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## The Practical Application of Biblical Theology to Christian Apologetics

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## The Practical Application of Biblical Theology to Christian Apologetics

### Abstract

Many Christians are skeptical regarding the practical relevance of theology for the common believer. Exploring how the subdiscipline of biblical theology can be applied can effectively dispel this misconception. In particular, the apologetic applications of biblical theology's primary deliverances underscore the relevance theology has to the average Christian. Given the growing need for effective Christian apologetics, it would be wise for the Church to further explore biblical theology and to incorporate it into the defense of Christianity. Existing scholarship has largely overlooked biblical theology's apologetic potential. Thus, there is a need to explore this relationship for the benefit of the Church's global witness. Biblical theology's two primary deliverances, a proper understanding of Scripture's metanarrative and a framework for properly applying Scripture, have apologetic applications and implications that are important for the average Christian. Although there are many possible approaches to apologetics, the utilization of biblical theology remains an overlooked method with significant potential.

### Keywords

apologetics, biblical theology, theology, application, metanarrative, scripture

### Cover Page Footnote

Currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science, Religion: Apologetics

## The Practical Application of Biblical Theology to Christian Apologetics

“Much of the Bible is...just plain weird, as you would expect of a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents, composed, revised, translated, distorted and ‘improved’ by hundreds of anonymous authors, editors and copyists, unknown to us and mostly unknown to each other, spanning nine centuries.”<sup>1</sup> This view of Christian Scripture expressed by evolutionary biologist and popular atheist, Richard Dawkins is becoming increasingly common in Western society. To modern readers, biblical writings often seem alien and unintelligible. Many are able to recall vague details of Bible stories they heard as a child but are unable to identify the narrative context in which those stories find themselves, let alone explain their theological significance. Unfortunately, this is true for many Christians and non-Christians alike. In order to adequately answer objections like Dawkins’, greater attention to the area of theology is needed.

In particular, the subdiscipline of biblical theology is well-equipped for this task. The use of the term “biblical theology” varies widely. The seemingly straightforward nature of the term may lead some to believe it refers simply to either the theology expressed in the Bible or a theology that is in accord with what the Bible says.<sup>2</sup> However, biblical theology’s primary focus is the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.<sup>3</sup> Although approaches to biblical theology vary, this treatment will use the term “biblical theology” to refer to the subdiscipline of theology that aims to describe the cohesive nature of the whole Bible. It enables one to see reality in the way the biblical authors did and thereby cultivates a biblical worldview.<sup>4</sup> Biblical theology is, therefore, indispensable to a proper understanding of Scripture and the textual relationships at play within it.

Despite this, some Christians are pessimistic about theology and remain skeptical of its use. The aim of this paper is to show the relevance, practicality, and importance of biblical theology to the average Christian. Contrary to the belief of some Christians, biblical theology is not an impractical enterprise, reserved only for academics and the clergy. Rather, since the primary deliverances of biblical theology—a proper understanding of Scripture’s metanarrative and a proper application of Scripture—have applications to Christian apologetics, biblical theology has practical applications for every Christian.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006), 268.

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012), 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (La Vergne: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

## Theology and Apologetics

The nature of the relationship between Christian theology and apologetics is debated. According to some, apologetics must occur prior to theology. Those who hold this position maintain that fundamental truths about theology must first be established by apologetics. Only then can one delve into theological exploration of those concepts.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, others argue, alongside Calvin, that theology must be done prior to apologetics. That is to say, apologetics can only be done once theological concepts have been defined.<sup>6</sup> James Beilby suggests both of these views err by assuming that theology and apologetics must be done in a wooden, chronological sequence. Instead, Beilby argues that apologetics and theology are intertwined such that when one is done, the other surfaces out of necessity.<sup>7</sup> Any theological proposition affirmed within Christian doctrine is, for believers, “true and true in the sense of being an accurate description of reality.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the need for apologetics arises to defend the truth of that proposition. Beilby is correct that “only a theologically well-grounded, confident faith can engage in apologetics.”<sup>9</sup> So, engaging in theology results in the simultaneous need for apologetics. Moreover, engaging in apologetics results in the immediate need to define and clarify theological concepts. Therefore, a substantive relationship between Christian theology and Christian apologetics arises necessarily from both pursuits.

However, the extent to which *biblical* theology applies to apologetics may depend upon the apologetic approach being used. A presuppositional approach to apologetics, for example, necessitates a greater reliance upon biblical theology than alternative approaches. Presuppositional apologetics depends on the assumption that the biblical worldview is true. In seeking to discover the inner unity of Scripture, biblical theology equips readers of Scripture to view the world through the lens of the biblical authors. That is to say, it informs people on what a biblical worldview is. Thus, biblical theology becomes a necessary component of engaging in presuppositional apologetics. Kevin J. Vanhoozer goes further saying, “only the biblical framework enables us to interpret reality correctly.”<sup>10</sup> Without biblical theology, the biblical worldview could not be known, making presuppositional apologetics impossible. Vanhoozer’s comment that “apologetics

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<sup>5</sup> James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 33, EBSCOhost.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> K. J. Vanhoozer, “Theology and Apologetics,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. Gavin McGrath, W. C. Campbell-Jack, and C. Stephen Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 35, ProQuest Ebook Central.

should not proceed as if Christian doctrines were irrelevant to the defense, or to the understanding, of faith” suggests he would agree with this conclusion.<sup>11</sup> Although other apologetic approaches can and do utilize biblical theology, a presuppositional approach requires it.

### **Apologetics and Scripture’s Metanarrative**

Regardless of one’s apologetic methodology, the two primary deliverances of biblical theology have several apologetic applications. These deliverances are (1) a proper understanding of Scripture’s metanarrative and (2) a framework for the proper application of Scripture. With regard to the first, there are many apologetic applications. Though cultural milieus largely dictate what apologetic methods and strategies are most effective, the apologetic use of Scripture’s metanarrative has its roots in the earliest days of Christianity. Jesus and his apostles took this approach when arguing for the Messiahship of Jesus.

The apostles regarded the story of their lives and ministries as the fulfillment of what began in the Old Testament (to them, simply, “the Scriptures”).<sup>12</sup> The apologetics of the early church included frequent appeals to prophetic fulfillment in the person of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> A prime example of this is Peter’s sermon summarized in Acts 4:12–26. In this sermon Peter claims that the God of the Jewish patriarchs has glorified Jesus (4:13), that the suffering of Jesus was foretold by the prophets (4:18), and, perhaps most notably, that the Abrahamic covenant was being fulfilled by Jesus (4:25–26).<sup>14</sup> Peter, as well as others in the earliest church, appealed to Scripture’s metanarrative to make the case for the Christological identity of Jesus.

This was not *ad hoc* for the early church, however. One might be tempted to imagine the disciples, following the ascension of Jesus, frantically combing the Scriptures to make sense of their experiences during the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. According to the gospel accounts, Jesus explicitly taught his followers to read the Scriptures in light of him and to see him in light of the Scriptures. The Gospel of Luke reports an intriguing episode where two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus are joined by a third party who, unbeknownst to them, is the risen Christ himself (Luke 24:1–29). After listening to the disciples recount the recently transpired events, Jesus, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets,” interpreted “the things written *about himself* in all the scriptures”

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 26:54 (NET); Luke 24:44–45; Rom. 1:2; 1 Cor. 15:4.

<sup>13</sup> Brian K. Morley, *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015), “Apologetics in the Bible,” ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>14</sup> Other examples of apostolic appeal to the prophetic fulfillment of Jesus include Acts 2:14–36, 3:11–26, 7:1–53, 8:26–35, 13:16–41.

(Luke 24:27 NET; emphasis added). Following this account, Jesus emphasized to more disciples that the law, prophets, and psalms were fulfilled in him (Luke 24:44). Clearly Jesus' intention was that his disciples be "witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48) and proclaim that the story they had been witnessing was the continuation of the story God had been writing from the beginning. Francis Watson remarks, "the life of Jesus does not take place in a text-free vacuum."<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt that Jesus and his disciples would wholeheartedly agree. The connection between the Old Testament and the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and continued ministry of Jesus shows that central to God's purposes for the incarnation was the fulfillment of Judaism. The story of Jesus is so intimately connected with the story of the Hebrew Bible that to neglect this connection and its use in the apostolic church is to neglect the very purpose of the incarnation itself.

Interestingly, the type of interaction with the Old Testament that was characteristic of the early church is often missing in modern Christianity. Perhaps it is the tendency of modern Christians to take for granted their belief that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. It may be that since many have been convinced (some since childhood) of Jesus' Messiahship, they do not see the need to defend that position as often as the first century church did.<sup>16</sup> As a result, telling the story of Jesus within the context of Scripture's metanarrative, which was so central to the early church, is largely missing in modern evangelistic efforts. In contrast to the modern church, the early church was keenly aware of their burden of arguing for their newfound beliefs concerning the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. There are, however, many ways which modern Christians can use Scripture's metanarrative apologetically.

#### "Internal" Apologetics

The first apologetic use of properly understanding Scripture's metanarrative is that it provides the Christian with a defense against heresy and false worldviews.<sup>17</sup> As Alexander and Rosner explain, biblical theology is the means by which a biblical worldview (i.e., seeing reality as the biblical authors did) is cultivated.<sup>18</sup> As one becomes saturated in biblical theology, a keen sense is developed for detecting views that depart from the biblical worldview. Therefore,

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<sup>15</sup> Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 2, <http://archive.org/details/texttruthredefin0000wats>.

<sup>16</sup> Roland E. Murphy, "Questions Concerning Biblical Theology," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 30, no. 3 (2000): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/014610790003000302>.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander and Rosner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

a person with at least a general reliance upon Scripture to deliver truth can develop the skill of identifying non-Christian ideologies by judging their alignment with the worldview of the biblical authors. As such, this application is more of an “internal” apologetic that can be used by the Christian (or, minimally, the person convinced of biblical reliability) to help guard against non-Christian views. For example, an artist who is intimately familiar with the works of Rembrandt can, because of extensive experience with authentic paintings, easily identify a counterfeit. In a similar way can the Christian who is steeped in biblical theology identify worldviews that do not match up.

Though useful, this apologetic approach has clear limitations. For example, it is of little use to the person who rejects the reliability of Scripture. If one does not believe that the Bible reveals the true story of the cosmos, then it is absurd for that person to adjudicate on the truth value of a worldview by comparing it to the biblical worldview. This apologetic use is admittedly reserved for those who have been convinced that the Old and New Testaments tell the true story of reality. Attempting to use this approach as a means of convincing, for example, a Buddhist of the truth of Christianity would be unreasonable. Furthermore, this apologetic technique cannot defend against every objection. It cannot provide the Christian with an answer to the objection that there is no evidence for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, for example. Nor can it address, on its own, questions about biblical textual transmission. The suggestion here is not that, upon becoming a believer, one should ignore objections to Christianity. Rather, if one does *in fact* accept the authority of Scripture, they can therefore be equipped by biblical theology to stay within the realms of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This does not render this approach useless, for it has much value that the Church would be wise to take advantage of. However, its limited scope must be kept in mind. Although this particular application of biblical theology is focused *internally* on the Church herself, there are other considerations with *external* apologetic applications.

### Biblical Theology and Desire

The second apologetic application of Scripture’s metanarrative is that it aids Christians in the “pre-apologetic” task of affecting people’s desires toward the Christian story. It is no secret that one aim of Christian apologetics is to convince people of the truth (or, minimally, the rationality) of Christianity. While offering rational justifications for and an intellectual defense of Christian belief are imperative for Christians (1 Pet. 3:15; Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 10:5), there are other non-intellectual hindrances to the reception of the gospel. Many do not *want* Christianity to be true. The effect that desire can have on one’s beliefs is perhaps an underestimated facet of anthropology in apologetics. It seems likely that if an

individual *wanted* the Christian story to be true, her or she would be more willing to investigate or accept it.

One strategy believers can employ to move people's desires toward Christianity is "out-narrating" competing worldviews.<sup>19</sup> Christopher Watkin helpfully clarifies that "out-narrating," in this way, does not necessarily mean telling the Christian story in the most persuasive way possible. Rather, "out-narrating" involves clearly articulating that the Christian story is the most all-encompassing story available.<sup>20</sup> It is a story that seeks to explain the history of the cosmos in its entirety. Within this story, every aspect of reality can be evaluated in relation to a Maximally Great Being and his *telos* for the cosmos. Many will find their desires moved by this story offered by the biblical metanarrative. Therefore, a proper understanding of the biblical metanarrative can be apologetically applied by presenting an attractive story for people to want to be true. However, the aim here is not to manipulate emotions or to persuade through effective rhetoric. Instead, the goal is to clearly communicate the grand story that the Bible itself is telling. There is no need to overdramatize or exaggerate aspects of biblical story. One need only tell Scripture's metanarrative in culturally appropriate ways. In so doing, there will surely be some whose desires are inclined—even if slightly—toward the Christian story. Although the effects of this strategy would be nearly impossible to measure, it has the potential to profoundly impact the cultural milieu in which the gospel is heard and responded to.

### Coherence, Relevance, and Interest

The third way in which understanding Scripture's metanarrative can be used apologetically is that it can help correct misunderstandings of Christianity. One of the most pervasive ideological enemies of Christianity in the modern West is not agnosticism, atheism, or polytheism but what some have called "apatheism."<sup>21</sup> This so-called "apatheism" is characterized by an apathetic attitude towards religious beliefs or practices in general. Consider not the atheist who vehemently argues that God does not exist nor the theist who argues for the opposite conclusion, but the passive individual who believes that one should not

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 21–23, EBSCOhost.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Conrado Vasconcelos Gonçalves, "A Reason for Apatheism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, (August 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-023-09886-x>.



care whether or not God exists.<sup>22</sup> In the modern age, some are so engrained within what Charles Taylor has called “the immanent frame” that they are not even asking the questions apologists are attempting to answer.<sup>23</sup> Content to find meaning and significance in the immanent things of the material world, they are either apathetic or uninterested in what religion has to offer them. This increasingly popular cultural attitude towards religious belief requires new kinds of apologetic strategies.

The widespread apathy towards Christianity in particular may be due, in part, to the perception that the Christian worldview is incoherent, irrelevant, and uninteresting. Biblical theology provides several avenues for addressing these misunderstandings. The first way is that communicating the biblical metanarrative aids in presenting Christianity as a coherent worldview. As previously mentioned, biblical theology seeks to discover the “inner unity” of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Articulating this inner unity may help correct the misunderstanding that the Christian story is incoherent by outlining a clear, logical flow across its entire storyline. There currently exists an unfortunate divide between the areas of New Testament and Old Testament theology where the scholarship of one field is rarely interacting with scholarship of the other.<sup>25</sup> Watson warns, “Where theological concerns are marginalized, the two Testaments fall apart almost automatically.”<sup>26</sup> If this is not addressed, misunderstandings and caricatures of Christian theology will continue to be perpetuated. Many unbelievers seem to be under the impression that the Old Testament was God’s “plan-A” which ultimately failed. Alternatively, some view it as simply providing a lineup of exemplary moral characters to imitate. Therefore, if Christianity is to be seen as a coherent system of belief, Christians must accurately portray the connection and consistency between the two Testaments. In other words, Christians must engage with the apologetic use of biblical theology.

Understanding and communicating Scripture’s metanarrative can also help dispel the misunderstanding that Christianity is irrelevant. If the Bible’s claims about itself are correct, then it offers the story of reality from beginning to end and is, therefore, relevant today. If the biblical story is true, then every event that occurs—down to the most minuscule detail—has a place where it fits in relation to God’s grand plan for the cosmos. Seeing one’s life and circumstances as

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<sup>22</sup> Trevor Hedberg and Jordan Huzarevich, “Appraising Objections to Practical Apathism,” *Philosophia* 45, no. 1 (March 2017): 259, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-016-9759-y>.

<sup>23</sup> James K. A. Smith, “Preface,” in *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, “The Leech Has Two Daughters,” in *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (WORDsearch, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Watson, *Text and Truth*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

intimately connected to the story that God has been working out for all of human history ought to illuminate the relevance that the Biblical narrative has to the modern world. A grand story which includes every aspect of reality that is orchestrated by a Supreme Being adds meaning and relevance to every part of life.

Lastly, the metanarrative of the Bible can be used to combat the view that Christianity is uninteresting. One could imagine the fascination an individual may experience when they hear for the first time the main plot that runs throughout Scripture. Many who have grown up in American churches are surely familiar with a handful of intriguing, but bizarre and seemingly disconnected stories. Perhaps they know of Adam and Eve but are unaware that Christ is the second Adam who has overturned the universal effects of Adam's fall (Gen. 1–3; Rom. 5). Perhaps they know of Moses parting the Red Sea but are unaware that Jesus has begun a new exodus (Isa. 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21).<sup>27</sup> Perhaps they know of the standoff between David and Goliath but are unaware of the promise and fulfillment of an eternal King from David's descendants (2 Sam. 7; Luke 1:32–33). Explaining the biblical metanarrative in these ways may help to increase interest in Christianity and the Bible. Addressing these accusations of incoherence, irrelevance, and uninterestingness using biblical theology can help combat the widespread apathy towards Christianity found in today's culture.

### The Problem of Evil

The fourth apologetic use of Scripture's metanarrative is that it aids in addressing the problem of evil by putting human suffering in perspective. Though the problem of evil takes many forms, it is notoriously one of the most challenging objections to Christian theism. James P. Moreland and William Lane Craig have made the helpful distinction between the intellectual and emotional versions of the problem of evil.<sup>28</sup> The intellectual problem of evil argues for the impossibility (or improbability) of evil and suffering in a world created by the God of Christianity. By contrast, the emotional problem of evil is more concerned with how people are coping with the suffering and hurt in their lives.<sup>29</sup>

It is with regard to the emotional problem of evil that biblical theology proves most helpful. To the individual who views his or her pain in light of the biblical metanarrative, the possibility of *hope* in the face of suffering becomes available. As previously mentioned, the metanarrative of Scripture is all-

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<sup>27</sup> Mark L. Strauss, "The Davidic Messiah In Luke-Acts The Promise And Its Fulfilment In Lukan Christology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1993): 389.

<sup>28</sup> J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Boston: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 540–55, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

encompassing. As a result, those who endure suffering with a biblical theological perspective can look forward, with hopeful hearts, to the end of the story when God will make all things right. Comfort can be taken in the fact that he will then deal the final blows to evil, suffering, and pain. Richard Lints remarks that theology does not just demand dogmas to be believed, it “encompasses a framework for thinking about God and God’s world and a vision for living in it.”<sup>30</sup> When Christians view the world and their circumstances within the framework of the metanarrative provided by biblical theology, they are better equipped to face times of suffering with peace, comfort, and joy. In this way, a proper understanding of the biblical metanarrative can equip the apologist for dealing with the emotional problem of evil. The apologist can point others to a time to come when, in the words of J. R. R. Tolkien, “everything sad [is] going to come untrue.”<sup>31</sup>

There are also indirect apologetic applications of biblical theology to the problem of evil. When Christians are shaped by the biblical metanarrative to endure suffering with peace, there is an opportunity for unbelievers’ credence in and desire for Christianity to increase. If an unbeliever witnesses Christian belief produce significant changes in a person’s life, his or her credence in Christianity may increase. This may happen upon noticing the practical differences in the way Christians live during a time of intense suffering. An unbeliever may be surprised by the unexpected amount of peace exhibited by a believer in this situation. The truth of Christianity may seem more likely to them given these real effects it seems to have on people’s lives. In short, what one believes impacts how one lives; how one lives impacts how likely others are to accept the truth of those beliefs.

This comfort that is available to Christians by properly applying the biblical metanarrative during suffering may also make Christianity more appealing to the unbelieving world. Just as suffering is a universal human experience, relief from suffering is a universal human longing. For this reason, the Christian story, as one that deals with suffering in a unique and final way through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the God-Man, offers a unique hope for people who are surrounded by despair. This does not, of course, make Christianity true, but it does highlight its beauty. The beauty of the cosmic hope offered in the Christian story may pique the desires and curiosity of some who are presently apart from Christ. These applications help to explore the implications that Scripture’s metanarrative can have for the average Christian.

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<sup>30</sup> R. Lints, “Theological Method,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. Gavin McGrath, W. C. Campbell-Jack, and C. Stephen Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 703, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>31</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King: Being the Third Part of the Lord of the Rings*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), chap. 4.

### Apologetics and Scripture's Application

The second primary deliverance of biblical theology, a framework for the proper application of Scripture, also has apologetic applications. The first apologetic use that a proper application of Scripture has is that it combats the view that the Bible is an irrelevant, archaic text with no applications to modern life. As previously mentioned, understanding the biblical metanarrative can help people see the modern relevance of the Christian story. Another way of establishing this is to use biblical theology to reveal legitimate applications of the Bible to modern life. By properly considering Scripture's coherent story, variety of literary styles, and human authorship, the biblical theologian can make legitimate applications of biblical texts to modern life.<sup>32</sup> Biblical theology is the discipline where these facets of Scripture are discussed and applied. When biblical theology is done properly, the application of particular Scripture passages is not contrived but organically arises from the text itself. This is the aim of proper exegesis. Alexander and Rosner agree, remarking that "biblical theology is integral to the whole process of discerning the meaning of the biblical text and of applying this meaning to the contemporary scene."<sup>33</sup> Using biblical theology, the Christian apologist can make the case that, contrary to the belief of some, the Bible is applicable to the modern age. Without this, the Bible and Christianity will be dismissed as having little more relevance than fairy tales.

### Intellectual Depth

Using a biblical-theological framework for properly applying biblical texts can also be evidence against the view that Christianity lacks intellectual depth. One of the dominant themes of popular, religious skepticism in the West has been the perceived absence of intellectual rigor within Christianity. The objects of this perception are, in some cases, the propositions affirmed by Christians—which may seem outrageous to the skeptic. In other cases, the objects of such perception are the Christians themselves—who may seem unintelligent to the skeptic. Although certainly not characteristic of Christianity as a whole, there are Christians who, contrary to biblical teaching, pay little attention to the level of intellectual rigor present in their expression of faith. This is an unfortunate misrepresentation of Christianity.

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<sup>32</sup> Alexander and Rosner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. It should be noted that considering Scripture's human authorship need not be mutually exclusive with considering its divine authorship as well.

<sup>33</sup> K. J. Vanhoozer, "Theology and Apologetics," in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*.

In some cases, one can hardly blame the skeptics for their negative perception. Steven Anderson, pastor of Faithful Word Baptist Church in Tempe, Arizona, is a particularly tragic example of this. Anderson misapplies passages in Leviticus to advocate for the execution of homosexuals. In response to the question “You believe that anyone who is not heterosexual should die, correct?” Anderson unflinchingly remarks, “Absolutely. Of course—that’s what the Bible says.”<sup>34</sup> If the church allows such improper application of Scripture to run rampant in this way, the world will continue to see those who belong to Christ as ignorant.<sup>35</sup> One strategy to help curb this cultural perception is for Christians to encourage the use of biblical theology for proper exegesis and application of the Scriptures. Though its impact on the broader cultural perception of Christianity may be subtle, careful exegesis and application of the Bible by Christians is one way of removing potential barriers to the acceptance of the gospel. The alternative is to leave yet another barrier to Christian belief standing.

### Application

The need for Christians to be better equipped to defend their faith in a winsome manner is ever increasing. With the growing popularity of religious skepticism, antagonism, and deconstruction comes an increasing demand for Christian apologetics. Though there are many means of accomplishing this, one—perhaps largely neglected—means is the use of biblical theology. The study and practice of biblical theology in the church would result in Christians who are better prepared to defend their faith in the public square. Additionally, by removing barriers to belief through biblical theology, culture will become more conducive to Christian conversions.<sup>36</sup>

There are a few steps churches and individuals can take to put biblical theology into practice with an aim towards apologetics. First, when studying biblical texts, Christians should ask themselves how the passage fits into the metanarrative of Scripture. This is a crucial step for doing biblical theology and prevents many misunderstandings and misapplications of the Bible. Not only this, but Christians should also keep each other accountable for the proper application of Scripture. While a spirit of humility and grace should always be present, Christians ought not stand idly by when fellow believers abuse Scripture through

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<sup>34</sup> “Pastor Defends His Anti-Homosexual Sermon,” *USA TODAY*, December 16, 2014, *YouTube* video, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbSM\\_kxpObc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbSM_kxpObc).

<sup>35</sup> There are many other reasons why Anderson’s views should be condemned, but they are outside of the scope of this paper. The focus here is on the blatant example his views are of the abuse and misapplication of Scripture.

<sup>36</sup> Culture, of course, is not responsible for conversions, but it does play a role in an individual’s own plausibility structures.

reckless exegesis and application. Not only is this dangerous to the spiritual well-being of the church, but it also misrepresents the intellectual health of the church to the world. Therefore, when someone draws an improper application from a text of Scripture, something ought to be said in the spirit of Christ. Another way biblical theology can be apologetically practiced is by Christians reminding other believers of the biblical metanarrative when they face times of suffering. The inevitability of suffering makes it imperative that Christians remind each other of what suffering looks like from the perspective of Scripture's grand story. Though pain and suffering come, the Christian can take comfort in the fact that all will be made right again by the conquering Lamb. Lastly, Christians should discuss the metanarrative of Scripture with unbelievers. This can help unbelievers see the coherence, relevance, and interestingness of the Christian story.

While it is true that the deliverances of biblical theology have beneficial apologetic applications, caution must be taken when biblical theology is apologetically motivated.<sup>37</sup> Christians need to guard against allowing apologetic biases to influence their biblical-theological conclusions. Apologetic motives are not to be eradicated (nor can they be), but they must be acknowledged, and Christians must actively work against allowing them to cloud or influence their conclusions. Theological conclusions that cause discomfort are not to be avoided out of apologetic concerns. Apologetics should serve as an area where biblical theology can be applied, but not the sole motivation for engaging in it.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the enterprise of biblical theology has practical, apologetic applications. A proper understanding of Scripture's metanarrative, the first deliverance of biblical theology, has several such applications. First, properly understanding the biblical metanarrative equips believers to recognize and defeat heresies and opposing worldviews. Second, understanding the metanarrative of Scripture aids in the "pre-apologetic" task of presenting the beauty of the Christian story that can move people's affections. Third, a clear presentation of the biblical metanarrative can help combat the view that Christianity is incoherent, irrelevant, and uninteresting. Fourth, a proper understanding of Scripture's metanarrative can aid in addressing the emotional problem of evil by putting human suffering in perspective. Furthermore, certain non-believers might find their credence in Christianity increased when they witness a Christian enduring suffering with a sense of peace rooted in their understanding of the overarching biblical narrative. The second deliverance of biblical theology, a framework for the proper application of Scripture, can combat the views that the

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<sup>37</sup> John J. Collins, "The Friends of Job and the Task of Biblical Theology," *Interpretation* 70, no. 3 (July 2016): 288–300, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964316640507>.

Bible is irrelevant to modern life and that Christianity lacks intellectual depth. For these reasons, properly practiced biblical theology applied in the area of Christian apologetics is another tool God can use to build his Church and kingdom.

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