



Goldsworthy, Graeme.

Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006. Pp. 341. Hardcover.
\$29.00. ISBN 9780830828395.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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I have a number of books on biblical hermeneutics and they're all pretty much the same. They usually approach the subject in one of two ways: either they discuss the philosophy of interpretation and with that the history of the philosophy of interpretation, or they outline the rules for proper interpretation with examples of how it should all look when practiced. I'm thankful for these books; they've all been tremendously helpful (some more than others); but after a while you realize that everyone is pretty much saying the same thing. Just how many times can you reinvent the wheel?

Thankfully Graeme Goldsworthy (retired lecturer in Old Testament, biblical theology, and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia) has wandered away from the pack and taken a different approach to discussing hermeneutics in *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* (hereafter *GCH*); a text born from a course he taught for years at Moore. This past Sunday I sat down with a pastor friend of mine at a cookout and he asked what I've been studying. I told him that I've been reading up on biblical interpretation and I mentioned Goldsworthy's volume specifically. I described it as a text that goes beyond outlining the principles or philosophy of interpretation by examining the presuppositional roots of the interpreter and working the task of interpretation into the Bible's grand narrative.

GCH is divided into three main parts. Part 1 lays the foundation in identifying what hermeneutics is and why we need it while identifying and examining the evangelical's hermeneutical presuppositions and sketching out what a Gospel-centered hermeneutic looks like, and finally relating all of this to the task of biblical theology. Part 2 identifies numerous challenges to evangelical hermeneutics, what Goldsworthy refers to as the "eclipse of the gospel," spanning nearly the church's entire history (he goes from Origen to modern Evangelicalism with plenty in between). Part 3 takes up the task of reconstructing evangelical hermeneutics via critical methodologies and a consistent Christian worldview.

As I've already intimated, *GCH* is a breath of fresh air if for no other reason than its inherent uniqueness; it's simply unlike most of what's already out there. I can appreciate how Goldsworthy has carefully thought through not only the philosophy and method of interpretation but also how this works according to distinctly Christian presuppositions and how this fits into a full-orbed Christian worldview. The manner in which he connects hermeneutics to theology, apologetics, missions, etc. shows not only how important the task of interpretation is, but also how connected the whole of the Christian faith is.

Now let's be clear in saying that according to Goldsworthy, a consistent evangelical Christian worldview is decidedly Reformed. He's not bashful about putting his Calvinism on display or his indebtedness to the *solas* of the Reformation. As a good Arminian I found myself a bit frustrated at times when reading that regeneration precedes faith but he made his Calvinism clear long before I got to those passages so I was at least prepared. But he's at least willing to acknowledge that there are other ways of being evangelical and he doesn't seek to diminish them even if the reality is that he finds them less than consistent. He's not nearly as forgiving of Catholics or Liberal Protestants though, which isn't the least bit surprising.

If I had to lodge a major complaint it would be with Part 2 in which Goldsworthy relies heavily on secondary literature for identifying the challenges to evangelical hermeneutics and offering his critiques of these challenges. He assures the reader that his "reliance upon secondary sources doesn't undermine the possibility of assessing some of the key areas of concern" (108), but relying upon primary sources, especially in a book on hermeneutics (!), wouldn't have undermined it either. A minor complaint would be that Goldsworthy too readily makes the analogy between Scripture and Christ, often referring to Scripture as having both a divine and human nature. Of course Scripture has divine and human *authors*; but not *natures*. We wouldn't want to present any challenges to the uniqueness of Christ, now would we?

In the end I think that this is a volume that will serve its evangelical audience well. I greatly appreciate the presuppositional nature (and by that I mean the emphasis on the antithesis between the Christian worldview in distinction from others; think presuppositional apologetics) of Goldsworthy's work. To highlight the noetic effects of sin and how that relates to the task of interpretation is important; and to highlight that interpretation itself is in need of redemption is a stroke of genius. I think that all Christians can benefit from these insights. Christians of other traditions would do well to engage this work and note the differences in presuppositions, if in fact there are any (Goldsworthy thinks that there are; I tend to agree).

The copious footnotes, which strike the right balance between explanatory and bibliographical; the detailed bibliography; and the name/Scripture indices make this text suitable for classroom use and independent study. The one thing it lacks is a subject index but each chapter is succinct and focused enough to not require one. While I wouldn't recommend this as the only text one should own on hermeneutics; I'd certainly recommend adding it to a library containing those volumes on the philosophy and method of interpretation.