2/>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ John 11:51b–52.

⁶⁶ Christopher Cone, “1 John 2:2 – Does Grace Extend to Everyone?” accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.drcone.com/2015/10/13/1-john-22-does-grace-extend-to-everyone/>.

CONCLUSION

Calvin is a transparent advocate for and thus example of the theological hermeneutic both for its appeal and its deficiencies. Like other proponents of the theological hermeneutic, he proposes the basis for knowledge is the fear of God – the right perspective of Him. However, he does not establish the place of hermeneutics within the study of worldview rightly leading Silva to recognize the precommitment to historical theology within Calvin's interpretive methodology. The result of this maneuver is the usurping of the authority of God (in as far as the system of theology impacts the exegetical process). This leads to a hermeneutic spiral compromising objectivity as both theology and exegesis continually provide growth for the other. This is essential for the theological hermeneutic and necessarily results in a form of eisegesis (in as far as the theological system is used to guide interpretation).