

ARTICLES

TOWARD AN EXEGETICAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

*Joshua Clutterham*¹

Introduction: A Gap in the Route from Exegesis to Practical Theology

Nearly forty years ago, Walter Kaiser, in his landmark book, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching*, announced a crisis in the Christian ministry, the danger of the widening gap between biblical exegesis and the homilist's work in sermon preparation and preaching.² He wrote,

A gap of crisis proportions exists between the steps generally outlined in most seminary or Biblical training classes in exegesis and the hard realities most pastors face every week as they prepare their sermons. Nowhere in the total curriculum of theological studies has the student been more deserted and left to his own devices than in bridging the yawning chasm between understanding the content of Scripture as it was given in the past and proclaiming it with such relevance in the present as to produce faith, life, and bona fide works.³

Kaiser further identified three crucial elements that compounded this crisis: (1) that although detailed treatments of the Scripture with respect to its critical text, history, grammar, and culture had been produced, and scores of significant homiletical treatments of Scripture texts had been crafted, a route had not yet been developed to move from exegesis to homiletics,⁴ (2) that without this route, homiletics was liable to

¹ Joshua Clutterham is Professor of Bible and Biblical Counseling at Brookes Bible College in St. Louis, MO. He can be reached at jclutterham@gmail.com.

² Kaiser's announcement was detailed in his *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), and was offered amidst other crises concerning divisions within biblical studies—widening gaps between disciplinary silos: Old Testament and New Testament studies, biblical studies and theology, systematic theology and biblical theology, etc. These silos were producing increased specialization and decreased ministry engagement.

³ Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 18.

⁴ In his own words, "Both ends of this bridge have at various times received detailed and even exhaustive treatments: (1) the historical, grammatical, cultural, and critical analysis of the text forms one end of the spectrum; and (2) the practical, devotional, homiletical, and pastoral theology (along with various techniques of delivery, organization, and persuasion) reflected in collections of sermonic outlines for all occasions forms the other. But who has mapped out

continue to move away from the biblical author's intent in the text of Scripture, and (3) that because there was a discontinuity between the seminary departments of biblical studies, which instructed in exegesis and the biblical languages, and of practical theology, which taught the preaching courses, that this trajectory was becoming an established position. The plain consequence was that preachers were missing God's message, would be trained to do so, and that congregants in the pews were the sure causalities. To this crisis, he offered a solution—the syntactical-theological method of exegesis⁵—for an improved foundation for preaching and teaching (which he called “textual expository preaching”), and effectively persuaded and strengthened a generation of pastors, teachers, and instructors to proclaim God's message.

Hermeneutically, Kaiser agreed with the foundations of the grammatico-historical method, but he saw weaknesses in that method exegetically for finally arriving at proclamation to the Church.⁶ Kaiser's syntactical-theological method of biblical exegesis highlighted two major tenets: (1) ‘Syntactical’ related to the in-depth analysis of words, phrases, and paragraphs in their literary and linguistic contexts, and (2) ‘Theological’ concerned the teaching of the whole of Scripture as related to the focus text.⁷ Finally, he heralded that “Exegesis is never an end in itself. Its purposes are never

the route between these two points? The number of books and articles worth mentioning which provide both faithfulness to the text of Scripture and spiritual nourishment to contemporary men and women is so sparse and hidden in such remote journals or languages as to be of very little aid for our needs today. To the best of my knowledge, no one has even produced in English or in any modern European language what we would call an exegetical theology that maps out this most difficult route of moving from the text of Scripture over into the proclamation of that text.” Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 18.

⁵ Although Kaiser communicates clear agreement with the goals of the grammatico-historical method of exegesis, he notes its limitations: “Grammatico-historical exegesis has failed to map the route between the actual determination of the authentic meaning and the delivery of that word to modern men and women who ask that that meaning be translated into some kind of normative application or significance for their lives.” Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 88.

⁶ The grammatico-historical method or hermeneutic teaches that a proper interpretation of a text is achieved when that interpretation agrees with the intention of its author and thus stresses the importance of understanding the words and syntax of that text in their grammatical sense and historical context for reading the author accurately. A method of exegesis—or exegetical method—practically develops the system of arriving at that interpretation from a certain hermeneutical foundation. *Exegesis* is sometimes used interchangeably with *Hermeneutics*—the science and art of interpretation—but the former, a broader term, focuses more on a method of analyzing a defined text to derive a critical interpretation while the latter describes a set of positions or principles for approaching the task of interpretation generally.

⁷ Technically Kaiser presented three levels of his syntactical method: (1) Contextual analysis which examined larger units of text related to the focus text in four categories—the sectional context, book context, and canonical context before returning to the immediate context, (2) Syntactical analysis which examined the grammatical and historical sense of the words chosen and their function in the sentence and paragraph, and (3) Verbal analysis which

fully realized until it begins to take into account the problems of transferring what has been learned from the text over to the waiting Church” and that it “must come to terms with the audience as well as with what the author meant by the words he used.” As such, Kaiser’s method culminated in a homiletical analysis which considered the data from syntactical and theological analyses in the development of the sermon plan.

Kaiser’s work profoundly influenced how scholars thought about the exegetical task and how various considerations of theology (biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, natural theology, practical theology) related to exegesis and to each other, as displayed in the perspectives and development of the exegetical pyramid.⁸ The exegetical pyramid arranged these considerations in order of foundations for the next step in the exegetical method—Scripture serving as the ultimate foundation, building from text to ministry.

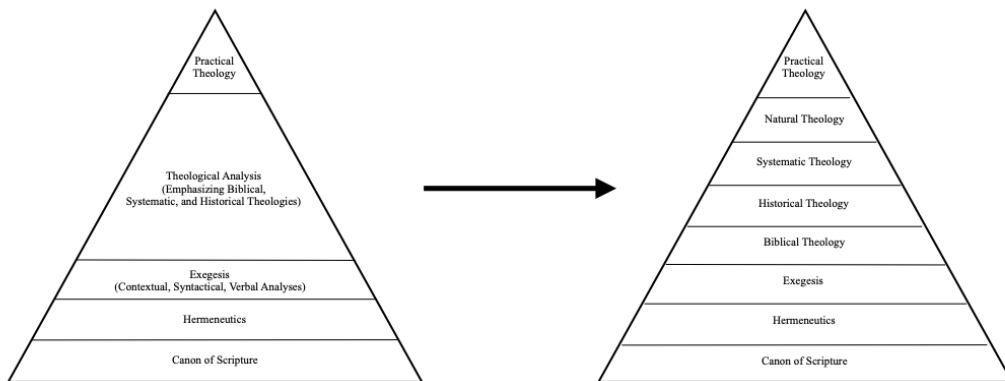


Fig. 1 Development of the Exegetical Pyramid, Kaiser to Today

The canon of Scripture, understood as inspired, inerrant, authoritative, complete, and sufficient forms the foundation of the exegetical task. The canon is then approached with Hermeneutics, a set of governing rules for interpreting the text. The process of interpretation applied to context, syntax, and words follows with the exegesis level.

considered additional factors effecting the meaning of words and phrases (e.g., idioms, cultural terms, figures of speech, and key theological terms).

⁸ Also called the *theological pyramid*, this diagram visually arranged the order of exegetical analyses into layers which both formed foundations for what would be built above, but also an expectation of checks on the interpretation derived from the application of those analyses. That is, once the concerns of language (grammatical) and context (historical) had been applied to derive an interpretation, that interpretation was augmented and checked through additional considerations of syntax (language structures), authorial personality, and theological inquiry (biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, natural theology). The peak of the pyramid—practical theology—then applies that verified interpretation to the ministry and proclamation of the Word.

Following this level of foundation, a set of theological inquiry both serves to fill out the interpretation and to guard against faulty interpretation. Biblical Theology examines the exegesis thus far with consideration to the nature of Scripture as progressively revealed over some 1500 years. It stresses the unique personalities of the biblical authors and the coherent purposes of the divine author. And as such, it further illuminates the intention of the author given his broader corpus, but also guards from error of reading a perspective into the text which is inconsistent with that corpus.

Historical Theology considers the long history of interpretation in the Christian Church, asking how people in the past have understood the same text of Scripture—assisting the exegete to make connections but also to guard from cultural bias and errors in ignorance. Systematic Theology organizes the teaching of the Bible (as exegetically discerned) and aids the process by allowing the interpretation of the focus text to be compared to the Bible as a whole. Natural Theology considers that God has revealed Himself to all creation in categories of glorious presentation (Psalm 19:1), eternal power, and divine nature (Romans 1:19–20). This robust understanding yields a proper foundation for practical theology, how humanity ought to respond to God’s revelation and how God works in and through this response. Scholars have rightfully remarked that the functional practice of this exegetical pyramid involves many interrelationships and feedback loops as the exegetical process and knowledge of the Scripture continues to be refined—leading some to represent the diagram not as a pyramid but as a network or circle. Still, as D.A. Carson concludes, “The line of final control is the straight line from exegesis right through Biblical Theology and Historical Theology to Systematic Theology and Pastoral Theology. The final authority is the Bible and the Bible alone.”⁹ And Kaiser’s work served as the impetus for this helpful development, filling the gap between exegesis and practical theology.

Although Kaiser’s solution brought improvements to teaching and preaching, those improvements did not translate to the full spectrum of pastoral ministry. His statement, “Nowhere in the total curriculum of theological studies has the student been more deserted and left to his own devices...,” could have been directed just as easily, if not more profoundly, to training in pastoral care and counseling. Those outlets of

⁹ D.A. Carson, “How to Read the Bible and Do Theology Well,” The Gospel Coalition, September 24, 2015, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-bible-and-theology-don-carson-nivzsb>.

practical theology had been suffering their own crisis for decades at the point of Kaiser's writing—a deeper crisis in fact since it concerned whether the Bible and theology were even foundational for those outlets at all.

The crisis in pastoral care and counseling indeed related to Kaiser's crisis in several ways. First, the problem in pastoral counseling expressed itself with a similar lament from seminary graduates getting started in ministry but with more agony. One such pastor expressed it this way:

Like many other pastors, I learned little about counseling in seminary, so I began with virtually no knowledge of what to do. Soon I was in difficulty. Early in my first pastorate, following an evening service, a man lingered after everyone else had left. I chatted with him awkwardly, wondering what he wanted. He broke into tears, but could not speak. I simply did not know what to do. I was helpless. He went home that night without unburdening his heart or receiving any genuine help from his pastor. Less than one month later he died. I now suspect that his doctor had told him of his impending death and that he had come for counsel. But I had failed him.¹⁰

At least these seminarians took courses that had them preaching from the Bible, although lacking Kaiser's exegetical route; these same seminarians had not even a glimpse at pastoral care grounded in Scripture. A second similarity: as Kaiser introduced a correction through the publication of a landmark book, Jay Adams, the pastor who had years before lamented his failure with the man grieving his terminal diagnosis, sought to spark the same type of correction through the publication of *Competent to Counsel* in 1970. In that work Adams, whose expertise was homiletics, had first become concerned about the deficiency of Scriptural input into counseling training through his own experience but increasingly as he sought growth and discovered the complete waywardness of contemporary Christian counseling in its discontinuity with Christian theology; that is, he was noticing the same type of alarming trends as Kaiser: (1) he saw a widening gap between the Bible and theology with the practice of pastoral care and counseling, (2) he became aware that no route from exegesis to pastoral counseling had been developed,¹¹ and (3) that because there was a discontinuity

¹⁰ Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), xi.

¹¹ The modern Biblical Counseling movement did see itself as reviving many perspectives on the ministry of the Word as promoted by the puritans, and the puritans did model a simple broad exegetical method of 1. Text, an

between seminary departments of biblical studies and theology and the department of practical theology which taught the counseling courses, that this trajectory was becoming an established position—three tenets practically identical to the challenges Kaiser was seeking to address.¹²

With such similarities between the corrections of Kaiser and Adams, why wouldn't Kaiser's correction have solved Adams's crisis to equal measure? The reason for this is twofold: (1) First, while the homiletics faculty within the seminary practical theology departments saw the clear implications of the syntactical-theological method of exegesis for sermon-preparation and preaching, because the task of preaching was still understood to focus on and be dependent upon the Bible, the pastoral counseling faculty had already rejected the sufficiency of the Bible and became dependent upon secular sources for the work of soul care—and the syntactical-theological method of exegesis had little benefit for those sources. (2) Second, there was a crucial oversight in the syntactical-theological method of exegesis: There was no attention to conservative rhetorical analysis—that is, the text's compositional technique—in Kaiser's method at the syntactical level. While practical theology was indeed strengthened by the syntactical-theological method for its advantages to deriving the intended meaning of the biblical author (thus making systematic theological conclusions more sound), the

exposition of the meaning; 2. Doctrine, a theological presentation about God and man's relation and obligations to Him, which involved attention to systematic theology; and 3. Use, an application of that meaning and theology, cf. David Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms: A Redemptive-Historical Vision of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59. This exegetical method seems to have been the seedbed behind their vigorously biblical approach to pastoral care. Still this approach was not expanded into a taught methodology and made available in the form that Kaiser sought to accomplish.

¹² A third connection point may be postulated (not proven in this article) that Jay Adams's book, which revived the circles of reformed theology to the richness of God's Word for practical theology, helped create the atmosphere and energy that catapulted Walter Kaiser to pen *Toward an Exegetical Theology* a decade later. Jay Adams's own book on preaching which was published in 1982—a year after Kaiser's—offers several points seen as lacking by Kaiser in an available methodology, working from exegesis to homiletics. Adams's book was the product of 12 years of his own educational focus on preaching and his experience teaching practical theology (both counseling and preaching) courses at Westminster Theological Seminary. This timeline would place Adams formulating and teaching some of the same conclusions as Kaiser in the decade leading up to Kaiser's book. It is noteworthy that Adams himself was aware of a rhetorical analysis at least by that point and that he lamented that it was unfortunately overlooked by most: "Rhetorical and literary analyses (areas themselves rarely acknowledged and so usually ignored)..." Jay Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 30.

Adams returned to attention of rhetoric in his article, "Biblical Interpretation and Counseling, Part 2," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1998). In that article, he did make the connection between the rhetoric of a text of Scripture with the practice of practical theology for the purposes of inviting contemplation and giving instruction memorably by putting truth in bite-size form (e.g., a proverb), or by shocking (through amplified language or hyperbole), or through illustrative descriptions.

method still left practical theology as merely an application of systematic theology and not also as a direct development of authorial rhetoric.¹³ This oversight made practitioners more informed about biblical doctrine, but still left them asking the same how, why, and what-specifically questions about how to deliver that doctrine in pastoral conversations.

The ministry mouths and hands of practitioners were not anymore skillful after the method than before. Instead they continued to lean on the sometimes wise/biblical and sometimes unwise/unbiblical guidance of mentors, or where available guidance lacked, resorting to testing out new procedures as situations arose instead of being profoundly strengthened by the Bible's own rhetorical richness gleaned directly from the text in exegesis. To say it bluntly, the syntactical-theological method of exegesis focused only on pulling the meaning out of the text in exegesis and left behind the text's own inspired delivery method as something without value. The meaning continued up the pyramid becoming more theologically refined and arriving at the step of practical theology only to begin a new search for a delivery system in the new ministry context of preaching and counseling. At this point, the preacher or counselor was left to his own devices to communicate the meaning—on the one hand, an unfortunate situation for preaching in which so much of the text's richness had been lost in the process but still recoverable given the typical amount of time to prepare a sermon, on the other hand, it was disastrous for counseling because its dynamic nature eliminated the opportunity to adequately prepare statements, responses, and questions.

Perhaps what has developed could be compared to a twin-engine plane. Practical Theology operates best when both engines are firing—a powerful combination of practical theological *meaning (content)* and practical theological *method of delivery (rhetoric)*. In the 1970s, when the founders of the modern Biblical Counseling movement first made the bold claim, amidst a crowded milieu of secular theorists and practitioners, that the Scripture sufficiently speaks into both areas of content and methodology, they gave pastors and Christians new wings to engage the influence of

¹³ Rhetoric describes, "1 the art of speaking or writing effectively: as a. the study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient times b. the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion 2 a. skill in the effective use of speech b. a type or mode of language or speech *also*: insincere or grandiloquent language 3: verbal communication: discourse." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "rhetoric."

those seeking to capture the territory of pastoral care, counseling, and practical living. But almost from the beginning, the one engine bore all the labor. Practical theologians asked the questions about how the teaching of the Scripture in systematic theology applied to the ministry challenges facing them. In time, they learned to use this engine to the maximum and its strength compensated for the non-use of the other engine. Those interested in the ministry of the Word side of practical theology skyrocketed to significance under the banner “nouthetic counseling,” a new term seeking to capture the admonishing, exhorting, warning, counseling approaches to personal ministry spoken of in the Scripture. Nouthetic Counseling first asked where problem behaviors were discussed in Scripture seeking alignment, what the God through the Scripture said about those behaviors, and how the pastoral counselor could involve himself to guide the counselee toward change. Nouthetic Counseling matured under the banner of “Biblical Counseling” and asked how the Scripture addresses motivations and the desires of the heart at the root of those behaviors, and how change of behavior could begin first by change of worship and desires (through right worship) and growth in a counseling-discipleship relationship. This article proposes that Biblical Counseling or Biblical Soul Care take up a distinctive quality (“Textual Biblical Counseling” or “Textual Biblical Soul Care” — paralleling Kaiser’s suggestion in “Textual Expository Preaching”) not to discard what has been gained in this modern history of progression but to also ask how the Scripture itself speaks to people who have wrong desires (and so wrong behavior) to effectively reveal to them their hearts and the way of the Lord, and how practical theologians can learn those same approaches well for practical ministry in speaking the truth in love.¹⁴

¹⁴ Although Jay Adams’s work has been frequently cited connected to the proposal of this article and gave a glimpse as to its proposal (connected to his discussion about the relationship of the preacher and the pastoral counselor and because he noteworthyly recognized the importance of rhetorical analysis in the exegetical process), he was not the only one to give a glimpse, and this article is not advocating what has been called “traditional biblical counseling.” I see a wonderful harmony in advocating all that the modern Biblical Counseling movement has learned in these past 50 years and especially in the direction of Dr. Powlison’s “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair,” JBC 13, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 35–50, and *How Does Sanctification Work?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), and the importance of relationship in counseling, with a return to a conservative rhetorical analysis of the Scripture’s benefit to teach us to speak wisely by learning from Jesus’ example, gaining expertise in inscripturated lines logic, being tutored in promoted approaches to communication, readily recalling specific communication that was used in similar inscripturated counseling scenarios or epistolary pattern. By way of making a connection, I am aiming at a systematic development from the Bible of the “verbal virtue of wisdom,” godly “conversational skill,” a robust counseling the Word. Cf. David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), esp. Chapter 10, “What is ‘Ministry of the Word’?” and *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), esp. Part 1.



Fig. 2 Method of Delivery Left Out of the Exegetical Process

Practical theologians are not only asking the questions of what the text and its author *meant*, but also how and why he communicated that meaning in the fashion he did—because the practical theologian is keenly focused on *how to approach* difficult ministry scenarios, what to specifically speak into those scenarios, and why that approach is most strategic or wise from God’s perspective. Practical theologians are not only interested in the whole counsel of God summarized in a systematic, understandable, relevant package but also in what would Jesus Christ actually say or not say and how he would say it if he were present in the room at this moment in front of the person in need of help and change.¹⁵ Practical theologians are interested in this knowledge because they want so earnestly to see the sinner-sufferer find the Lord’s help, but also because that demonstration of utter wisdom in words would send them to their knees in personal worship—“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” Such depth of riches and wisdom and knowledge of God are not found only in Scripture’s information and data, but also in the expression of those things in the manner God chose for His communication.

¹⁵ Cf. Joshua Clutterham, “What is Biblical Counseling,” in *Men Counseling Men: A Biblical Guide to the Major Issues Men Face*, ed. John Street (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 27.

The doctrine of the inspiration of the Scripture, a pillar of theological orthodoxy, should tell us as much. The doctrine teaches that the Holy Spirit of God carried along human authors to cooperatively write His Words (cf., 2 Timothy 3:15–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). And the doctrine includes attention not only to the broad message of the Scripture but to the very words. Every word choice was inspired by God. The delivery method was as much the intention of the author as the meaning. And thus an exegetical method that includes a conservative rhetorical analysis of the text at the syntactical level should be a key element of the exegetical method. Our appreciation of the Scripture’s rhetoric (method of delivery) as a significant aspect of that God-breathed formulation though has been lacking. To argue from the extreme, if the rhetoric or method of delivery is not part of the inspiration design, we might wonder why God didn’t give his word in bullet-point since that arguably is more efficient and thus an improvement, or in encyclopedic fashion—alphabetically arranged—since finding information in such a voluminous document can be challenging. John Frame’s discussion of inspiration directs toward this consideration,

God’s speech is often propositional: God’s conveying information to us. But it is far more than that. It includes all the features, functions, beauty, richness of language that we see in human communication, and more. So the concept I wish to defend is broader than the “propositional revelation” that we argued so ardently forty years ago, though propositional revelation is part of it... God’s Word is not merely propositional. God’s purpose is not merely to convey information to us, though he certainly does that. His purpose is to do for us all that can be done by language. He means to convey not only information, but tone, emotion, perspective. He means to convey his love to us, along with the sternness of his justice. Human language is right in this way, conveying a wide variety of content. God’s language is all the richer. And to communicate it, he employs a wide variety of writers with a rich diversity of experience. And the final result is exactly what he wanted to say to us.¹⁶

The doctrine of inspiration teaches us not only that God is the ultimate author of the Scripture, but that the Scripture in all of its parts bears his majestic wisdom. It is a present from the Lord in which both its contents and packaging are material more valuable than gold and silver, more precious than jewels (Proverbs 3:13–15). This present isn’t designed to toss away the method of delivery once the meaning it conveys

¹⁶ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 3, 142–43.

is uncovered; instead, the exegete ought also to analyze the text’s rhetoric itself with additional theological inquiry and arrive at practical theology with at least a prominent delivery method in mind for effective ministry.

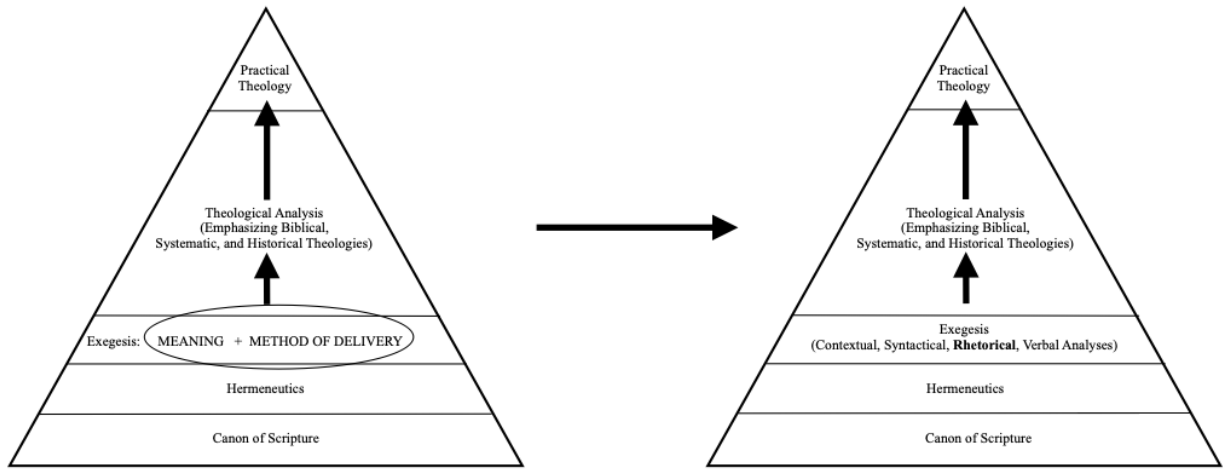


Fig. 3 Keeping Method with Meaning in the Exegetical Pyramid through Rhetorical Analysis

Whereas Kaiser’s method focused on the value in the text being its meaning, his method passed on an emphasis on the text’s method or rhetoric. As such, it left behind clues—instruction—for how to approach counseling scenarios, what to specifically say in those situations, and why it is most strategic or wise from God’s perspective. A key improvement to Kaiser’s proposed method would then be found in the inclusion of a rhetorical analysis at the syntactical level and for the fruit of that analysis to accompany the biblical, historical, systematic and practical theological inquiries—that is, a rhetorical analysis for the advantage of ministry not just meaning.

Now, this article is not contending that Kaiser did not hold to inspiration—nothing of the sort. Instead, it suggests that an oversight in this one area is not most consistent with the doctrine. To be fair to Kaiser, it must be remembered that he introduced a thorough method when there was at that time no other readily available resource of the sort, and his work has stood the test of time so that what is taught currently in the seminaries is largely identical to his proposal. Praise God for the insight he was given in 1981 and his ministry to communicate it for all the ways he has blessed the Church through his work. Kaiser’s method was not wrong with respect to the

exegesis of meaning (really an amazing help in this area), but incomplete. Kaiser's work solved one problem without solving a related problem.

Unfortunately, solving one exegetical problem, with respect to preaching and teaching, brought an unintended consequence, with respect to pastoral care and counseling, and a distancing the ministries of the public ministry of the Word from the private ministry. (Think of the scenario in which some potholes in a road are fixed while others are not. The road improves in some places but becomes even more dangerous in others because of the divergence of levels.) This article cannot critique Kaiser's book for improving preaching and teaching when his goal was to improve preaching and teaching. But, with great respect, it may critique the tendency to leave the private ministry of the Word behind. Last, as will be shown later, Kaiser's work did address a point akin to rhetorical analysis—attempting to locate and use the author's own outline as the basis for a sermon outline—so the seed idea was there but just applied to preaching and teaching in a minor way.¹⁷ The following critique, and that which has been offered thus far, is not aimed to discredit Walter Kaiser or to devalue his work; rather, it aims to expose an unintended consequence of the way that the syntactical-theological method has been formulated, especially for the private ministry of the Word in practical theology.

With care to these disclaimers, three problems with the syntactical-theological method (STM) as established by Kaiser should still be summarily considered:

1. STM Aims at an Incomplete Ministry of the Word

STM develops an exegetical method that doesn't take into account the public and private ministry of the Word. The fact that not all ministry is preaching should alone cause us to reconsider the theological pyramid. While, there may be occasions where a person is involved in one type of ministry and not the other, there isn't a New Testament representation of ministry that doesn't reflect both (i.e., a complete ministry

¹⁷ "In those happy instances where the Biblical materials are cast into a straight didactic form, such as the exegete finds in much of the Book of Romans, there is hardly any need for what we are here calling "principlization." There the problem is relatively simple, in that the only demand on the exegete is that he put the teachings and doctrines of Romans into the form of propositions (i.e., main points in a preaching outline) that will call the hearers to some type of response. When truth is not internalized within the hearers, but is left as just so many notions floating around outside their experience, the exegete is in effect a mere dilettante—a trifle in the art of interpretation." Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 150–51.

of the word). Such would be a foreign concept in the apostolic tradition, cf. Acts 20. Lack of a robust practical theology for pastoral counseling as a culmination of an exegetical method points to problems in that exegetical method. And this lack might be illustrated with a commentary on many otherwise biblical sermons when A. no application is given in the sermon, or B. insufficient time is given to develop application in the sermon, or C. application is only more systematic theology to know/hear, not to do.¹⁸ This type of preaching may reveal a foundation of academic bias, expressed in the following presuppositions or occurrences: 1) a belief that all things practical cannot be academic, 2) a belief that academic and practical do not mix—they are natural competitors, 3) academicians who do not have experience in studying practical theology academically and so cannot conceive of it, 4) those who are often academic are puffed up with the pride that makes them view the practical as simplistic—though they themselves often struggle with many of the basics of the Christian life and are at times revealed to be living hypocritical lives, 5) not many academicians have seen or exposed themselves to people who are truly investing academic efforts to studying the practical.

2. *STM Severs Meaning from Method of Delivery*

This severing may be due to an emphasis of viewing the attributes of Scripture only with respect to the meaning of the text and not its own method or rhetoric. The concern with inspiration has already been discussed but consider also the relevancy of Scripture. A view that sees parts of the Scripture as valuable (the meaning) while the rest is that which creates barriers and distractions from value (e.g., method being the shell and meaning the valuable inside). In this view, rhetoric may be studied but again only to get at the meaning, not to apply the rhetorical method itself.¹⁹ The idea may be expressed in “mining the text for gold nuggets,” or “gleaning the value embedded in

¹⁸ An interesting phenomena since the beginning of the modern Biblical Counseling movement is the progression of putting all practical application doctrine under the banner of Biblical Counseling (the private ministry of the Word) instead of the broader term, “Practical Theology,” which is ministered in both public and private outlets. The reasons for conflation of practical theology and biblical counseling are that the general population of Christians (even many pastors) have not developed a foundational theology that addresses the everyday lives and sanctification pursuits of their congregants. In the absence of the availability of practical theology, the *counseling* movement had to develop *both* the practical theology (content) and the counseling methodology.

¹⁹ Perhaps the presentation of presuppositional apologetics would be an exception here since it argues theologically that they are arguing connected to an informed anthropology and epistemology utilized in the Scripture. Although this approach is profitable, it would still only capture a small glimpse of the rhetoric of the whole of Scripture for practical theology.

the text.” Consider sufficiency: the lack of assent to the doctrine of sufficiency may be directly related to this severing, arguing over its content while brushing aside a key component of its sufficient design (i.e., its delivery method). By arguing for sufficiency, we are saying that it includes information (meaning) but also the way that information is delivered (method) in the hands of the redeemer to accomplish salvation and sanctification. Our attempts to show the sufficiency of Scripture are stunted by the fact that we do not appreciate all aspects of the Scripture (its rhetoric, model, reasoning, and instruction) as part of its sufficiency.

A similar observation might be noticed in the shortening of the extensive public reading of the Scripture in the normal order of worship—or not having a place for it in the normal order of worship. Some preachers limit their reading of the text in focus as well. The public reading of Scripture seems to have been a tradition in the very early church (Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3)—people would hear meaning and method together.

The phrase *counsel the Word* reflects well the appreciation of practical theologians for the potential of not severing meaning from method. They observe that there often is already a 1-to-1 correlation between the biblical text and the context of counseling. Severing the meaning from the delivery method breaks this unity and the value in analyzing how to approach similar counseling questions/concerns or similar ministry scenarios. In the pursuit of seeking to interpret the meaning of a passage, interpreters seemingly forgot that the meaning came through a message, and that in the actual words and techniques of that message God is instructing us how to respond to kinds and categories of questions with actual words to use as well. Each word in its context has a morality, a directness and tone, a connotation. For example, the difference of meaning between “sanctioned” and “approved” is negligible but the force of them is worlds apart in personal conversations—one may raise eyebrows that the other does not. For example, instructions to “rebuke” in the Scripture should be followed with words to an offender that don’t emphasize levity but sincerity. In Kaiser’s own words: “To put it more bluntly, exegesis must come to terms with the audience as well as with what the author meant by the words he used. Traditionally this is the very place where theological education has failed in its program.”²⁰ Again this quotation sees the

²⁰ Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 149.

importance of the telos of Scripture but neglects that it has processed the initial method out of the Scripture by filtering its meaning—the importance of looking to words not just for meaning but method.

3. *STM Prioritizes Meaning and Neglects Method*

In theological analysis, it is a problem that more exegetes are not involved in the systematic study of the Scripture's own methodology for disseminating its theology practically. In the development of practical theology, Kaiser's point that "None of the theological departments has been specifically charged with assisting the student in the most delicate maneuver of transferring the results of the syntactical-theological analysis of the text into a viable didactic or sermonic format" because "everyone has assumed that this is so very obvious to anyone who has spent hours analyzing the Biblical text, that it would be a work of supererogation to even delve into the matter at all!" shows that the weighty matters of method are being neglected and that the exegetical method is making the meaning more distant from the delivery not more near.²¹ As practical theologians, we need to emphasize that the Scripture is already (in many cases) in the format of counsel as it was delivered to us by the Holy Spirit and so its distance from being ministered today is not distant—that is, does not depend upon a principalizing to make it useful. The same words and phrases can often be used in almost exact contexts of the personal ministry of the Word.

What would a rhetorical analysis beginning at the syntactical level and sustained throughout the duration of the exegetical process accomplish that it wouldn't accomplish by only first considering it at the practical theology level?²² First, the rhetorical analysis would refine a biblical theological analysis since the exegete would become that much more familiar with not only the teaching content of a certain human inspired author but how that author tends to communicate (e.g., How does Paul, or John, or Peter put it?). Second, since rhetorical analysis at points seeks to recover intangible aspects of the text (emotion, sarcasm, satire, humor, etc.) which are important

²¹ Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 149.

²² Some may suggest that homiletics and pastoral theology be alone responsible to work out the detail of proclamation ministry—that is, at the practical theology step of the exegetical pyramid. The problem with this approach is that 1) these departments often do not have persons who are advanced in syntax themselves so as to carry it to completion, and 2) these departments have been staffed at times with those who do not hold the same theological foundations/convictions or exegetical conclusions but are respected for their credentials in psychology.

for understanding both meaning and delivery method, a historical theological inquiry would cause us to glean the teaching of the Church on the text throughout its history.

Third, inclusion of the rhetorical analysis early on would bring about a new enterprise of systematic analysis and perhaps overlooked connection of previously perceived unrelated texts—where else in the Scripture is the same rhetorical approach employed? And fourth, having been amplified by these theological analyses, they also serve as checks on interpretation: that which claims to be a biblical approach to the private ministry of the Word but fails the checks of these steps, namely, that which is not “consistent with the Bible rightly interpreted—is a poor witness. Likewise, that which claims to be instruction in biblical counseling but bears no resemblance to Jesus Christ—doesn’t speak the way He speaks, or sound the way He sounds, or share His message or operate with His worldview” will be exposed to have included a crucial error along the way.²³ For example, consider the dialogue between Jesus and the man who had been lame for 38 years (John 5:1–9). Knowing Jesus’ rhetorical approach would aid us both as disciples seeking to follow His example, but also in our interpretation. How does Jesus ask the question: “Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6). Does Jesus intend to communicate a critical or condemning question: Don’t you want to get well? It appears that is how this man, who doesn’t know Jesus, hears the question for his answer is defensive, explaining why it is that he has not been able to get into the pool of Bethesda.²⁴ Knowing Jesus’ tendency to ask questions that get to the heart of the matter that deal with the situation in the present, as opposed to the past (and the fact that the belief of the healing cult at the pool of Bethesda is inconsistent with Jesus’ ministry which is contrasting real power versus false claims to it) helps the reader to understand that the lame man misunderstood Jesus’ question with a genuine offer to be healed. This man answered in the affirmative in his own tangled web of lost-ness. A rhetorical analysis would help us to hear Jesus’ in the words of Scripture, to both grow in our interpretation skill, but also our own ministry capability in approaching others. In short,

²³ I maintain the point expressed in “What is Biblical Counseling?”, 23, that biblical counseling is tested by the two criteria: consistency with the systematic data of Scripture, rightly interpreted, and resemblance to Jesus Christ, and not by agreement to the teaching of any one leader, author, speaker in biblical counseling circles.

²⁴ The marginal note of John 5:4, likely a historically accurate representation of the thought behind the healing cult at the pool of Bethesda at the time, is not included in the earliest manuscripts and thus not part of the inspired text. Various English translations represent this factor in different ways, some removing it from the main text to include at the bottom of the page with a note.

it would strengthen both the exegete's understanding of the meaning of the text and his foundation for ministering from it practically.

In summary, this article is making a proposal similar to Kaiser's work in that (1) it seeks to connect two ends of a spectrum—exegesis to practical theology, but differs in the particular outlet of practical theology—counseling and soul care instead of preaching and teaching. (2) It is similar in that both Kaiser and this article are stating that the proclamation ministry should be more affected by the text (“textual expository preaching”), but differs in the emphasis this article places on the exegesis of the text for meaning and method (producing “textual soul care” or “textual biblical counseling”).

Thesis

This article sets forth five postulates to contend for the emergence of an exegetical practical theology:

1. Rhetorical analysis at the syntactical level concerning the Scripture's own method of delivery has been largely neglected in the exegetical method taught in the seminaries.
2. Those who have embraced rhetorical analysis in the exegetical method have thought of it only as a tool to help determine meaning, not for skill in ministry outlets of practical theology.
3. Rhetorical analysis has a benefit not just for determining meaning but shaping our own method of delivery in ministry (the public and private ministry of the Word).
4. Practical theologians should champion the inclusion of a rhetorical analysis at the syntactical level of Kaiser's widely adopted syntactical-theological exegetical method, because A. It honors the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, B. It amplifies the acquisition of insight from the Word of God, C. Practical theologians have already gathered insight into this area unknowingly because of the way they tend to give particular attention to the text, and D. because growing the church in this way would prepare ministry leaders more adequately for the public and private ministry of the Word, which would grow up the Church as a whole into those who speak the truth

- in love—as David Powlison describes “God’s new society in Christ, come to its own and coming to its own”—a vision that practical theologians long to see come to fruition.²⁵
5. Advanced exegetes should respond to this attention by using their skill to bless the ministry of the Word and not just the knowledge of the Word’s content. Exegetical scholars with writing ministries should help connect the fruit of their analyses to practical matters in their publications. Seminary professors should teach this extended exegetical method since they are preparing gospel ministers to work with people, ready to utilize the full breadth of Scripture’s wisdom to engage a foolish world.
 6. As a first step, the rhetorical analysis should begin with a conservative set of categories of rhetorical analysis which do not require debate and are ready for reception.

Conservative Categories of Rhetorical Analysis

This article proposes four conservative categories of rhetorical analysis be included in an exegetical practical theology: (1) Model, (2) Logic, (3) Instruction in Communication, and (4) Counsel.

1. Model

This category is an analysis dealing with narrative texts in which the rhetorical approach of God, Jesus, or another godly model is examined and a conclusion concerning how the modern reader could either (1) follow that model (e.g., Nathan confronting David with the preface of a parable, 2 Samuel 12:1–15; Jesus’ interaction with the rich young ruler, Matthew 19:16–22), (2) follow the model in a modified way by appealing to the Lord’s rhetoric (e.g., “Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ Hebrews 3:13) or (3) rhetorically pointing to God’s ways of dealing with such a scenario with appropriate respect (e.g., “The Lord rebuke you” Jude 9).

The concept that the reader is to learn from godly models is foundational to the Scripture (“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” (Joshua 24:15); “Follow

²⁵ Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 6.

me as I follow Christ," (1 Corinthians 11:1); "Whatever you have learned and received and seen in me—practice these things..." (Philippians 4:9). One's communication approach is not singled out as an exception; rather it is a prime area of application (Titus 2:8). The Scripture is modeling for the reader an approach to rhetoric with prescriptive undertones. We understand that not all words, speeches, or written correspondence of biblical characters (even the prophets and apostles) were inspired by God (e.g., these persons may have written grocery lists in their lifetime) but it is still clear when they are serving as models and the occasions when these apostles or prophets are portrayed as speaking God's words. Consider the benefit of learning from some of these models:

a. *The Triune God*

Scholars agree that the book of Deuteronomy is written in the form of a Suzerain-Vassal treaty or speech. The form evidences attention to rhetoric. In that form, the suzerain, the LORD, begins by reminding his vassal, the nation of Israel, of the nature of their relationship and all that the suzerain has done for the vassal as a basis for issuing stipulations. The implication of this approach is that those who are willing to reject the stipulations betray the party that has invested so much into the relationship. (In covenant with the LORD, it's never just business; it's always personal.) The rhetoric of covenant fills the pages of the Old Testament. The relationship is compared to a father to his child, an adoptive parent to his orphan, a husband to his spouse. If God uses this rhetoric for the way that He appeals to His people, the practical theologian should consider it as an effective model.

Or consider the way that God approaches Job when his desire to vindicated and to be shown in the right challenges God's authority. He doesn't issue a statement of explanation or summarized understanding—He doesn't issue a statement at all. Instead, He fires a host of questions at Job which draw Job to make the conclusion that God's knowledge is infinite, the extent of His purposes are beyond finding out. He begins with "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? And finishes with questions about Job's ability to tame the wildest of the Lord's creatures—Behemoth and Leviathon. It is through these questions—not statements—that Job comes to humble himself: "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay

my hand on my mouth...I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4; 42:3, 6). In this case, God inspires humility and obedience not in what He has done for Job but through all the things He was doing beyond any connection to Job. Paul, likewise entertaining an argument hypothetically involving the Lord's speech, asks whether a lump of clay would have the audacity to ask its molded, "Why have you made me like this?" To this line of rebellious questioning, God's response confronts with "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" (Romans 9:20). The response is not a direct answer to the question; the response focuses on how the question was the wrong question. The discussion surrounding shows that God has the right, power, and authority to do as He pleases; He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, compassion on whom He has compassion, if even to show his wrath, to make know his power and the riches of his glory.

And throughout the Scripture, the paradox of God's words describing Himself continue to form the basis by which He is worshipped (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9–10; 7:9–10) and make answers to complex questions simple, how the Lord turns evil enemies into forgiven friends:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6–7, echoing 20:5)

These words become Moses plea to spare the rebellious generation (Numbers 14:18–19). They soar on the wings of David's praise (Psalm 145:7–9). They are Solomon's address at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chronicles 6:14). They vex Jonah (Jonah 4:2) and reveal what God was doing in Nineveh. They are the meditation of Jeremiah behind bars about Judah inside Jerusalem and Babylon outside the walls (Jeremiah 32:18). They are Daniel's prayer for the end of exile (Daniel 9:4). They stir Nehemiah's heart to act (Nehemiah 1:5) and encourage his work (Nehemiah 9:32). And they are Mary's magnificat (Luke 2:46–55), and the expression of the justice of the justifier

(Romans 3:26). That is, if the chorus of God in the Bible sings about His mercy and covenant keeping, the practical theologians rhetoric should follow its example.

b. *Jesus (Particularly)*

Jesus was a master of rhetoric. He used it to get to the heart of the matter in every conversation. In the Gospel narrative texts we see something of each component of this proposed conservative set of rhetorical analysis. Zack Eswine writes,

The footsteps or “ways” that Jesus lived resembles the God who wants us to navigate life with the language that can handle it. For a moment we remind ourselves of the Gospels and what we see and hear in them for Jesus. Is Jesus sappy, sentimental, and naïve, when he talks about loving enemies and the chronically ill? His poetic language and parables are dressed with the earthy and down-home... God intends to reveal himself as the One Who Goes There. He intends to equip his people with a voice and language and method that has the capacity to do the same. “Getting prepared by God to find a language adequate for handling life as it is.”²⁶

Consider a few examples:

Jesus put a lawyer to the test in Luke 10:25–37, who himself aimed to put Jesus to the test, when He asked him two questions: (1) How do you read [the Torah]? He often asked this type of question with particular individuals, “What does the Scripture say?” “How does it read?” Their approach to Scripture after revealed much about the state of their hearts. And (2) Which of these three [the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan] proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? Those questions and the parable they surround exposed this man as one who knew the Law but didn’t apply it. He desired more to justify himself through loopholes, than to embrace the full force of the Law in compassion. Jesus’ rhetoric grips the reader as it did His original hearers.

Jesus’ interaction with the rich young ruler also shows us the brilliance of His rhetoric (Matthew 19:26–22; Mark 10:17–27). For the rich young ruler, the world is his oyster. He is respected, rich and young. His whole life lies before him and he has the

²⁶ Zack Eswine, “An Unexpected Method,” in *Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 23, 35.

resources to find earthly pleasure at every turn with those whom he chooses. But the rich young ruler is not worthy of the gospel because he does not believe it to be worthy of him. He wants a good deal, a blue light special on entrance into the kingdom of heaven. So what rhetoric would reveal most the matter of this man's heart? Jesus knows it in two seconds; he first tests the man's own evaluation of himself—again by directing him to the Scripture. The rich young ruler passes that self-evaluation with flying colors, big surprise. When Jesus reveals the price tag, however—that eternal life will cost him everything—he is shocked and dismayed. Possessing everything, he walks away emptied handed. He was interested in addition, not subtraction. He could not see that Jesus' offer to come follow Him, while leaving behind everything he knew, was an invitation to inherit the world. It was not Jesus' rhetoric that failed the man, for he left knowing exactly what stood in his way to eternal life and the love of the savior that bid him come.

Like the Old Testament sage, he warns his readers to “Beware!” “Look!” and “Consider!” “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them,” whether it be in your giving, praying, or fasting (Matthew 6:1). The consequence is the loss of any heavenly reward. Look at the birds...are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26) “Consider the lilies of the field...how much more will he clothe you?” (Matthew 6:28–30). When requested, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), Jesus didn't only teach them about prayer; He modeled prayer. “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:2–4). “Pray like this...” he says (Matthew 6:9ff). Before serving as an outline for proper prayer, His prayer was a prayer itself—expressed in model rhetoric for speaking to God.

Finally, Jesus rhetoric models an approach to hard words and confrontation. Jesus strongly reproved the scribes and Pharisees, “Woe to you...hypocrites!” (Matthew 23), as He had done their predecessors centuries before (Ezekiel 34). The latter words reflected the same righteous anger of their former expression, while still keeping as much balance as possible, “Do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works

they do" (Matthew 23:3).²⁷ Jesus discourse includes a tidal wave of identifications of similarities between the scribes and Pharisees of His day with those whom the LORD had confronted throughout Israel's tragic past. In their full expression of the Lord's disdain for these men's wicked hearts, the reader learns a rhetoric for addressing like figures.

c. *Godly Examples*

In addition the LORD and Jesus (particularly), the rhetorical approach of other godly men and women offer the reader a rhetorical models. For example: The prophet Nathan was in a difficult position. David, who possessed absolutely kingly authority, had sinned and orchestrated a sinister cover-up (2 Samuel 11). At the point of his visit, a whole year had almost had passed (as we surmise by the child of their immorality was born) and David had still not turned. How would the king respond to being confronted? Nathan's approach models skillful rhetoric, exposing the heart and leading toward God's ways. He offers up to David a parable, brilliantly analogous to David's own deeds. The result of this approach was that David objectively tried his own case, and issued his own sentence. He experienced the righteous anger of the LORD toward the rich man in the story, and condemned him for his lack of pity on the poor man. When all was revealed, Nathan executed his confrontation, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7) and pointed the finger at the rich man in the courtroom.

Consider the son of David in Jerusalem. When Solomon is faced with an extremely difficult court case (2 Kings 3:16–28), his wise rhetoric draws out the truth: "Bring me a sword...Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." This rhetoric he taught to his sons and courtiers: "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out" (Proverbs 20:5). Eswine, considering Ecclesiastes, reflects on Solomon's use of extensive questions, poetry, proverbs, lament, cynicism, unsettling speech, personal testimony and intimate language as a carefully crafted method for effectively bringing the reader to the author's conclusion. He writes,

²⁷ Interestingly Jay Adams brought attention to various words used by Jesus that communicate sounds (ouai "woe" "oh"), onomatopoeic words in the effect of his speaking. He suggested "sprinkle these freely into the mix of your daily practice sessions and notice how they improve the flavor." Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 95.

This is the calling set before us in Ecclesiastes. This is the kind of discipleship offered by the sage to his student. This is the kind of apologetic that the Preacher invites those who listen to. This is the kind of evangelistic hint this pastor uses to see his hearers converted to God. In short, the voice and method of this Preacher apprentices us in a sage way of talking with others about God.²⁸

Dare we consider the other prophets: Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Jehu, Iddo, Azariah, Elijah, Elishah, Eliezer, Jahaziel, Hanani, Micaiah, Joel, Jonah, Zechariah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Asaph, Nahum, Huldah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Uriah, Hananiah, Habakkuk, Daniel (and his friends before Nebuchadnezzar), Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Noadiah, Ezra, Nehemiah...the apostles before the Sanhedrin, before kings and governors—the list could continue on. The Scripture is replete with godly models displaying rhetoric that could be used in wise application of practical theology.

2. *Logic*

This category is an analysis of the lines of reasoning utilized in Scripture, prioritizing those that can be seen as promoted (prescription not only description) for the modern reader. Logic deals with the relationships between ideas to deduce conclusions. In the Scripture, the biblical writers are presenting truth claims and placing them in logical relationships—relationships confirmed by the mind of God.

Consider the following five factors:

First, the logic category is seen through the use of various literary devices:

- “Simile—an expressed or formal comparison between two things, “He shall be like a tree, Psalm 1:3;
- Metaphor—an implied or unexpressed comparison where an idea is carried over from one element to another without directly or expressly saying that A is “like” (“as”) B, “go tell that fox,” Luke 13:32;
- Pleonasm—a redundancy of expression where more words than are necessary are used in order to obtain a certain effect on the mind of the listener or reader, “the butler did not remember, but forgot” Genesis 40:23;

²⁸ Eswine, *Recovering Eden*, 39.

- Paronomasia—the repetition of words that are similar in sound, but not necessarily in sense or meaning, “having all sufficiency in all things,” expressed through the Greek words *panti pantote pasan*, (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- Consider also hyperbole, hendiadys, synecdoche, metonymy, irony, litotes, euphemism...²⁹

The Scripture uses these literary devices to express biblical ideas and truth claims as these devices most adequately present the logic of the mind of God. The rhetoric of the text should not be abandoned once the meaning is determined by considering the rhetoric; instead the rhetoric should continue on toward the practical theology level.

Second, the logic category reveals a formulation of the relationship of ideas which counters secular worldviews. That is, the Lord’s logic does not make sense to the world (which has been surreptitiously teaching us all our lives) and thus the Lord’s logic must be observed and learned; further, it must be taught effectively, and the rhetoric of Scripture displays an effective method to do so. How better to express the thoughts, value system, and goals of God than to express the logic and logical rhetoric of the Scripture, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; Matthew 16:25). “Many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31). “No one can serve two masters...” (Matthew 6:24). “A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus” (Galatians 2:16). “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” (Luke 22:26).

Third, the logic category is seen through standard lines of argument, for example: greater to the lesser argument, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:32; lesser to the greater argument, “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you” (Matthew 6:30).

²⁹ Cf. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 123–25.

Fourth, the logic category can be observed in how the biblical authors often call the reader to a complex interaction with the whole of Scripture through the use of intertextual allusions and quotations.

Fifth, the logic category comes through in strategic insight for addressing those who do not operate according to the Lord's logic. For example, the Scripture speaks profoundly to tell us not to answer a fool according to his foolishness that we would be guilty of acting foolishly ourselves, instead we are to answer a fool according to his folly which takes into account that his words are not really the point to be addressed (Proverbs 26:4-5).

3. Instruction in Communication

This category is an analysis of the instruction given concerning wise communication, a description of a godly approach to communication. This category goes beyond the variety of rhetorical devices to describe the nature of our rhetoric generally and not specifically requiring a target circumstance. For example, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). This general instruction might include how to approach particular groups of people, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5:1-2).³⁰ "We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." (1 Thessalonians 5:15). A pastor-elder is to "Declare these things [practical instructions for old men, old women, young men, young women, and slaves]; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you" (Titus 2:15) He does so without "being quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently

³⁰ Research and writing in the modern Biblical Counseling movement predominately explores classes of people with like problems or classes prone to certain problems. This approach has been helpfully balanced by (1) the foundation that counselors counsel people not problems, (2) the importance of using biblical language concerning characteristic labels, and descriptions of incidental behavior, (3) a greater focus on the heart—understanding that problems do not arise at the behavior level but at the worship level, and (4) an appreciation that similar outward behavior problems can be motivated by very different heart foundations. Still, there is need for further balance (A) since exponential divisions of classes lead to a perspective that people are more different from each other than similar, and (B) since the rhetoric of Scripture slices past these divisions to point toward maladies common to people. For example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 addresses many classes of persons and their characteristic problems, but verse 11 addresses them all in the same pronoun "you all were washed, you all were sanctified, you all were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God."

enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness... ” (2 Timothy 2:24–25). Paul addresses wisdom in speech with non-Christians: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6). The Scripture supplies ample instruction concerning wise godly communication.

4. *Counsel*

This category is an analysis of specific counseling scenarios engaged in correspondence, especially the New Testament epistles. The epistles are first practical theology and counseling before they are sermons, lectures, and books. Heath Lambert writes, “The Epistles are counseling. Reading these letters is like reading the counselor half of a counseling session verbatim. Though we do not hear the voice of the congregational counselees, we are able to listen in on the inspired counsel of the apostolic authors.”³¹ In contrast to the instruction in communication above, the counsel category instructs concerning and examines the rhetoric found in a robust collection of models set in particular circumstances. Into these circumstances, the inspired author offers inspired rhetoric in giving God’s message—five aspects to consider:

First, the counsel category displays how a particular set of information is given to help navigate life or to give necessary hope in that particular counseling scenario. Paul’s letter includes several statements introducing the transfer of information for a specific counseling purpose: “I want you to know” or “I do not want you to be uninformed or unaware” (Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:12; Colossians 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Second, the counsel category often operates according to a three-prong sanctification paradigm: put off the old man, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:5–17). This paradigm can be seen as the foundation in extended counsel as well; for example, Romans 14–15 is addressing the need for the stronger Christians to receive the weaker Christians:

Put on: As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him (14:1a)

³¹ Heath Lambert, “Using the Epistles in the Pastoral Ministry of the Word,” in *Scripture and Counseling*, 369.

Put off: but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats (14:1b–3a)

Be renewed: for God has welcomed him. (14:3b)

The remaining portions of these chapters fortify this basic outline, exhorting and reproving the church to put off personal preferences that cause divisions, to appreciate God’s reception of the weaker brother as God Himself has already received him with additional details, overwhelming support from other portions of the Scripture, in great rhetorical skill.

Third, the counsel category displays a rhetoric that is God-centered, pointing toward the simplicity of relationship with the Lord instead of pushing for a change of circumstances. James writes, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.” In the midst of trial, Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:4–5). Instruction in this vein supplies a priority that simplifies the way forward (overlapping here with model). Paul further directs them in the same passage to not worry about anything, but to pray about everything, to tell God what you need and to thank Him—to which He will respond with a peace within that surpasses all understanding and that guards your heart (vv. 6–7). Jesus directs the disciples not to worry but to pursue two things—God’s kingdom, and His righteousness. He elevates one great command—to love God comprehensively and neighbor as yourself (the second a necessary component of the first).

Fourth, the counsel category reveals a rhetoric that prizes the gospel, and understands people as those who are participants of its power and propagation to the world, or as those who are still ignorant of it and darkened in their understanding, or of those who are enemies of it. The writers of the epistles are men on a mission to see the glory of the Lord fill the earth. Paul’s letter to Philemon is a good example of this dynamic, itself displaying epistolary rhetoric. In the letter Paul addresses Philemon from the start as a fellow worker among gospel soldiers (Philemon 1–3). He reminds him of his prayers for him and for his own gospel witness (v. 4–7). He requests that

Philemon consider sending his slave Onesimus to Paul to serve him alongside him in gospel ministry (v. 8–14). He muses that his slave’s fleeing may have been God’s plan to bring him to salvation and to usefulness in the gospel ministry (vv. 15–16). He offers to settle any debt Onesimus might owe from the account of debts that Philemon owes to Paul—as one who preached to him the gospel leading to his own salvation (vv. 17 – 19). He makes a final appeal for Onesimus, confident that Philemon will consent (vv. 20–21), before closing the letter with greetings from those with him and a plan to visit (vv. 22–25). In the process of Paul’s argument, a further rhetorical strategy is being tactically pursued. In verse 7, Paul commends Philemon for the way he is refreshing the hearts of the saints. In verse 12, Paul calls Onesimus his very heart. This rhetorical counsel culminates in the powerful command of verse 20: “Refresh my heart.” As Philemon has ministered to others, Paul appeals that he would minister to him (to whom he owes so much) by sending Onesimus back to him. All of this wrangling is operating under the pretense that Paul and Philemon are in the work of the gospel together, and Paul has identified an area where the gospel ministry could be more strategically advanced by transferring Onesimus to a new position on the battle field. Whatever a Christian’s vocation in life, the epistles’ rhetoric speaks to them as ambassadors and disciples making disciples.

Fifth, the counsel category reveals a rhetoric that approaches Christians as learners of Christ, little children of God who need to grow up in their maturity (with respect to discernment and dealing with sin and temptation) and love for one another as a witness to the world—an elder statesman appealing on behalf of the father of the nation. His words warn of the dangers but welcome home in confidence that they will be overcome. The hymnist Will Thompson captured this rhetoric when he wrote,

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling—Calling for you and for me; Patiently Jesus is waiting and watching—Watching for you and for me! Come home! come home!
Ye who are weary, come home!
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, Calling, O sinner, come home!...

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). The implication is that they are not what they will be and they have not yet

arrived to where they are going, but they are growing and they are on the move. Martin Luther reflected this sentiment when he wrote:

This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.³²

Formalities are set-aside with nothing worth hiding from these discerning and loving writers. Their rhetoric pierces to the core and lays the matter plainly—calling, watching, warning, waiting, welcoming.

Foundations of Agreement

The tenets of this proposal are already affirmed by biblical scholars, practitioners, and counselors individually but have not been drawn together to a unity of argument. Consider the following five foundations of agreement.

1. Foundational Agreement about the Importance of Authorial Intent

Kaiser's systematic-theological method asserts the importance of the preacher and teacher's presentation matching the biblical author's message.³³ He notes the benefits of using the author's form (akin to rhetoric) as often as possible. He writes,

There is foundational agreement that attention to the biblical author's rhetoric is seen as advantageous for delivering his message in sermonic outlet. What lacks is that this principle is not limited to the public ministry of the Word. Why wouldn't the same principle be true for personal conversation and the private ministry of the Word? And furthermore, if attention to certain details give this benefit, how much more would attention to the full breath of rhetorical details! This practice, in addition to advantages in ministering with heightened rhetorical

³² Martin Luther, "An Argument – In Defense of All the Articles of Dr. Martin Luther Wrongly Condemned in the Roman Bull," in Works of Martin Luther, Vol. 3 (1521; repr., Philadelphia, PA: A.J. Broadman Company and The Castle Press, 1930), 31, Jesus, under Article 2.

³³ Martin Luther, "An Argument – In Defense of All the Articles of Dr. Martin Luther Wrongly Condemned in the Roman Bull," in Works of Martin Luther, Vol. 3 (1521; repr., Philadelphia, PA: A.J. Broadman Company and The Castle Press, 1930), 31, Jesus, under Article 2.

strategy and skill, would also come full circle as familiarity with an author's rhetorical patterns may bring breakthrough of interpretive walls. For example, in communication generally, an author speaking his point can have certain advantages over his printed word alone—a pause, a tone, an emphasis, let alone body language that accompanies. The point is that the more aspects of communication (locution, perlocution, and illocution) data that can be gathered, the higher the potential of successful comprehensive reception. understanding, but also of force.³⁴

Just as Kaiser's contextual, syntactical, and verbal analyses are attempts to bring the reader closer to hearing the communication the way the author intended, a rhetorical analysis is a key instrument in the interpreter's toolset.

2. Foundational Agreement about the Inspiration of Scripture

As presented earlier, the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture teaches that every word of Scripture is inspired by God—God carrying along human authors to cooperatively write His Word. The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is a pillar of theological orthodoxy. The doctrine teaches that the Holy Spirit of God carried along human authors to cooperatively write His Words (cf., 2 Timothy 3:15–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). There is agreement that the words are profitable in their meaning for doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness; however, there is lack of appreciation for how the delivery method shares in this profitability.

3. Foundational Agreement that the Word of God can be Taught with Varying Degrees of Effectiveness

Local churches and training organizations have long committed themselves to training believers and church leaders to more effectively communicate God's Word. There is foundational agreement that the Word of God can be taught ineffectively and effectively and that teaching the Word of God effectively is more advantageous to teaching it ineffectively. And that effective teaching includes both a concern for orthodoxy and skill in teaching it. Both contribute. One avenue of making effective

³⁴ Martin Luther, "An Argument – In Defense of All the Articles of Dr. Martin Luther Wrongly Condemned in the Roman Bull," in *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 3 (1521; repr., Philadelphia, PA: A.J. Broadman Company and The Castle Press, 1930), 31, Jesus, under Article 2.

teaching ineffective is through a lack of skill to deliver it. There is foundational agreement on this observation for preaching and teaching; what needs more attention is its implications for the private ministry of the Word. Mike Emlet writes,

The Bible affirms that we impact one another for better or worse. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). Fathers do exasperate their children (Ephesians 6:4). We can refresh one another in the Lord (2 Timothy 1:16-18). We create a relational context for other people that makes it easier or harder for them to obey Christ. God recognizes this, and he cares about the suffering that people experience at the hands of others.³⁵

Further, concerning preaching, Adams wrote, “Great content, set forth in the most logical order and with the exact words appropriate to it, can be grossly distorted, or even totally destroyed, by careless, lackluster, inappropriate, or conflicting delivery. There is matter in manner.”³⁶ Put as clearly as Adams and Emlet do, the case for the application to the private ministry of the Word becomes obvious.

4. Foundational Agreement about Bible Application

Preachers appreciate application. There is foundational agreement on the major subject of a passage being its practical telos—noticing the pastoral concern behind the text. What may be overlooked is that the very first application of Scripture before any further action is taken is to actually receive the Word as it has been written, in all its force, care, persuasiveness, and meditations. Second, there is foundational agreement that we are to be doers of the word and not hearers only, but our study and instructional approach has been tilted toward knowing, not doing. For this reason, we also often jump over the 1-to-1 correlation between what we read and what we say. A primary application area is our own communication or speech. The Scripture teaches that our communication is one of the most challenging areas to seek reform (e.g., The tongue is a “fire,” “a world of unrighteousness,” “a restless evil,” it is “full of deadly poison,” “untameable,” James 3:1–12). In addition to the Holy Spirit’s intention to sanctify the heart which produces words with the theological content of the Word; He aims to sanctify the heart by the Word’s method of delivery—the full breath of Scripture

³⁵ Michael R. Emlet, *Cross Talk : Where Life and Scripture Meet* (Greensboro: NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 97.

³⁶ Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 153.

combatting the heart of its hearers, and training the hands of those hearers in their spoken ministry to others. We should speak/reason/debate/etc. as the Scripture speaks much more than we do.

5. *Foundational Agreement that Communication as a Complex Activity Demands Wisdom*

There is foundational agreement that communication is difficult, and words have the potential to effect much more than the transference of information—opportunities for tremendous positive impact but also for harm. Wisdom in communication, which rhetoric concerns itself with, is needed to navigate such opportunities. Rhetorical analysis is not new to this article. The concept or theory of the speech act, that language accomplishes more than extending factual assertions, has been studied for more than a century. It has exposed the complexity and power of language, and has positively assisted the work of biblical interpretation. While there is at least some foundational agreement about the profit of rhetorical studies for interpretation (meaning), the benefits have not extended to application to the private ministry of the Word in model, logic, instruction and counsel.³⁷

The Nouthetic/Biblical Counseling movement as promoted one aspect of this foundation from the beginning by applying biblical principles of communicating in context. Adams drew attention to two specific examples of counseling in the same pattern as the biblical text—Nathan to David, and Jesus to Peter—but did not develop the idea of analyzing the rhetoric of these texts specifically: theological principles, yes; method of delivery beyond the surface description, no.³⁸ Biblical principles in context continue to be helpfully emphasized in biblical counseling literature.³⁹ It isn't that using

³⁷ Again, the seed of this idea has been proposed in the past by Jay Adams but was not significantly developed or widely received. He wrote, "You have to understand what the Bible is talking about. But you also need to learn how to use those devices to impress truth upon counselees to help them think and remember. Learn to invent and use crisp, startling aphorisms the way Jesus did. 'Don't cast your pearls before swine,' 'Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' are aphorisms applied to a given situation, but the principle beneath each can be applied to a variety of situations." Adams, "Biblical Interpretation and Counseling, Part 2," 30.

³⁸ Adams saw methodology and technique as primarily drawn from biblical principles rather than principle + rhetoric. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 100. Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 98–99.

³⁹ Cf. Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 50–52.

biblical principle would be a point of disagreement. There is indeed already agreement there. This article continues that agreement by including the component in the proposed rhetorical analysis: partly through the category component of “instruction in communication” and partly through the “counsel” component. The issue is that further agreement should meet the other rhetorical categories of analysis which have been neglected in practical theology studies (as a result of being absent from the standard exegetical method). For example, in a recent work devoted to Bibliology and its relation to counseling, developed by a collaboration of leading voices in the Biblical Counseling movement, only approximately 5% of the total volume, with no dedicated chapter or section, include a comment in the vein of the use of the Scripture’s own rhetoric for the practice of counseling proposed in this article.⁴⁰ This is significant because it displays that when the modern Biblical Counseling movement today has had the chance to write on Scripture or hermeneutics, it has not taken the opportunity to highlight the need to fill the gap of the syntactical-theological method and how to do it.⁴¹ It would have been reasonable for the movement that started under the banner of “nouthetic” (a word having more to do with method of delivery than meaning) to be more developed in the use of rhetoric some fifty years later.⁴²

⁴⁰ Approximately 24 pages out of the 447 total pages (in the chapters contributed by Robert Jones, Lilly Park, Jonathan Holmes, Deepak Reju, Heath Lambert and Randy Patton) include a comment on the benefit of the Scripture’s rhetoric for the practice of counseling. Bob Kellemen, and Jeff Forrey, eds., *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

⁴¹ In Michael Emler’s tremendous book dealing with biblical interpretation and application to counseling ministry, he often speaks to wise approaches to ministry contexts with God’s Word but does not include rhetorical analysis in his exegetical method. Michael Emler, *Cross Talk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 102. It is clear that he favors attention to the Scripture’s rhetoric but doesn’t take up the point about seeking to adopt its rhetoric for our own ministry approach. “It’s important to realize that the Bible not only tells a true story; it also demands a response. The authors of Scripture write with intention—their words are meant to provoke a response from the reader. In other words, the Bible is a story that provokes action! It not only informs; it also transforms our lives. It’s a message that invites us to turn from unbelief and to participate in the life of the one who, through his death and resurrection, forgives our sins and gives us new life through the Spirit,” 51. In *Scripture and Counseling*, Jeremy Pierre illustrates the difference between counselors, with similar content, approaching a scenario with different emphasis so that the reader can examine effectiveness, but does not connect the rhetorical approach back to Scripture’s rhetoric, 106-108. Heath Lambert’s fortifying work, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), and specifically the chapter “Advances in How Biblical Counselors Think about the Bible?” lends to the credibility of this article’s claim that a rhetorical analysis for private ministry of the Word has not developed in the Biblical Counseling movement; his chapter “An Area Still in Need of Advancement” confirms that this article’s proposal is not even on the radar for imminent development.

⁴² Jay Adams selected the word *nouthesis* and the method *nouthetic confrontation* because of the Greek word translated variously in the English versions of the Scripture as “admonish,” “warn,” “teach” and “counsel.” Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 44. Adams contended from the beginning that “problems are solved nouthetically by verbal means.” *Ibid.*, 45.

And there are voices in the rhetorical wilderness calling out for such attention already. Consider David Powlison's reflection:

Sometimes in conversation, Jesus cited author, book, and text from earlier Scripture (see Mark 7:6-7, 10; 10:4, 6-9, 19; 11:17). Sometimes he wove the words of earlier Scripture into the conversation without noting the source (8:18; 9:48). But his words were always biblical in their essence. God's intentions and point of view shaped everything he said. Just like a good preacher, counselor, and friend, what Jesus said was always fresh. The same truth always came out differently, because people always differ... Jesus counseled non-believers frequently and found it easy to converse about what matters. He was able to love them, to climb into their lives, to go after what ruled their hearts, to give them himself in a fresh and personal way, so that they might come to believe and find mercy, hope, and direction... Honest and wise conversations (likewise sermons) abound with many things: questions, comments, stories, metaphors, current events, personal details, opinions, asides that double back later, wit, emotion, silences, particularizing emphases, heartfelt concerns—and the Word of life, shaping it all. This is how Jesus converses (and preaches).⁴³

This article seeks to make ready fuller agreement to the way of the Lord in the expression of His Word.

I. Goals of the Revision

This article intends to effect several goals. Consider the following five:

1. *To Strengthen the Route between Exegesis to Counseling and Soul Care*

This article intends to do what Kaiser did for preaching and teaching in the world of counseling and soul care: to close a gap point between exegesis and practical ministry by inserting rhetorical analysis into the method at the syntactical level. Instead of proposing an entirely new exegetical method, this article only proposes a revision to Kaiser's already well-established method so that the connection of biblical analysis meets the private ministry of the Word side of Practical Theology in a more robust way—the culmination of a deep understanding and skill with the Bible's own rhetoric

⁴³ Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 106-7.

for ministry to people. (Indeed, this revision should also impact the public ministry of the Word as well.) Biblical Counseling has struggled to reach cruising altitude because the task of exegesis has not sufficiently been routed to practical theology.

2. To Enlist a Workforce in the Development of Exegetical Practical Theology

This article intends to draw together talent from both ends of the spectrum: to gain scholars advanced in exegetical skill and practical theology practitioners (in the private ministry of the Word particularly) who embrace the full breath of the Scripture's expression to a development of a rhetorical analysis for the benefit of practical theology—to return the hearts of biblical scholars to the task of practical theology, and the hearts of practical theologians to the work of syntactical exegesis. There are a few challenges to this goal. On the one hand, there are sectors of advanced exegetes who have categorically written off the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture (or bought into a redefinition of it) so there is a lack of motivation to return to the subject. This article seeks to win them back through opportunity for fresh inquiry—Test the Scripture again, but this time as supplying meaning and method. Why keep cutting yourself in life and living in spiritual drought when the storm clouds of God's sufficient Word are on the horizon? This proposal is worth your pursuit! On the other hand, there are sections of practical theologians who have written off academic labor, seeing it as a competitor, and not developing language skills for reading the Word of God without translation. This article seeks to illustrate the merits of such skills for discernment and learning the Word in the full expression of its method of delivery. This cannot be achieved without a commitment to more training.

3. To Reprove Homilists in the Appreciation of Its Elder Brother in a Common Heritage

As Jay Adams echoed so clearly 35 years ago the moorings of generations, the ministry of the Word is a two-pronged ministry: the private ministry of the Word and the public ministry of the Word. Again, the ministry of the Word is one that is done both in public proclamation and private counsel. A ministry that is only public and not private may be a ministry but not the ministry of the Word promoted in Scripture (and vice-versa):

The ministry of the Word is to be carried on both publicly and privately, just as it was by the apostles (Acts 20:20). In that passage, Paul says not only that he refused to hold back anything that might be beneficial to the Ephesians, but that he impressed truth on them publicly, as Calvin says, “in the congregation,” and, as Calvin continues, “privately, as every man’s necessity did require” ... Balance must be found in the ministry of the Word. Preaching must not be neglected for counseling, and counseling must not be neglected for preaching. In truth, both are one and the same ministry, as Paul viewed it in Acts 20:20. He saw no competition between them as some purport to see today. The reformers concurred. They saw the ministry of the Word as a two-fold task, to neglect either side of which was detrimental to their sheep and a failure to discharge their own stewardship of the Word.⁴⁴

Consider the brotherhood of these ministry partners, the Word of God and sons their business marquee. Before ever there was a preacher, there was a mentor meeting him with the Word of God—a tour de force together, the potential for competition apart. But not in this brotherhood. The elder brother has championed the cause of his little preacher brother, submitted himself to the words delivered among the crowd, and prayed diligently for him and his ministry. Yes! Yes! Speak to me the words of life! Cut me with that healing sword! Lead me in paths of righteousness for His namesake! But a concern gifted brother: have you forgotten our brotherhood in your zeal for preaching, and the days when you were young and needed me? Now that you are in your kingdom, remember me. I have met many friends down here in the crowd. And I with them and they with me admire you. These friends delight to hear what you have to say, but I have found that they occupy themselves more often with why? and how? A thousand thanksgivings for answering “what?” dear brother... It has been my joy to come alongside your words and expand your ministry to cheer these why and how folk. They remind me of you in your youth when what, why, and how swam together in your mind. You would be glad to know that many fellowships with despairing why and how following what you said at week’s beginning frequently ended with enthusiasm to hear more what. But I admit that I miss the days when we met what, why, and how together at a common meal. Dear brother, do you still ask why and how when you sit before our father, preparing to speak. I wonder what our father would think of us now, acting so independently of each other. Yes, you are you and I am me. I

⁴⁴ Jay Adams, “Balance in the Ministry of the Word,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 6, no. 2 (1983): 1.

aim not to bring you down. I myself am inherently in the background, never inviting a crowd, and wouldn't have it any other way. I've seen too many miracles in the shadows to wonder what it's like in the limelight. I know I need you, and I think that you still need me more than you know. As brothers, do you think we could bear a better resemblance to each other, and walk together toward a common goal? After all, we are sons of the same father trying to lead whys and hows and whats back to him.

4. To Call for a Systematic Study of Scripture's Rhetoric for Practical Theology

This article intends to lead to the development of a systematic study of Scripture's rhetoric for practical theology. At this point, no sophisticated systematic theological category of methodology has developed, beginning with the proposed conservative categories: (A) systematic study of rhetorical model, (B) systematic study of promoted rhetorical logic, (C) systematic study of instruction in communication, and (D) systematic study of counsel in biblical occasional scenarios.

5. To Unleash the Doctrine of Scripture's Sufficiency

This article intends to move the modern Biblical Counseling movement to a new phase of inquiry into the Scripture, to find a more robust sufficiency of Scripture (one that is designed to supply content and method).⁴⁵ After David reminded the reader of the Scripture in its many forms (law, precepts, testimony, commandment, fear, rules, Psalm 19:7–11), he emphasized its rhetoric: "Moreover, by them is your servant warned..." (Psalm 19:11)—warned, not just informed. He describes the Word as sweeter than honey and more valuable than gold. The words delight us in their expression; we are undone and left wanting more. Paul reflects on this text in his own description of the Scripture's sufficiency (2 Timothy 3:15–17) in a letter charged with attention to use of actual words and rhetorical strategy dealing with people in ministry.⁴⁶ He writes, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:1–2). Problems have arisen when the Biblical

⁴⁵ Perhaps not "recklessly innovative" but at least innovative, cf. Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 44.

⁴⁶ Cf. Clutterham, "What is Biblical Counseling?" 34 for the connection between Psalm 19 and 2 Timothy 3:15–17.

Counseling movement has asserted that it is capable of sufficiently addressing a small box of problems. An esteemed preacher, gifted himself in homiletics, sneered at the idea of the Scripture confined. His words would be an appropriate clarion call for this article's proposal:

The Word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See you that lion. They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools, and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries.⁴⁷

II. Advantages, Objections, and Clarifications

Now that a description of a conservative set of rhetorical categories to begin with, and the value of a rhetorical analysis has been sufficiently described, it is necessary articulate some of the advantages of the proposal with further explanation, to make a case for its implications on a passage like 2 Timothy 2:15, and to respond to objections or points of anticipated confusion.

Advantages of an Exegetical Practical Theology

As has been argued, this article presents the advantages for including a rhetorical analysis within the exegetical method at the syntactical level so that the author's own expression is considered in the interpretation of the passage and through the theological analyses for continued refinement of practical theology output. A rhetorical analysis contributing to the exegetical method has the potential in its exegetical practical theology output to train the hearer to communicate in the methods of Scripture and the Spirit-empowered speakers in Scripture, to produce at least five specific advantages:

⁴⁷ Charles Spurgeon, "The Lover of God's Law Filled with Peace" (sermon, The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, England, January 2, 1888).

1. An Exegetical Practical Theology Further Defines What Biblical Counseling Is

As Biblical Counseling has thrived under a commitment to the Bible's sufficiency for content and method in the practice of counseling, it should use this proposal as an opportunity to further define itself. Further definition would have a positive impact externally and internally. Externally, instead of biblical counselors leaving behind the term "Biblical Counseling" because some have taken an opportunity to claim the term simply because the Bible has some connection to their version of counseling (while its primary loyalties are to secular psychology and philosophy), it is more advantageous to put these claims to the test, whether these versions measure up to an exegetical practical theology—biblical in their content and method.⁴⁸ Exegetical practical theology creates another system of checks as to biblical accuracy and fidelity, and would show that these alternative approaches are not exegetically founded and bare even less resemblance to the Scripture. Internally, further definition would protect against the emergence of a guild that rivals the Bible's authority itself. In the realm of increased specialization, there is the danger of relational commitments taking priority over convictional foundations. In a hypothetical case of a guild of elite biblical counselors who decide who may also claim the title of a biblical counselor, and in which individuals arise to majority influence—whether through political maneuvering or by some prioritizing relationships over convictions—wherein a particular counseling system lacking clear connection with core convictions is promoted to exclusive support, it could be foreseen that this guild becomes a competitor to the Bible itself—a question of "what does biblical counseling teach?" (i.e., the biblical counseling guild), rather than "what does the Bible teach?" An exegetical practical theology could aid this guild and Biblical Counseling to maintain that it only rightly bears the name Biblical Counseling in so long as it is biblical.

2. An Exegetical Practical Theology Rebalances Theology and Rhetoric in the Practice of Biblical Counseling

While rich biblical systematic theology has yielded a profound impact on the work of soul care and pastoral counseling, certain problems have also arisen. A

⁴⁸ The Christian Integrationist and Christian Psychology positions have sought to move into the space of Biblical Counseling by marketing their instruction in educational institutions as "Biblical Counseling" and moving the historic Biblical Counseling approach off to a corner, calling it simplistic and labeling it as Bible-only counseling.

rebalancing of theology and rhetoric would assist the practice of biblical counseling to solve at least four problems:

First, the balance corrects the problem of systematic theology answers alone for principal heart problems. As elsewhere expressed, systematic theology alone answers tend not to target the heart except from the angle of authority, often do not appear to be compassionate (i.e., doesn't incarnate grace and truth), and may not seem relevant quick enough and long enough in the counselee's state of mind.

Second, the balance corrects a methodology of counseling which is a data dump—an extensive list of verses and biblical data—without a biblically wise presentation of it, and a prioritization of what needs to be heard and in what order; thus, good information but not edification as fits the need of the moment.

Third, the balance corrects against theological counseling alone, instead of counseling the Word. Theology may be more the product of our own biases than we realize and hope for. And creedal theology, by its nature of being more memorable, can tend to take the precedent over use of the Bible—especially in informal counsel. The rebalancing would equip biblical counselors to draw upon the model, logic, instruction, and counsel of the Scripture more readily and to ensure a biblical message, bolstered by theology not replaced by it, is delivered.

Fourth, the balance reminds—as others have already offered the correction—that the conversation is indeed theological (as is all of life), but it still is a conversation—a dynamic dialogue between embodied souls. It reminds us that at various times God spoken in various ways, including a voice from heaven, but in His ultimate expression He spoke by becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). Theology could have been delivered from heaven alone, but God chose to converse among humanity in two-way expression.

3. An Exegetical Practical Theology Directs toward Advanced Skill

The challenges for practical theologians and Christians in general as they seek to portray Christ to a watching world are immense. It isn't only the answer to what that

we give, but how we give it that is under scrutiny, and getting it wrong in one area can tear down any progress made in the other. Jesus was constantly faced with these same challenges. Remember the onslaught of the religious leaders: "...the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say" (Luke 11:53–54). His responses to them shut their mouths in amazement, marveling at His wisdom, shamed by their exposed wicked hearts. How this skill is needed today! Biblical counselors are limited; they are not the source of all God's help for their counselees. In directing the counselees to Christ and the resources of His Word, person, and community, they need the advantage of advanced skill in how to answer/speak—how to offer powerful, hopeful, challenging, comforting, etc. words that draw out the heart and direct it to obedience to the Lord and relationship with Him. These challenges necessitate a skill in delivering God's Word. As intent on homiletics as preachers are, biblical counselors should be cognizant of rhetoric. Just as many young preachers have sunk battleship sermons in their delivery of them, many novice counselors have needlessly march counselees away in the paths of rich young rulers though they truly loved them. Why? The Word they knew did not transition into the message they gave in words tactically launched, gracefully sailed, and landed at soul-winning moments.

The preacher Steven Lawson tells the story, "A young man once came to Martin Lloyd-Jones and said 'what's the difference between teaching and preaching?' And Lloyd Jones said with that dry humor, 'Young man if you have to ask me the difference between teaching and preaching it's obvious you have never heard preaching because if you'd ever heard preaching you would know the difference between teaching and preaching.'" He continued, "A lecture which is teaching oriented can be given any time, today, next week, next month, next semester, but with preaching there's a sense of urgency about the message. It must be delivered now and it must be received now. And it both builds up and it tears down, both comforts and afflicts, it challenges, it consoles, it confronts, it points the way with urgency."⁴⁹ The question for us is not whether our challenges bear similarity to Jesus' challenges but whether Jesus counselees would remark about modern biblical counselors, "You must have never seen a counselor!" In

⁴⁹ Steven Lawson, "The Mandate, Meaning, Marks, Models, and Mechanics of Expository Preaching" (lecture, Brookes Bible College, St. Louis, MO, April 27–28, 2017).

the Scriptural model, logic, instruction, and counsel, practical theologians need to press on toward advanced skill in their rhetoric.

4. An Exegetical Practical Theology is an Onramp for Teetering Christian Integrationists and Christian Psychologists

The field of Christian Counseling is populated by Christians with genuine desires to help others. Sadly, some with good goals have been directed toward theological positions at odds with biblical anthropology, hamartiology, and bibliology or simply ditch theology altogether in favor of rationalism and humanism. Instead of being trained to deliver the life-giving words of Christ and Scripture, they are equipped to offer hope in the form of diagnosis, support in the form of on-the-clock relationship and help in the form of practical tips. Their method is secularly founded and organized but peppered with Bible to add a Christian flavor. Some who have been living in these camps have grown weary of the biblical drought and famine.

They stay because they hear professionalism, technical direction, and kindness in the community. For those ready to leave in favor of the Biblical Counseling position within the field of Christian Counseling, an exegetical practical theology provides an onramp to an approach that is fundamentally biblically in its very rhetoric. (The steak and the pepper are biblical.) Further, it deals with the specific details of Scripture from syntax to practical theology—the entire exegetical methodology—to deliver optimal wisdom and kindness in the counseling room.

5. An Exegetical Practical Theology Achieves a Counsel Nearer to the Heart of God

In its attention to rhetoric, an exegetical practical theology, highlights how the Scripture directs us keenly into a wisdom of what to say and how to say it. The why of what and how is the wisdom of the heart of God. Scripture represents what God thinks is important (at the time and place) and how He desires the answer to be given (extending from His very character). As David Powlison reflects on the most prevalent command in Scripture—“Do not be afraid”—he remarks how necessary it is for those who are suffering to hear most boldly and in sustained fashion the words of the Lord—

“I am with you.”⁵⁰ In practical theology, we seek to represent the heart of God on the matter, which necessitates, what we say, how we say it and even the order in which we say what we say.⁵¹ Before Jesus retold his disciples about His going, he encouraged them with the statement, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” and plans to prepare a place for them. Practical theologians appreciate the value of a word fitly spoken (Proverbs 25:11), especially as that word captures the heart of God for the hearer. This greater wisdom through the rhetoric of Scripture is so needed to skillfully navigate conversations with sinner-sufferers steeped in the emotionally charged whole-life problems so common today. Being able to use the Scripture’s model, logic, instruction, and counsel expressed possibly in the same words, statements, lines of reasoning, tactics as God maximizes the potential that people we minister to might just hear from God.

Objections and Clarifications to an Exegetical Practical Theology

While this article has aimed to set forward a clear thesis, it can be imagined that a number of points of confusion or objections to the thesis could arise. The following eight clarifications anticipate some of those questions:

1. Biblical Rhetoric Only?

This article is not advocating that the counselor’s every word is restricted to quotations from Scripture. It is also not advocating that the Scripture only has benefit through the specific methodology in which it was given (e.g., Psalms only sung, or Jesus’ confrontation of the Pharisees only used in tense or angry situations.) Rather, the article is advocating that the Scripture’s rhetoric (along with its meaning) be our trainer

⁵⁰ David Powlison, *God’s Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 51–52.

⁵¹ Consider this point for even the arena of parenting. The Scripture’s rhetoric helps us discern God’s priorities for how to direct our children. In parenting, where children are navigating pushes and falls, lack of desire to share and care, etc., children need to be taught to work out small relationally effected incidents with a method that mirrors biblical priorities.

Consider the following order: (1) Are you okay? (Your welfare is my greatest concern.) (2) How can I help? (I am here to serve.) (3) I’m sorry for what I did. (Your harm is my regret and sorrow.) (4) Will you forgive me? (Will you treat me kindly despite my offense, and send away the obstacle that prohibits our future relationship?) (5) I love you. (I am committed to you with loyal kindness.) (6) A hug. (I love you tangibly.) (7) How can we play together again better? (A plan to resume relationship in an improved way.) We see this order as significant to demonstrate the other-oriented nature of biblical love.

in the private ministry of the Word. This means that we could find several useful approaches to ministry of the Word that effectively draw attention to its meaning, but that we should at least use the Bible's rhetoric in the ministry of the Word and to not neglect the study of it. With respect to 1 Corinthians 14:26 which references multiple types of communication from church members, John Frame calls our attention to see that the main issue was not the format used but whether it was used edificationally.⁵² Still, we find that the rhetoric of our communication may be used as a vehicle of edification, and that the Scripture can train us in wise rhetoric. Related to this question is the foundational distinction between interpretation and application. This article would maintain that there is but one interpretation for any text but many applications. Of those applications, two prominent applications are (1) that we would receive the Word as it has been delivered to us, and (2) that we would learn to approach verbal ministry with the Word as our guide.

2. *"The Meaning of Scripture is the Scripture"*

Dr. John MacArthur is famous for this short but powerful line: "The Meaning of Scripture is the Scripture." Does this article disagree with that statement? Let's first examine what Dr. MacArthur is driving at. MacArthur is highlighting two points: (1) The Scripture is not what it means to you personally, so that there could be a thousand different meanings for a thousand different people. The Scripture means one thing—what the writer of Scripture carried along by the Spirit of God himself intended. His meaning is the Scripture. (2) He is also making a point that it is essential for a preacher to give the meaning of the Scripture to his people as what the Holy Spirit will use to grow the believer to maturity. This article has affirmed Kaiser's point concerning authorial intent that MacArthur echoes. It also agrees that the meaning of the Scripture is used by the Holy Spirit in His work to produce maturity.

There may be a difference of emphasis in this article; not a disagreement with MacArthur's famous line. MacArthur is emphasizing the importance of getting the meaning right. This article is emphasizing getting the meaning right and noting the manner in which the words were delivered. MacArthur rejects the Barthian idea that the Scripture attests to God's revelation or merely contains the Word of God (i.e., that it

⁵² Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 261.

itself is not the Word of God, but is only testifies to it). Instead, he teaches that the very words of the human writers in the composition of the Scripture were the Words of God—the exact words (verbal-plenary inspiration).⁵³ That view is entirely consistent with the proposal of this article—not only consistent but totally dependent upon it. This article has argued that the Scripture, its meaning and method through its very words, are part of its inspired and sufficient design, a point that could be confused by the MacArthur’s statement unintentionally—not a point of disagreement but rather a point of emphasis.

3. Doesn't the Fact that Jesus and the Prophets and Apostles Failed to Produce Repentance in Some Individuals Indicate that Their Method of Delivery was Unimportant?

It is true that the rich young ruler walked away from Jesus (Mark 10:17–27; Matthew 19:16–22). Those who didn’t receive his call to eat His flesh and drink His blood ceased to follow after Him (John 6:1–66). This article is not presenting rhetorical wisdom and skill as a magic trick to get people to do what you want. Instead, the goal is to reveal and expose the heart of the counselee in the context of the life-giving Words of God. With this goal, they never failed. Their rhetoric was a key aspect of their success to reveal and to guide with the greatest possible expression of love.

4. Does this Proposal Attempt to Manufacture the Work of the Holy Spirit?

One might consider this proposal as an attempt to manufacture the change that the Holy Spirit alone can accomplish. This article would affirm that no one can fundamentally change his character apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 13:23). This article does not presume to take the Holy Spirit’s place, but it does recommend that practical theologians learn from Him and follow after His rhetoric in the Christian ministry, finite minds valuing and following after the expression of the infinite one. The Holy Spirit will still need to be the change agent even in the case of wise rhetoric; the difference is that the minister will more skillfully bring the counselee to that meeting. While some spiritually gifted individuals may be more adept in their

⁵³ John MacArthur, and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 75 – 78.

application skill, the Word is delivered to all. After a series of rhetorical examples (soldier, athlete, and farmer), Paul directed Timothy “to think over what I say” and for the reason that in doing so “the Lord will give [him] understanding in everything” (2 Timothy 2:7)—an example of the Lord meeting Timothy in the midst of considering God’s Words as they were rhetorically delivered.

5. The Bible is Often Descriptive and Not Prescriptive

An important clarification for this article is that not every word of Scripture models or instructs us to follow after it. The Scripture contains records of instances of men lying (e.g., 1 Samuel 31:4–6; 2 Samuel 1:5–10) but we should not take that observed rhetorical approach as a prescription for the way we speak and do ministry. Two clarifications: (1) Even the descriptive elements are often enclosed in a wider presentation where prescription rhetorical model, logic, instruction, and counsel are supplied. For example, the instance referenced above includes data for how David received and responded to the lie which was motivated by theological foundations, (2) the proposal that biblical rhetoric could be prescriptive does not eliminate the need for discernment to judge between whether the Scripture is presenting the words as in accordance with godliness or examples of worldliness. The interpreter is always required to read the Word carefully.

One such area in need of discernment is an appreciation for a reverence for the Lord in acknowledging that He has the right to use certain rhetoric that we do not. We minister as servants to the king. Although we bear His resemblance, maintain a loyalty to Him, and at times represent His authority, we are still not Him. We minister as those who have been changed but are continually in need of change coming alongside others in need of change as the Lord’s ambassadors and servants. This factor impacts the way we also think about the triune God and Jesus’ hard words. God, in His rebuke, exercises a unique level of authority. And His anger is always righteous anger. At times, the counselor would express hard words in such a godly fashion. And at other times (probably more often), in view of our own tendency to pride and selfish anger, the counselor should point the counselee to God’s vehement words on the matter alone. Our loyalty to the Lord who speaks with hard words is to respect the position of those hard words and the need to deliver them as God intended. Furthermore, the reader

must utilize discernment in recognizing certain cultural factors and considering how those cultural factors relate to his own context of ministry. It is true that Jesus went against the culture around Him in His rhetoric (e.g., using comparisons of children and dogs to express a priority of his incarnational ministry in reaching the house of Israel, Mark 7:27–30) but in His way of doing so, He said exactly what needed to be said to expose the heart and direct in the way of the Lord.

6. Isn't a Comprehensive Systematic Theological Answer Superior to One that Prioritizes Rhetoric

This article has not challenged the importance of the Scripture's meaning; rather, it has attempted to emphasize the equal importance of the Scripture's rhetoric. We need only to be careful readers of the Scripture to observe that God, Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles did not answer questions with encyclopedic entries of complete systematic theology answers. They answered questions in the way the heart needed to hear them. You might be thinking of Psalm 119:160: "The sum of your word is truth..." Two clarifications: (1) the word translated "sum" is the common Hebrew word *rosh* (which is otherwise translated head or first). It is the first word of the Bible (Genesis 1:1 *bereshit*, "In the beginning..."). It would be better to understand this verse as "The beginning or first of your word is faithfulness or truth." The idea is that God's Word is entirely true, even from its very beginning—from beginning to end. (2) Remember the rhetoric of Hebrew poetry, which this verse fits that genre. Hebrew poetry often utilizes a two word couplet in a parallelism structure. This verse would be an example of synthetic parallelism—a structure where the second line extends the statement of the first:

Line 1: The first of your word is truth

Line 2: Every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

From this analysis it is clear that this verse is not teaching that only a systematic answer yields an expression of truth. Instead, every piece of God's Word, rightly interpreted (which includes the analogy of Scripture principle, a systematic theology confirmation), is truth. The practical theological practitioner must consider how he delivers this truth

in a way that systematic theology does not concern itself with.⁵⁴ Imagine two persons who set out to run a marathon. One runs this length on an Olympic style track; 105 laps, he has completed the journey but is right back where he started. A systematic theology may help to prepare the counselor for the answer he must give but he is still required to determine how to answer. (Now, this article is proposing that by including a rhetorical analysis at the syntactical level, that a systematic study of how to answer would become part of the exegetical process. In such a case, this marathon runner would start the race in a straight line pondering what to answer and how to answer and would make tremendous progress by God's grace in the life of the counselee.) The way in which the meaning is delivered is important. Imagine ordering a sandwich at a restaurant and when your order arrives it is the full contents of ingredients on your plate but not assembled. You would object! I ordered something to be readily eaten, not a project to put together! The presentation doesn't translate into the enjoyable eating experience that you were anticipating. You've decided to complain. But to your surprise, the manager doesn't see what the problem is. "We gave you everything that would constitute a sandwich, what's the problem?" The delivery method of course.

7. Wouldn't Preoccupation with Rhetoric in Counseling Lead to Counsel Devoid of Genuine Love?

Some might suggest that words are not the essence of our counseling as the private ministry of the Word is dedicated to love not just with words (1 John 3:18). The apostle John did warn against empty words that did not display love. In the context of his warning, those words created an excuse to move away from real need. The proposal of this article concerns words that engage—words that move toward the need. Christians should not only give words, but when words are appropriate, they should follow the Scripture's model, logic, instruction, and counsel. Paul writes, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each

⁵⁴ Is there actually a single discourse from God/Jesus/Spirit-empowered witness wherein a comprehensive systematic theology is supplied? The fact that there isn't should convince us that there were goals other than to inform in the heart of God/Jesus/Spirit-empowered witnesses. We should deal with the point that the reason that we have to work so hard to construct a systematic theology is because the Bible wasn't arranged itself as a systematic theology because a systematic theology may not be the best way to inform, correct, instruct desires.

person” (Colossians 4:5–6). The Christian’s rhetoric is part of an overall strategy to love, and great wisdom is required.

8. Will this Proposal Move Me Toward Foolish Complexity or Toward Simple Wisdom?

This proposal seems to highlight an academic perspective of Scripture not emphasized by others typically in practical theology circles; is it actually an idea that would move away from the fruit of studying Bible and theology? Three considerations: (1) The proposal of this article is a simple one—that we consider the method of delivery of Scripture along with its meaning. We prefer this in everyday life when we would rather speak to someone on the phone or in person. And we also appreciate the clarity of recognizing not only what someone said, but how that person said it to consider an appropriate response. This proposal seeks to pull attention to that same dynamic, but with Scripture, and how we minister from it. (2) The fact that this feature of Scripture has been neglected for ministry means that the Church has significant work to do. As with other periods of church history when portions of the Word were neglected, the answer is not to continue neglecting them, but to submit ourselves to the Word and get busy studying it. (3) The fruit of our labor would actually produce simplicity, having done away with more foolishness, and having not settled for simplistic knowledge, and having acquired godly rhetorical skill in approaching difficult matters of ministry. David Powlison writes of a similar dynamic in the work of growing in the Christian life:

Human beings do well with simple. We do poorly with complicated. We do poorly with simplistic. True wisdom has a delightful simplicity. Foolishness either over-complicates or over-simplifies. Two of my favorite modern proverbs comment on the relationship between simplistic, complex, and simple. I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity. On the near side of complexity is simplistic; on the far side of complexity is simple. The truly simple accounts for all complexities. For example, consider Jesus’ words, “You either serve God or money.” That is simple. What do you live for? Whether you inherited millions, or work hard to make a decent living, or live on the edge in poverty, Jesus’ words search you out. Do your money-sins cluster around conspicuous consumption? Coveting? Anxiety? Theft? Presumptuous confidence? Jesus’ simple truth

accounts for you, no matter what your economic status, cultural background, or personal quirks. His simple words probe every complexity.⁵⁵

Thus the solution is not that we neglect that pesky pain in our body. The Christian community is too far separated from Scripture (and maturity in a knowledge of the Scripture) to believe that the Scripture itself, read with detail, that we would not see its rhetorical details as practical for such a huge area of life (communication, relationship, and interpersonal ministry). We must face this weakness and grow up into greater likeness to Jesus.

III. Implications and Conclusion

The implications of the emergence of an exegetical practical theology are quite extensive. The following examines eight categories of development now needed. Each requires a response from Christ's Church, a call to press on to maturity, to buckle down and do the hard work of learning a neglected aspect of Scripture. Having traveled so long on a journey as the Church, it's difficult to have come so far and to realize that something so vital was left behind at the beginning. Let's take courage to recapture what was lost:

1. *Take a Fresh Approach to Scripture Reading*

The first implication is for every Christian directly since it implies that we pay closer attention to a detail in every passage—the method it is given—and to meditate on such details. This factor should teach us something about how we speak to one another. It holds out wisdom to us and a demonstration of what love sounds like in specific words so that we will imitate its example and by doing flourish in relationships and attract others to our savior. If we could speak wisdom, warning, hope, and peace seamlessly to a foolish, lost, desperate, and chaotic world, they would recognize that we have been with Jesus in His Word. We would be in good company since our puritan forefathers approach Scripture in this way and bore tremendous fruit.

⁵⁵ David Powlison, "How does sanctification work? Part 2," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 45–46.

2. Counsel the Word, Not Simply a Systematic Theology

The engine of systematic theology has served us well and we will not now leave it behind; instead, the content we gained is joined by a powerful sidekick accompanying every majestic claim in the Scripture. Be watchful that a systematic theological answer is part of your counseling repertoire but not the only part of it. We would readily acknowledge that answers our counselees are seeking are predominately not information downloads, just as we find in the Scripture where no point of systematic theology has one address. The goal is to counsel the Word with all of its insight and breadth, not to counsel our theology, and the Word offers wisdom as to how to speak, what specifically to say, and what approach would be most wise—through its rhetoric, model, reasoning, and instruction. The Thessalonians grieving the loss of loved ones received a personal eschatology lesson, not a cosmic one. The lesson spoke hope, confidence in the Lord, and how to keep walking in obedience through grief to a concern over fear of judgment and loss at the coming of Christ.

3. Gain Exegetical Training for Practical Theology

A clear implication of this article is that those who are engaged in practical theology (really everyone) should grow in their command of exegesis. Some may need to acquire more interpretive skill in understanding rhetoric, the original languages of the Scripture, diagramming a passage, and hermeneutics. Others will need to ensure that they gain greater access to those who have such skill and to their developing conclusions. The minority who already have this skill should view their training as a weighty stewardship and publish conclusions and insight as widely as possible as quickly as possible.⁵⁶ These leaders should bring along other leaders gifted in practical theology but behind in exegetical skill. When counselors gather together for instruction, a priority should be placed on counselors being trained by other counselors who possess an exegetical practical theology (meaning and method). Young infantry know their best hope for training is found with the men who have made it through the same

⁵⁶ A special thank you to Drs. William Varner and Russell Fuller who guided me to study Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic syntax for exegesis and Drs. Robert Somerville, Stuart Scott, John Street, Ernie Baker, Jim Newheiser, Heath Lambert, David Smith and Wayne Mack who introduced me to practical theology in Biblical Counseling studies from God's Word and wisdom for applying it and ministering from it in counseling. You have faithfully entrusted to me what was entrusted to you; may I be faithful to do the same!

battles and carry the same weapons. They salute the general but bow to the experienced soldier. There are limitations on the degree to which systematic theologians, who are not actively engaged in the private ministry of the Word, can train counselors in counseling ministry. Examinations and certification requirements for those leading biblical counseling or soul care ministries should not neglect an evaluation of whether someone can derive practical theology exegetically (not just systematically). And finally, just as biblical counselors need to learn exegesis, exegetes need to be attracted to the study of practical theology, and perhaps the transformation of two persons working from opposite ends of the spectrum could best be accomplished through mutual sharpening. If you are on one end of the spectrum, lock arms with a willing companion on the other and let iron sharpen arm. In the institutional setting, Practical Theologians need to learn syntax and Exegetes need to learn practical theology—a need that may be satisfied in closer collaboration between departments, or teams of faculty. (Seminary presidents or presidents of Christian colleges/universities might consider merging the location of faculty offices to help this development.) The upstream challenge presented in this article is questioning why scholars in the area of “Biblical Soul Care” or “Biblical Counseling” are spending nearly all of their biblical research attention on what the Scripture means instead of also considering how it say what it means since their ministry will ultimately require words.

The answer could be that (1) understanding the meaning of a passage is in itself a significant challenge, and limitations of resources have required these scholar-practitioners to isolate what they believe is most important, the meaning of Scripture, (2) systematic theology tends to be prominent in these circles as the surest method to represent the teaching of Scripture, (3) these scholar-practitioners tend to have weaker exegetical training and facility in the original languages, and (4) because they have not been challenged with the benefits of a rhetorical analysis for exegesis. The downstream conversations sparked by this article will consider the fruit of an application of an exegetical practical theology, how the rhetorical data within the Scripture should direct the counselor’s tone, pace, pauses, choice of words, the order of what our answers address first, a wisdom that moves past presenting questions to pressing ones, strategies for revealing the heart of a deceiver, godly methods and words of persuasion, etc.

4. *Join a Research and Writing Project*

This article envisions at least the birth of three research and writing projects: (1) a systematic study of biblical rhetoric for ministry application. As the study examines who like questions are answered rhetorically similarly or similar rhetoric addresses different questions, new categories and connections for understanding a biblical rhetorical method will emerge. (e.g., How is it that you answer not a fool according to his folly lest you be like him yourself while answering a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.) We might redraw the lines of our systematic theology for practical theology, or what may develop is a truly practical theology with its own categories of communication to the heart—a systematic study of the range of godly responses, specifics of instruction in what to speak, and precision of development and wisdom/strategy for how to engage would emerge. We ought to consider the rhetoric of the Scripture as connecting with the heart of God—it is the way God spoke in a given circumstance. A whole systematic theology of methodology may develop if the consideration of Scripture’s method wasn’t left behind at the exegetical level. (2) Second, the implications of this article open the door to an even more robust defense of Scripture’s sufficiency, a rhetorical sufficiency. The biblical counseling movement’s explanation and defense of sufficiency lacks attention to Scripture’s rhetoric as part of its sufficiency design. We would be well served to take up the full advantages of the Scripture and even to use the rhetorical wisdom of the Scripture in our defense of its sufficiency. This would be advantageous since most of the critique from secular counselors or Christian counselors is that, while assenting to the same general view of Scripture, they find it to lack a method for their work and so attend to it sparsely. The inspiration claim includes its profitability for different types of uses. As John Frame contends, it was not sufficient for God to just give us thoughts or ideas; he designed to give us actual words himself which communicate thoughts, ideas, etc.⁵⁷ Its advantage is not only that it gives us sufficient information to teach on the one hand, and reprove/correct/encourage/warn on the other, but that it also models, teaches, and trains us in the rhetoric needed to approach others in that manner. And (3) third, as a revised exegetical method has been proposed in this article, commentaries that adopt the method are needed to lead the way to illustrate the profoundly positive impact it can make for both biblical counselors and preacher-teachers. These commentaries would

⁵⁷ Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 143.

highlight the route between syntactical inquiry and practical theology in a way that includes rhetorical analysis and emphasizes an exegetical practical theological output.

5. *Reevaluate the Critique of Jay Adams's Work*

The proposal of this article works from the arena of the exegetical method used to prepare a generation of textual expository preaching sermons. It is amazing to notice the seed of this proposal in his first formulations, and to also see that seed be neglected for decades, overlooked and underdeveloped so that it is sparsely mentioned. An implication of this proposal is that students of biblical soul care would reconsider his works (or consider them for the first time in the case that they have not read his work), and to balance such critiques of his own direct rhetoric with an appreciation of his aim. Remember that he wrote the following, which reveals his standpoint for this approach as a pastor:

Nouthetic counseling principles affect a man's entire ministry. The pastor who is nouthetically oriented will tend to become lovingly frank with his people. Counseling principles carry over into every area of the pastoral ministry. A pastor who takes nouthetic interest in his people seeks their benefit for God's glory. Therefore, he will not mince words or spar around with people. Rather, he will be specific about personal problems and straightforwardly attempt to correct them. His people will discover that he is interested in the real issues, not secondary ones. They will count him to be a man of courage. Because he will not settle for the status quo, some people will be offended, but the majority will be helped greatly and nearly all (whether they agree with him or not) will respect him. A man with the loving involvement of which Paul spoke will have a unique ministry in his community. The conservative ministry desperately needs a nouthetic orientation."⁵⁸

Perhaps this approach is slightly different for counselors who are not the pastors of the counselee (and so do not have the same authority). Adams believed that all Christians should be involved in nouthetic ministry but he did not see nouthetic ministry as something functioning without the direct oversight also of a pastor (perhaps who would give this final hard word). This consideration might assist our grasp too of the tense moments in Jesus' ministry when he confronted religiously wrong leaders (Matt.

⁵⁸ Adams, *Competent*, 62-63.

23). It is important that we recognize and deal with the fact that Jesus Christ was at times extremely angry and stern and used hard words with people. Now, we biblical counselors have been matured in many ways throughout these decades but we have not dealt with this one point of hardness of words in the counseling ministry and when they are appropriate. It may be important for us to reconsider Adams's approach and to temper our critique.

6. Influence Preaching and Preachers

Another implication of the proposal of this article is that it will change the preaching approach of many. There are many types of preaching approaches but the one that may be most celebrated today is "Expository Preaching," an approach that aims to have sermons directed by the Bible. Within the banner of expository preaching, there are still quite different approaches (1) Verse by verse teaching, an approach that seeks to comment on each verse, comparative to a commentary, and can sound more like teaching with perhaps a hortatory culmination or application. At times these sermons can emphasize certain verses or devote most of their attention to certain verses without a clear reason in the text. (2) A discussion of a systematic theology topic featured prominently in a passage. This approach identifies certain theological topics, or pertinent theological questions prominent in the text and will preach each passage to identify and answer those questions or teach those topics. The approach may quickly take you outside of the immediate passage to connect to the rest of Scripture, and thus at times this approach can seem distant from the immediate text right in front of the reader. (3) Finally, a preacher may seek to follow closely the biblical author's own outline, an approach which pays careful attention to the inspired author's own structuring of the passage to reveal the main claims/statements, to distinguish those claims/statements from supporting details, and to primarily teach those claims/statements in the sermon.

This final approach within expository preaching types may be the best conduit to highlight meaning and method, and to emphasize the need to do, not only to hear. As this article has shown, the what and the how matter to God and for that reason preachers ought to devote their sermon to exposing the what and how. If most Christians heard the what and how of God's communication with mankind more

frequently from the pulpit, they might be better suited to look for it in their personal reading and meditation on the Scripture and thus minister more effectively to one another and as witness to the world. Further, this approach may be the best representation of the comprehensive ministry of the word. As pastoral/biblical counselors stand between two worlds as well in personal conversations, a preaching approach that lends itself to an exegetical practical theology would strengthen the private ministry of the Word and benefit the church as a whole.

7. Shore-up Your Definition of Biblical Counseling

Biblical Counseling is at a crossroads of crisis—everyone wants to claim the term but many do not want to own its core historic commitments. Its lines have been blurred enough so that it has simply become the banner term in some people’s mind for all things practical and applicational. describing a vast array of subjects including Bible application, practical theology, pastoral care, instruction in Christian living, a Christian alternative to secular or quasi-secular psychology or psychotherapy, tips on marriage, tips on parenting, tips on relationships or paths for navigating conflict, evangelism, discipleship...the list seems to never end. As the discipline of Biblical Counseling matures, ministry and thought leaders must return to grapple with basic questions—what is Biblical Counseling or Biblical Soul Care?

The correction in this article clarifies some definitions or emphases—suggesting that the emphasis of biblical counseling is the practice of the private ministry of the Word in counseling and discipleship, which is one of two outlets of the ministry of the Word. Practical theology is *the sum of biblical wisdom textually derived applied to the ministry of the Word*—public (preaching and teaching) and private (counseling and discipleship). Biblical Soul Care is broader, combining the practice and wisdom of practical theology in the private ministry of the Word. And “the ministry of the Word” is the broadest terminology for a textually guided proclamation ministry of the Word of God in private (soul care through counseling and discipleship) and in public (homiletics, teaching and preaching) discourses.

Under a broad banner, some personalities and institutions not committed to biblical counseling’s core commitments and the sufficiency of Scripture have drifted in

to enjoy the credibility that those committed to the Bible and its sufficiency have labored so long to achieve. But like a life insurance salesperson who shows up to a family gathering, these personalities and institutions aren't fooling anyone, except for those who are actively seeking out the pure milk of the Word without the discernment yet to know that they are not getting it. And it's simply awkward—those committed to the core commitments of biblical counseling and the historic doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture view new converts—those who have seen afresh that there is great hope for change and encouragement to sinner-sufferers in the Scripture—as new kinsmen and have a familial affection for them. Peddlers at the party create a tension and distraction. Strengthening the connection between the practical use of rhetorical analysis of biblical texts would help to distinguish between that which is sourced in the biblical text itself on the one hand (a more clear claim to being biblical counseling) and that which is only theologically/philosophically derived on the other hand, which may be more influenced by someone's presuppositions.⁵⁹

The Biblical Counseling movement in its collegiality has produced helpful documents clarifying its commitments that help to distinguish itself. We still must equip the Church to see the underlying biblical foundation at the root of these commitments to create conviction. The revised exegetical method proposed in this article would help us practically and foundationally to lead toward those convictions and for the Church to adopt those convictions with gravity and sincerity--and in so doing, create an atmosphere of discernment of contrast for the Church.

⁵⁹ A societal space has opened for persons to pursue help in relationship with those who possess a level of wisdom about the problems people face. Persons seeking help often find relationship with these caring thinkers to be helpful. All Christians possess a wisdom in the gospel, and a mission to help others by making disciples. But not all are Christians engaged in the context of full-time counseling, wise persons meeting with persons needing help, as their dominate occupation. In the arena of fill-time counseling occupation there are many approaches and formulas (how much gospel, how much personal wisdom, how much clinical technique, etc.). The counselor might also invite or depend upon the client having an active voice in this formula. And success may be measured through whether in the end the clients felt that they were helped by the relationship. This social experiment is widely accepted in American culture. Some Christians may choose to earn a living in this societal space. They might be very successful in offering this type of helpful relationship. They may even testify to certain portions of the Scripture as the wisdom element of this helpful relationship. Consider two key distinctives: (1) this arrangement may be a societal norm but it isn't what the Scripture describes as a ministry of the Word. (2) Jesus, in His incarnational ministry, moved to disrupt individuals instead structures of societal norm: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22); "Leave her alone...for the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me" (John 12:7-8). Biblical counseling has traditionally linked itself to the private ministry of the Word, and not in the service of societal norms. Let there be a distinction. Jesus will evaluate the world and its ways—their work in the field—while biblical counselors are busy working on God's building. Jesus the righteous judge will ascertain the value of each person's work; sufficient for our concern is that we are building well.

8. *Demonstrate a More Excellent Skill in Wise and Loving Leadership*

Jesus, who loved the rich young ruler, got straight to the matter of his heart, and whether he was more dedicated to his possessions or to following him. Paul spoke to the need to approach conversations with the ability to cut a straight path to the gospel (the word of truth). As biblical counselors become more exegetically adept to solve questions of a practical nature (e.g., the common obstacles leading to a misunderstanding on the doctrine of forgiveness), they will demonstrate a more excellent skill to lead others wisely and lovingly to a sure answer. They will engage in less fruitless quarrels and in more effective soul-winning Christ-exalting powerful conversations with this level of skillset. Instead of quibbles, we will direct hearts! Questions and concerns will be satisfied before they can become debates or become entrenched around positions and personalities, and people will marvel at something greater than Solomon—the wisdom of Christ in His people.

Conclusion

This article has aimed to put the Bible before our eyes again and to point out that the full breath of God in the inspiration of Scripture intended something more than embedded meaning; He gave us words—words that He wanted us to hear just as He moved along human authors to write. The mind of God is on display in the method of delivery not just in the sum of meaning. His intention is that we be taught, corrected, reproved, and trained in righteousness through his rhetorical richness of model, logic, instruction, and counsel for how He speaks, what He says, and why He does so in that way. By returning to the Word in this way, the Church would build itself up by growing up in our knowledge the truth and the love of God and our ability to speak it as the Lord and the writers of Scripture intended, and our witness to the world would bear resemblance to what Jesus began to do and to teach in his incarnational ministry and what he continued to do and teach through his witnesses so that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord would fill the earth as the waters fill the sea. *Soli Deo Gloria*