

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND CROSS-CULTURAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS AS A MODEL

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Introduction

Cross-cultural ministry of any sort gives rise to numerous challenges, not least of which is the accurate communication of the gospel message in culturally appropriate and comprehensible ways. These challenges are compounded when one begins to engage in theological education across cultures. When missionaries move beyond the “milk” of the gospel (1 Cor 3:2) to the “meat” of deeper theological reflection, the challenge of meaningful teaching also grows deeper.¹ Yet, theological education is essential to sustaining the health of churches. As Dean Flemming argues,

The dichotomy between evangelism and theology that is present in much contemporary theological education [and, we might add, in much modern mission strategy] would have seemed quite strange to Paul. He did not consider his missionary work to be confined to his initial preaching of the gospel. Paul was profoundly concerned that believers would persevere in the faith.”²

The missionary task is incomplete without advanced theological training. The Pauline paradigm clearly reflects a deep concern that churches and leaders are adequately equipped theologically. Thus, while challenging, cross-culturally theological education is indispensable.

The way in which cross-cultural theological educators attempt to solve the problems of teaching theology is determinative for the successful passing on of the “faith that was once for all

¹ Of course, this is not to say that the gospel is simplistic or only needed for evangelism. Rather, the gospel is of “first importance” (1 Cor 15:3) and is central for all theology. See Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

² Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005), 90.

delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).³ Traditional “western” systematic theology can be difficult to contextualize as they begin with typical western questions, which can lead to western answers.⁴ Of course, this may be culturally understandable in the Western world, but can be problematic in other cultures, both in terms of comprehension and application.⁵

A detailed exploration of theological contextualization is beyond the bounds of the present inquiry. Instead, this article will argue that biblical theology offers a readily available solution to many of the problems associated with cross-cultural theological education. This is not to label biblical theology as the “silver bullet” that solves all problems, but rather to suggest biblical theology as a starting point for a way forward. In what follows, we will first provide a working definition of biblical theology and give several reasons for its use cross-culturally. Second, it will be argued that Romans is a work of biblical theology done cross-culturally. Paul’s teaching on sin in Romans 1 will be used as an example. Finally, the article will conclude with a few summary conclusions regarding cross-cultural theological education. The primary intention is to argue for the use of biblical-theological method for cross-cultural theological education.

Biblical Theology as a Way Forward

Many definitions of biblical theology have been offered in recent scholarship.⁶ For the purposes of this article, biblical theology shall be defined as *the study of the theological message*

³ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁴ The distinction between biblical and systematic theology will be made below.

⁵ For example, many of my Asian students struggle with systematic theology, particularly in applying accepted doctrinal positions to life and ministry. Anecdotally, I have heard many students articulate theological understandings that sound like near exact repetitions of traditional western theological textbooks. While there is nothing theologically incorrect about the positions, there remains a disconnect between understanding and application. I would posit that one reason for this is that the theological positions are couched in western systematic theological terms rather than culturally appropriate concepts. That is, it is nearly impossible to think in western Christian terms and apply one’s theology to Asian cultural issues because the theology is not addressing the relevant life issues or being expressed in culturally applicable ways.

⁶ See for example Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 3-9; Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 7-8; Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000), 10; Scott J. Hafemann, “Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002), 16; Charles H.H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 4; Peter J.

of the Bible, which proceeds from a literary awareness of the diverse texts of Scripture and seeks to expound the unified teaching of the Bible using the theological categories from the text itself.

Biblical theology seeks to understand and explain the theology of the Bible from the perspective of the biblical authors, emphasizing those theological themes that appear important to the authors themselves. By contrast, systematic theology brings culturally appropriate questions to the text and seeks to answer these questions by means of logical deduction from biblical teaching.

Biblical theology cannot claim to be more “biblical” than systematic theology. Rather, biblical theology proceeds from the text asking the questions raised by the text rather than bringing contemporary questions to the text and seeking to answer them biblically. Both disciplines are necessary for the health of the church, but it could be argued that biblical theology is primary while systematic theology is secondary in that it ought to build upon the results of biblical theology.⁷

While the two disciplines are essential to the health of the church, biblical theology possesses a number of advantages over systematic theology in relation to cross-cultural theological education.⁸ First, the nature of the Bible makes it inherently cross-cultural. As Christopher J. H. Wright has convincingly argued, the Scriptures themselves exist as a result of the mission of God in his world.⁹ While the exact nature of the Bible is a controversial topic,¹⁰ evangelicals widely agree that it is the self-revelation of God to humanity. This self-revelation

Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 33-34; and James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), 15-16.

⁷ Yet, biblical theology in many ways proceeds from systematic conclusions. For example, one comes to the Bible text with certain assumptions about the nature of the text. If it is believed that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, this affects the way in which one reads and applies its teaching. Thus, one should not pit biblical and systematic theology against one another.

⁸ The following advantages will be only briefly mentioned and cannot be fully developed or substantiated here.

⁹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2006), 48-51.

¹⁰ See J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

was given by the missional God to people within particular cultures. Thus, by its very nature, the Bible is a cross-cultural book.

Second, any culture can find thematic overlaps with biblical material. Since the Bible is inherently cross-cultural, there will be elements from any culture that echo biblical themes. Further, biblical-theological methods give rise to a multiplicity of theological themes, which transcend the traditional dogmatic loci. For example, filial piety is an important feature of most Asian cultures and overlaps with the biblical picture of God's fatherhood. Yet, this important biblical theme rarely (never?) finds its way into systematic discussions of theology proper.

Third, biblical theology allows cross-cultural educators to lead students through the biblical text, emphasizing that which is most important to the biblical authors rather than that which is most important to the teacher. That is, biblical theology rightly done, provides a built-in system of checks and balances that prevents the teacher from importing too much of his/her own cultural concerns to the study of theology.¹¹

Fourth, biblical theology aids students in grasping the unified nature of the biblical message. Traditional theological curricula often have separate courses for Old and New Testament introduction with no biblical theology course to connect the two. In addition, many systematic theologies do little to aid students in understanding the relationship between the testaments. Biblical theology allows students to understand doctrines within the context of the unified canon of Scripture.

Fifth, biblical theology aids believers in various contexts to see themselves within the story of God's mission in the world. Most evangelicals agree that the Bible tells one grand story that centers on God, his people, and his world. Biblical theology traces this story through the

¹¹ Of course, it would be naive to think that any study of theology could be done with no influence from the teacher's cultural background. The point here is that biblical theology, when carefully done, reduces the risk of importing cultural ideas as biblical truth. In addition, leading students through a study of biblical theology allows the students to use the advantages of their own cultural experience to gain fresh insight into biblical teaching. See Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations* (Pasadena, Calif.: WCL, 2015).

Bible and helps believers who may otherwise see themselves as isolated, within the bigger story of God's people. This, in turn, leads to a firm foundation for discipleship and service.

Sixth, biblical theology helps to build a matrix for integrated theological engagement with culture. Theological themes arising from one's study of biblical theology drives one toward cultural engagement as one observes both the overlaps between culture and biblical theology as well as the distinctness of the biblical teaching. Further, when one understands the gospel message within a biblical-theological framework, cultural engagement becomes a gospel mandate.¹² In short, biblical theology is essential for building a Christian worldview in any cultural context.

Seventh, one's method of teaching communicates just as much, if not more, than one's content. Without belaboring the point, some theological methods unwittingly lead theological students to a diminished view of Scripture because Scripture seems little more than a form of support for a previously held belief rather than the sole authoritative source for belief.¹³ Some systematic textbooks begin with a doctrinal proposition and then proceed to support the stated position with biblical texts. This leads to a deficient theology because it puts the emphasis on the proposition rather than on the theology that emerges from the study of the text. In other words, merely teaching a theological position without the leading students through an exegetical and biblical-theological study of the text fails to enable students to adequately root their doctrinal positions in the Scriptures. The study of biblical theology provides a foundation for systematic theology by giving close attention to the biblical text and the unique theological themes emerging from the text. Meaningful systematizing is built upon this foundation.

¹² Here I refer to recent studies by Scot McKnight and N.T. Wright, which rightly argue that the gospel is the announcement of the good news that Jesus is King. See McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) and N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is News and What Makes it Good* (New York: HarperOne, 2015). The point here is simply that understanding the gospel in this way leads to engagement with culture when one gives his/her full allegiance to Jesus and seeks to understand what it means for him to be King in all areas of life.

¹³ See, for example, Michael Bird's critique of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology in Evangelical Theology*, 78.

Finally, systematic theology is done best by cultural insiders. By definition, systematic theology comes to the Bible with preconceived questions. While there are some questions that every human being asks, these common questions are couched in very different terms in various cultures. The answers to these questions need to be biblically accurate, but in order to be meaningful, they must also be couched in terms of the questions being asked. Cultural outsiders will always find this challenging. Biblical theology helps to train theologians such that they are better able to answer the relevant questions with biblically faithful answers.

Romans as a Model for Cross-Cultural Theological Instruction

Having argued that biblical theology offers a potential way forward in cross-cultural theological education, we now turn our attention to the epistle to the Romans as a biblical example. In short, it will be demonstrated that in Romans, Paul uses biblical-theological methods to instruct the Roman church and that this provides a model for contemporary cross-cultural teachers of theology. Though most contemporary interpreters correctly reject Melancthon's view of Romans as a "compendium of Christian doctrine,"¹⁴ the letter contains deeply theological reflections on the gospel and its implications for the church in Rome.

Richard Longenecker has recently written that Romans provides "a template for an understanding of how the Christian gospel may be effectively contextualized today."¹⁵ That is, Romans should be read not just for its content but also for its method of cross-cultural theologizing. The remainder of this article aims to extend this insight to theological education and emphasizes the biblical-theological method Paul utilized throughout the epistle.

¹⁴ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (trans. Scott J. Hafemann; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 2.

¹⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), x.

Paul as a Biblical Theologian

N.T. Wright correctly argues that Paul is a biblical theologian.¹⁶ Wright holds that Paul built his theology upon the understood storyline of the OT. According to Wright, this is the story of “the creator god and the world, and focused upon Israel’s place as the covenant people of the former placed in the midst of the latter.”¹⁷ In Paul’s view, the OT story reaches its climax in the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the new covenant people of God (the church). Thus, Paul’s use of Scripture is more than mere proof-texting or simply a rhetorical tool used to add weight to his argument.¹⁸ While Paul’s use of Scripture clearly had rhetorical effects, these effects were only successful because Paul’s theology was biblical. That is, Paul demonstrated his understanding of Christ and his people to be in continuity with the storyline of the OT. Further, all of his theological arguments are nested within this story.¹⁹ Paul’s use of Scripture shows his gospel and its implications as the outflow of a continuous story. In this way, Paul was a biblical theologian.

However, it is also important to recognize that Paul was a *contextual theologian*.²⁰ He did not tell the “old, old story” in the same way in each of his sermons and letters. Instead, Paul used the OT in ways that were appropriate to the situation of the church or individual being addressed. He emphasized the aspects of the OT story that most directly related to his purposes in writing. Of course, Paul’s letters are situational, with each letter addressing issues relevant to the recipients. Yet, Paul was able to address these varying issues by a consistent use of the OT that allowed him to root his theology in the biblical story. Thus, biblical theology and contextual theology need not be put asunder as Paul’s theology was both *biblical* and *contextual*. Indeed, as

¹⁶ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 263.

¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 216.

¹⁸ Contra Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2004).

¹⁹ For a recent examination of narrative, particularly OT narrative, within Paul’s writings, see Bruce W. Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

²⁰ Flemming, *Contextualization*, 89.

argued above, the diversity of biblical themes highlights the contextual relevance of biblical theology. This is very evident in Paul's writings as "*all of his theology is contextual theology.*"²¹

Romans as Cross-Cultural Communication

Klaus Haacker argues that Paul had cross-cultural intentions in mind as he wrote Romans.²² Haacker notes numerous overlaps between the content of Romans and contemporary themes in Roman culture. He writes, "In introducing himself to the Roman Christians, Paul is not only displaying his 'orthodoxy' in terms of Early Christian convictions and faithfulness to the heritage of the Old Testament, but also his creative capacities in encountering new horizons of missionary endeavors."²³ Here Haacker touches on the two aspects of Paul's argumentation in Romans that are the focus of this article. First, Paul's arguments are presented as biblical-theological expositions of Scripture. In other words, Paul uses a biblical-theological approach, arguing not just from isolated texts, but also showing the way in which OT texts fit together to form a unified message interpreted in light of the coming of the Messiah. Second, Paul does this with sensitivity to the audience to which he is writing.²⁴ While using a consistent biblical-theological method of instruction, Paul is able to address issues unique to the original readers of his letters.

An Example: Sin in Romans Chapter 1

Space constraints prohibit a full demonstration of Paul's contextualized biblical theology through Romans. Instead, a brief example from the first chapter of the epistle will suffice. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul begins his argument concerning the universal nature of sin. Rather than a

²¹ Flemming, *Contextualization*, 92. One might add that all theology is contextual since all people read Scripture through their own cultural lenses.

²² Klaus Haacker, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 115-16.

²³ Haacker, *Theology*, 119.

²⁴ See also Jackson Wu, "Paul Writes to the Greek First and also to the Jew: The Missiological Significance of Understanding Paul's Purpose in Romans," *JETS* 56.4 (2013): 765-779.

full exegesis of the section, I will limit the discussion to the way in which Paul utilizes a biblical-theological method to express his argument.

Most commentators agree that Rom 1:18-32 begins Paul's argument regarding the universality of sin and thereby sets up the plight of humanity for which the work of Christ is the solution. However, what is often unnoticed or underappreciated is Paul's biblical-theological method in making this argument. This brief section of Romans is filled with allusions to Genesis, which draws attention to the story of Adam and Eve's sin in Genesis 3. Perhaps surprising to both the original readers and to present-day students of Romans is that Paul weaves in an additional allusion/quotation of Psalm 106:20 to show that all people, regardless of ethnic identity, are in sin.

While the indictment of Gentiles found in Rom 1:18-32 is similar to other Jewish writings, Paul's use of Scripture sets his arguments apart. The Adamic context for the argument is established in verse 20, where Paul explicitly mentions the "creation of the world." Drawing on creation, Paul argues that all people are "without excuse" because there is clear revelation of God within the creation. Then, in verse 23, Paul alludes to both Genesis 1 and Psalm 106. The primary allusion in the verse is to Psalm 106:20, which is a reflection on the golden calf incident of Exodus 32. Paul's allusion seems to follow the LXX of Psalm 106:20 closely, though he has added the word εἰκόνας (*eikonos*), meaning "image." This is the same term used in the LXX of Genesis 1:27 for the "image" of God. Thus, Paul has imported the theologically loaded term "image" into the allusion to Psalm 106:20.²⁵ This is pictured below, with the verbal connections in bold:

The most likely reason for the insertion of "image" in Romans 1:23 is to show an organic relationship between the stories of Adam and Israel. That is, just as Adam was God's special creation who failed to live in obedience, so Israel was God's special people who failed to keep the covenant. There may be echoes of Jeremiah 2:11 here as well, which would confirm the point

²⁵ Morna D. Hooker, 'Adam in Romans 1', *New Testament Studies* 6 (1960): 297-306 (p. 298), notes that every time Paul uses this term, it is always in reference to the image of God.

as the Jeremiah text refers to the golden calf in reflecting on Israel’s predicament leading up to the exile.

Romans 1:23	Psalm 106:20 (LXX 105:20)
καὶ ἥλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἔρπετῶν.	καὶ ἠλλάξαντο τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν ἐν ὁμοιώματι μόσχου ἔσθοντος χόρτον.
and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.	They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. ²⁶

The mention of “birds or four-footed animals or reptiles” at the end of Romans 1:23 almost certainly evokes memory of the creation account in which humanity was given dominion over all created things (Gen 1:26). Some may doubt the allusion to Adam here since Paul is obviously talking about images in relation to idolatry. However, this misses the force of the argument. People have exchanged the glory of being created in the image of the Creator for the shame of worshipping images of creation. The importation of the term “image” adds considerable biblical-theological weight to Paul’s argument.

Additional allusions to Genesis can be found in verses 25, 26–27, and 32. In verse 25, Paul says that people have worshiped the creation rather than the Creator. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve chose to listen to the voice of the created serpent over the Creator God. In verses 26–27, the use of “male” and “female” echoes the creation account, yet focuses on sin. Finally, verse 32 links disobedience with death, just as God pronounced the penalty for disobedience as death in Genesis 2:17.

²⁶ Note that although the NRSV translations use “image” in both Romans 1:23 and Psalm 106:20, the Greek term is ὁμοίωμα, which could be rendered “likeness.”

The upshot of all of these observations is that Paul has drawn on the story of Adam and Eve and also the story of Israel in order to show a basic human solidarity in sin for all those who do not place their faith in Christ.²⁷ Unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile alike, are “in Adam.” It is not merely that all people commit sins (individual evil acts). Rather, Paul’s biblical-theological argument shows that all people, regardless of ethnic identity, are bound to sin.²⁸ Humanity as a whole is in slavery to sin, a condition that transcends ethnic identity. That is, all people are caught up in the story of fallen humanity. This background forms the foundation of Paul’s argument for salvation in Christ, for Jew and Gentile alike. God is creating the true people of God composed of Jews and Gentiles who find ethnic-transcending unity in Christ.

Paul’s use of biblical theology in Romans 1 serves his purpose of communicating the universal nature of sin, which transcends ethnic identity and sets up his later argument for multi-ethnic unity in Christ. The use of both the creation story and the story of Israel serves to communicate this truth across cultures.²⁹ His biblical-theological method appropriately connects with both Jews and Gentiles as creation themes touch all cultures. The allusion to Israel’s failure with the golden calf draws the Jews into the broader story of humanity in need of redemption. In other words, Gentiles understand the concept of sin as rejection of the Creator’s honor, resulting in shameful creation-worship. Jews understand the allusion to the golden calf through Psalm 106:20 as indicating that they have joined in the shameful exchange. The result is that all people, regardless of ethnicity, shamefully reject the one true God.

This is but one example of a consistent method of teaching in Romans. Other examples are readily available in every chapter. Romans 2, though addressing Jewish sin, contains a sustained reflection on the new covenant showing that Gentiles have become members of God’s

²⁷ The same biblical-theological argument can be found in Romans 3:23; 5:12-21; and 7:7-13. In each case, Paul alludes to both Adam and Israel in order to show a basic human solidarity in sin.

²⁸ N.T. Wright, “Romans,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 432-433.

²⁹ While disputed, most scholars agree that the Roman church was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. See Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 55-91.

covenant people.³⁰ Romans 3:21-26, while historically viewed as central to the doctrine of justification by faith, places that doctrine within the OT story that moves from unfaithful humanity to a faithful Messiah with allusions to both Adam and the story of Israel. Again, Paul's biblical theology shows that just all people, Jews and Gentiles, become part of the people of God by faith. Chapter 4 reflects on the Abrahamic covenant and God's faithfulness to covenant promises to give Abraham a worldwide family. In 5:12-21, the Adam-Christ analogy includes allusions to Israel's story, thus reflecting a biblical-theological argument. And the list could go on.³¹ Paul consistently uses a biblical theology to communicate theological truth across cultures.

Conclusion: Paul, Biblical Theology, and Cross-Cultural Theological Education

The brief study of Romans 1:18-21 above illustrates Paul's use of biblical theology. This example reveals a basic method that is repeated throughout the letter and, indeed, throughout Paul's writings. This is particularly important in light of Paul's role as the apostle to the Gentiles. The great missionary of the early church allowed Scripture to dictate both his message and his methods. This extended beyond his initial gospelizing to his discipleship, and we might add (though anachronistically), to theological education.

Most recent commentators rightly reject the notion that Romans is a theological treatise or summary of Paul's theology. Nevertheless, Paul clearly wrote the epistle with the intention of communicating theological truth to the Roman Christians. As such, Romans offers some insight on Paul's method of teaching, particularly teaching cross-culturally to the multicultural Roman congregation (which he was yet to visit). There are several principles that can be drawn from this.

³⁰ See especially 2:15 and 2:29, both of which allude to new covenant promises.

³¹ The point here is not to make additional theological arguments, but to demonstrate that Paul consistently uses a biblical-theological method to teach cross-culturally. Each example mentioned in this paragraph illustrates biblical theology with cultural sensitivity as Paul argues for universal bondage to sin and redemption of Jew and Gentile in Christ, resulting in a multi-cultural people of God.

First, Paul taught *exegetically*. His exegetical methods may not look exactly like modern approaches, but it is undeniable that Paul saw his use of the OT as expositions of the OT text in light of the coming of the Messiah.³² As Richard Hays has argued, “Paul is seeking to ground his exposition of the gospel in Israel’s sacred texts.”³³ Paul was not merely proof-texting but expounding the OT to argue his point. Modern missionaries involved in theological education would do well to follow this pattern. Cross-cultural workers have sometimes by-passed methodology in order to more quickly communicate theological content. This handcuffs nationals by not equipping them to handle the biblical text. Paul’s methodology of exegetical instruction provided a model of biblical exegesis for the early church.³⁴

Second, Paul taught *biblical-theologically*. Not only did Paul communicate through exegesis of the OT, but this exegesis was rooted in a biblical-theological method that placed various OT texts within the overarching OT story. As demonstrated above, Romans 1 is a clear example of Paul’s use of the OT story in which he draws together various parts of the story and applies it to the particular situation in Rome. Again, missionaries should pay close attention to Paul’s use of biblical theology. Rather than addressing a situation with a formulated systematic answer, Paul situated his theologizing within the biblical story.³⁵ This methodology effectively teaches “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27), places theological concepts within the broader biblical context, and allows teachers to draw on a wide variety of biblical themes to communicate truth.

Third, Paul taught with *cultural sensitivity*. While information regarding Paul’s early life and his experience of the various cultural contexts in which worked is limited, his writing makes

³² For an examination of the use of the OT in the NT in relation to contemporary Jewish exegetical methods, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

³³ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 34.

³⁴ This observation holds true for cross-cultural theological educators in all disciplines, not just theology. In other words, this same pattern of instruction applies to teaching counseling, preaching, ethics, evangelism, and any number of subjects.

³⁵ Paul would have been completely within his rights as an apostle and inspired writer to provide such an answer. That he chose to lead his readers through a biblical-theological argument is significant.

clear the fact that he understood his audiences and their cultural backgrounds. Also limited is our knowledge of Paul's understanding of the church situation in Rome. Nevertheless, assuming the church was composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul was able to use a biblical-theological method to effectively communicate to both groups in an effort to draw them together as the people of God for the purpose of mission.³⁶

Finally, all of the above points are intimately related. Evidently, Paul believed that the best way to teach in a culturally sensitive way is to make use of biblical-theological exegesis. While biblical theology does not solve all the problems of cross-cultural theological education, it does provide a way forward in seeking to train national church workers for effective ministry. Indeed, a study of Paul's methodology is a vivid reminder of the need to be biblical in both content and *method*.

³⁶ For an examination of the various proposals for the purpose of Romans, see Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 92-168.