

Book Review

The Witness of Jesus, Paul and John: An Exploration in Biblical Theology

Larry R. Helyer

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). 432 pages

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This book succeeds on two levels. First, it offers a concise but thorough review of the subject of biblical theology, including its history in scholarship and its current practice. This serves as a very helpful introduction to the discipline. Second, it demonstrates how biblical theology is done through examination of the three major witnesses of the New Testament—Jesus, Paul, and John. This moves it from academic theory to practical application.

In the academic world, biblical theology does not get enough attention. Every college provides courses on Systematic Theology—and a plethora of books exist on that subject—but biblical theology is not afforded the same treatment. This is a shame because, as Helyer says, “Biblical theology provides data for the systematic theologian who can then reformulate the material.” Furthermore, “good preaching should reflect the fruit of biblical theology” (26).

Chapters 1-3 provide the framework for doing biblical theology while chapters 4-10 examine the biblical theologies of the three main New Testament witnesses. Chapter 11 offers a summary and synthesis of what these three witnesses say together.

Chapter 3 examines the differences between what he terms Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism. While this study is very good, it really interrupts the flow of the book and probably belongs in another work.

As Helyer admits in the first lines of chapter 4, whether a “theology of Jesus” can be presented from Matthew, Mark, and Luke is an open question (123). To my mind, it seems like running before one can walk. By “theology of Jesus,” Helyer really means a theology of the Synoptic Gospels. However, I think this cannot be adequately done until a theology of each Evangelist has been completed. There is nothing inherently wrong with his results. However, he skips a step that would be helpful for a theological student. I was also disappointed that he limited himself to the New Testament because a companion volume focusing on the witness of Moses, David, and Isaiah would complete the biblical theology.

The Witness of Jesus, Paul, and John can serve as a wonderful textbook for a class on biblical theology. It should also occupy a place on the shelf of every minister who desires to effectively preach the Word of God and apply it to the lives of his or her hearers.