

THE **TRIALS** OF



BECOMING A 'PROVEN WORKER'  
IN A DANGEROUS BUSINESS

EDITED BY  
ANDREW J. B. CAMERON AND BRIAN S. ROSNER

CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**

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## The Trials of Biblical Studies

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D.A. Carson

*Dr Don Carson is New Testament Research Professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He has taught at this institution since 1978, and his epic output in the discipline makes him well-placed to describe the dangers of ‘professional’ biblical study.*

*We begin to see how much can ‘hide’ beneath the noble object of our study. The magnificent and privileged collection that we call ‘the Bible’ is so particular in its purpose, and so special in its origin, that we call it ‘Holy Scripture’. Yet its excellence distracts us from the hidden deceptions we engage in as we work on it.*

*Carson observes five ‘domains’ that students of Scripture will need to address: integration (of the Bible, and of ourselves); work (whether too much or too little); pride (in several directions); and the capacity to manipulate Scripture. He also makes several helpful suggestions for the priorities of those whose ministry vocation is academic writing.*

*Biblical studies can be dominated by a ‘lust for mastery’. But we also learn Scripture’s great antidote: to practise the same humility as was embodied by our Master.*

In the United Kingdom and in countries heavily influenced by British usage (such as Australia), ‘theology’ is a large category that includes biblical studies, historical theology, systematic theology, and much more. The ‘trials of theology’

are then the trials encountered in any of the disciplines covered by the large label 'theology'. This usage is worth recognizing, for in America and in countries heavily influenced by American usage (such as Canada), 'theology' is a narrower category, usually referring to systematic theology. Because this chapter on biblical studies is included in a book on the trials of theology, clearly the former usage prevails here: students in biblical studies – devoting years to studying the Old Testament or the New Testament – face a variety of challenges that need to be thought through and understood. As for the word 'trials', I take it to include not only the elements that make competence in biblical studies hard work, but also those elements that constitute temptations to sin. True, these are trials of rather different kinds, but perhaps not so distinct as one might first think, as we shall see.

For convenience, I shall group these trials into various domains.

### **Integration**

Many have observed that with the astonishing multiplication of knowledge that has taken place during the last two or three centuries, genuine 'renaissance thinkers' – people who are competent and integrative across numerous fields – can no longer be found. This is true even *within* disciplines. One no longer studies physics; rather, one studies the properties of a postulated quark whose half-life is measured in nanoseconds. One no longer studies biology; rather, one devotes years in the sub-discipline of microbiology to reactions at the molecular level within particular cells. Similarly, within biblical studies there are few who study the Bible; rather, one writes a learned tome on one facet of pentateuchal criticism, on the theology of Haggai, on cognate Semitic idioms; one specializes in some

facet of the synoptic problem, on the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews, on the significance of *pistis Christou*, ‘the faith of Christ’, in current debates on the new perspective on Paul. As the old adage puts it, we learn more and more about less and less.

Yet certain forms of integration are essential if a biblical theologian is to be mature. I shall mention four:

1. The need for the first is uncovered by most first-year theological students who arrive at Bible colleges and seminaries with a passionate delight in reading the Bible — and then after a few weeks stumble into things like Greek morphology, English-Bible content quizzes, and the demands of hermeneutics. They can end up with two mutually exclusive ways of reading Scripture. In the one, they apply all the critical tools they are learning and attempt an ‘objective’ study; in the other, they read the Bible divorced from such critical thought, for they are having their ‘devotions’ and simply want God to speak to them personally and in an edifying fashion as he seemed to do before this wretched course in theological study was undertaken. This polarization of reading approaches is to be resisted as an abomination. In your most diligent technical study, you should be trying to understand what God himself has said through this text, trying to think God’s thoughts after him, worshiping God with reverence and joy as you deploy your newly learned ‘tools’ to think more critically. (The word ‘critically’ in this context, of course, does not mean you ‘criticize’ the Bible or its contents, but that you seek justification and reasons for every interpretation you adopt.) And

when you read the Bible in quietness, not for any course assignment but ‘devotionally’, you should be observant, careful, ‘critical’ in the best sense, eager to learn, to see connections. Sometimes you will be impelled, even while thinking through and praying over a text, to pull a commentary or two off a shelf to make sure you are understanding the biblical passage responsibly.

2. More broadly, theological students, like the ministers many of them aspire to be, should aim not only to be learned (for being learned is a prerequisite for being qualified to teach) but also to be godly. There must be an integration of knowing what texts mean, and following them; of learning what Scripture says about the cross of Christ, and applying it to one’s own life; of absorbing the biblical emphases on, say, holiness and love, and becoming holy and loving. That presupposes love for Christ within the context of the Christian community; it presupposes relationships, some suffering, growth in reliance on God’s providence and grace. What shall it profit biblical scholars to become experts on Greek aspect theory and on the relationship between Jude and 2 Peter, and lose their own souls? You can become an expert in number theory or plate tectonics without your discipline making any demand on you other than hard work and integrity. But the disciplines bound up with biblical studies bring a further urgent demand: you are studying the Word of God, and unless your study is integrated with faith, obedience, godliness, prayer, conformity to Christ,

rising love for God and for his image-bearers, you are horribly abusing the very texts you claim you are studying.

3. It is essential to work hard at integrating the texts you are currently studying into your understanding of the Bible as a whole. Only rarely do beginning theological students fail in this regard: the diversity of the course work prohibits them from focusing too narrowly. Ministers more commonly fall short in this area when they focus all their attention on short books, or on the epistles, or on the New Testament, and fail to learn how to teach and preach the whole counsel of God. But the worst offenders are frequently the biblical scholars who devote all their energy to one or two or a handful of parts of the Bible, and actually stop reading the rest of it. They do not discipline themselves to continue with accurate exegesis and theological reflection across the entire canon. They may remain broadly orthodox while losing all capacity to articulate how the current text ought to find its place in an integrated complexity that reasons its way to the gospel, to Christ, to the sweep of redemptive history that rushes toward Christ, his cross, resurrection, and ascension, and on to the new heaven and the new earth.
4. It is no part of wisdom to despise adjacent disciplines – systematic theology, historical theology, philosophical theology, various forms of biblical theology. Obviously, these disciplines have lessons to learn from careful and learned exegesis of the



sacred text; equally obviously, anyone who wrestles with the exegesis of a text should avoid thinking that they are a 'blank slate' as they approach it. They should carefully weigh interpretations of texts advanced in earlier ages, and learn from the creative integrations offered by other theologians. That means spending at least some time reading broadly in the fields of historical and systematic theology. One could adduce other disciplines (e.g. works on literature and literary genres). Time taken away from biblical studies and devoted to such adjacent disciplines will on the long haul pay huge dividends.

The first domain, then, where the demands of responsible biblical studies become part of the trials of theology, lies in various challenges of integration.

### **Work**

Polar temptations lurk in this domain. On the one hand, the field of biblical studies is so large that the diligent and the industrious may be tempted to work themselves to exhaustion. Those learning the biblical languages will also want some degree of mastery of the cognates. Especially in the case of Hebrew, there are a lot of them (Ugaritic, old Egyptian and other cuneiform texts, Akkadian, Aramaic, languages related to the Babylonian and Persian empires; and so forth). Those studying the New Testament must learn not only Greek, but at least some Hebrew and Aramaic (since the New Testament quotes or alludes to the Old so often), and, if there is any desire to engage in serious textual criticism, Syriac, Latin, and Coptic. If one's theological study is in preparation for pastoral ministry, the language requirements are not so massive, but those who are responsible

to teach and preach the Bible should make a valiant effort to gain some mastery of the biblical languages. Nowadays that should also include an introductory grasp of linguistics.

While we engage in exegesis of the biblical texts, we should become informed of the conclusions of earlier generations of interpreters of the Bible. Some knowledge of the history of interpretation is a necessity for students of biblical studies, not merely a happy option. But thoughtful preachers and teachers will want more than the history of interpretation. They will also want to avoid merely atomistic exegesis (note the comments on integration, above) — and the alternatives mean we have some responsibility to learn and interact with systems of thought. Good exegesis is more than parsing Greek, of course. Soon we find ourselves wrestling with different literary genres and assorted rhetorical devices. I have not yet mentioned the vast array of secondary sources that reflect contemporary discussion: how much we want to burrow into such material will depend on our intended audience.

If, then, we are by temperament somewhat perfectionist, it is not difficult, with such a vast array of data-rich fields before us, to become workaholics. And a true workaholic is unlikely to be a good spouse, a godly and wise parent, a faithful Christian. Work, intrinsically a good thing, easily becomes an idol.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, biblical studies, strange to say, can become a field where lazy students hide. They never do stellar work, but they get by. If they become pastors, they may put in long hours, but they will be ineffective hours because they

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1. See Timothy Keller's recent book, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009).

diddle away their time in lazy reading, endless visits to blogs, last-minute preparation, and sloppy work habits. Instead of really growing in life *and doctrine* [1 Tim 4:14-16], they decide that they studied theology while at seminary, and now they can read other things. ('I learned it,' one remarkably naïve man told me; 'I don't need to keep reading that stuff now.')

A seminary education must never be viewed as a ticket to a job. It is the beginning of a lifetime of study and reflection, worked out in the hurly-burly of ministry. Most ministers do not have someone immediately over them to check up on how effectively they have used their time, how honestly they fill their hours. Thus the very posts that may feed the workaholic may be safe-havens for the lazy or ill-disciplined.

### **Pride**

This domain has many facets. I shall mention five.

1. The desire to be admired and recognized runs deep in all of us. The line between godly affirmation and encouragement, on the one hand, and the lust to be number one (like Demetrius in 3 John), on the other hand, is never as sharply demarcated as we might like, because our motives are frequently mixed. The lust for recognition can attack theology students, pastors, and seminary teachers alike.
2. A peculiar form of pride may be located in our sheer enjoyment of discovery as we work through texts, write essays or books, and prepare sermons and lectures. Those who work in other disciplines may enjoy their work and discoveries just as much as we enjoy ours. The difference, of course, is that microbiologists and Shakespeare scholars are unlikely to think they are entitled to a high place in the spiritual

sphere because they have unravelled an arcane point within their disciplines. They may be exhilarated by their discoveries, but they are unlikely to think that because of these discoveries they are spiritually superior. But that is the kind of temptation we face. We exult in mastery of certain texts, but because those texts are the texts of Scripture, we think our mastery confers on us a more profound knowledge of God. We do not always recognize that the mark of true growth in the study of Scripture is not so much that we become masters of the text as that we are mastered by the text.

3. A subset of this pride in specialist biblical knowledge lurks behind the academic biblical specialists who think their sphere of competence qualifies them to be superior pastors. I hasten to add that many academic Bible teachers *are* so equipped, not least because not a few of them have at some point been pastors and missionaries themselves. But many *think* they are so equipped even though they are not. Their shortfall is not necessarily in the realm of people skills; rather, it has to do with orientation. College and seminary teachers deal almost exclusively with students who come to learn; pastors deal with a much wider diversity of ages, academic backgrounds, and degrees of hunger to learn the Scriptures. College and seminary teachers are inevitably drawn to new ideas, even while, if they are teaching in confessional schools, they recognize their responsibility to be faithful to those standards; pastors know they have a huge responsibility to nurture and protect God's

flock, to teach their brothers and sisters in Christ to be faithful, even while they have some interest in keeping abreast of trends so that they can be better pastors. College and seminary teachers do not usually engage in much evangelism; pastors who are faithfully doing their job are interacting constantly with unbelievers and are much concerned to lead lost men and women to Christ.

If those distinctions in orientation between, on the one hand, college and seminary teachers, and, on the other hand, pastors, are maintained for two or three decades, they may become acute differences in emphasis. What makes them especially dangerous to the academics is that, *precisely because of their expertise in the biblical texts*, they may not perceive their own dangers. After all, biblical experts are sometimes asked to speak at conferences for pastors; by contrast, unless they are specialists themselves, pastors are not invited to address professional society meetings of academics. The relationship between the two sides is tilted in favour of the biblical experts. Unless they have the hearts, the experience, and the commitments of pastors, they can quietly inflict a fair bit of damage on the people they train, all the while supposing that even if they are not currently serving as pastors they have the academic training that would make them superior pastors.

4. A great deal of pride turns on our standards of comparison. When we begin biblical studies, almost everyone knows more than we do, save other first-year students, some of whom do not achieve grades as good as ours. Pretty soon we are third-

year students or research students, and then there are many who cannot quite match our standards. Eventually we enter into a life of ministry in, say, the local church or a Bible college, where virtually no one whom we teach knows as much about the Bible as we do. Occasionally, of course, we mingle with other pastors, some of whom are far more astute than we are, or we attend professional meetings of biblical scholars where we come across minds so amazingly capacious that our limitations become a little clearer. Most of our ministry, however, is discharged in contexts that encourage us to think of ourselves as more knowledgeable about the Bible than others (which is true) and therefore superior (which is not). We forget Paul's rhetorical questions: 'What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?' [1 Cor. 4:7].

So often it is the little things that betray us. Because, relative to others, we become knowledge experts (at least in the biblical arena), we may begin to act as if data are everything and relationships are of marginal significance. For those so inclined, study and books are a lot more attractive than people and pastoral problems; indeed, because the book that is our chief study is the Bible, we may actually justify our callousness towards people by claiming the priority of the study of the Bible, when a little self-examination suggests that at least in part we are pursuing our preferences.

5. Under this 'Pride' domain, I have so far mentioned areas in which theologians, not least in biblical

studies, may descend to a variety of forms of arrogance. But sinful motives are so complex that not infrequently they are inverted. Many theologians, including students, ministers, and academic biblical experts, may actually feel threatened by ‘lay’ people they meet, each with their own guild of competencies: lawyers, doctors, accountants, CEOs, assorted scientists, wealthy business leaders, skilled professionals. The theologian knows that at least some of these people do not think that theologians have ‘real’ jobs. The subject matter is often regarded as ethereal; certainly their salaries are lower. Masking our insecurities and secret jealousies, pride may then erupt in an inverted form that makes free and easy human intercourse almost impossible, even with fellow believers.

Both kinds of pride belong to the still larger category of *self-justification*. That sin goes back to the Garden, where Adam blames Eve and Eve blames Satan himself. It is difficult to think of any sin we commit that does not include a dollop of self-justification. Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to a lawyer who asked a question because he ‘wanted to justify himself’ [Luke 10:29]. Elsewhere he condemns the Pharisees because, he says, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight’ [Luke 16:14-15]. The difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector lay in the fact that only one of the two was confident in his own righteousness [Luke 18:9]. In other words, self-justification wears many faces. Like the lawyer in Luke 10, it may ask a slightly stupid and certainly morally vacuous question be-

cause one's personal limitations have been exposed and one is trying to claw one's way back to the top. Like the Pharisee in Luke 18, it may pray with utterly unself-conscious arrogance and condescension. Like those in Luke 16, it may prefer the approval of fellow human beings much more than the approval of God. The common ingredient, self-justification, similarly lurks behind so many of our sins of pride, inverted or otherwise. And the biblical answer to *self*-justification, of course, is the justification we must have from outside ourselves, the justification only God can give. The more we succumb to the assorted convolutions fed by self-justification, the more our lives testify that we have not absorbed very well what it means to stand wholly justified before God on the sole ground of what Christ Jesus has borne on our behalf.

### **Manipulation of Scripture**

All of us have witnessed some pretty amazingly ridiculous interpretations of Scripture, undertaken by well-meaning folk who are not much used to disciplined reading of *any* texts. When biblical scholars engage in the same game, of course, our tools are much more sophisticated. But make no mistake: many of us really do continue to play the game.

The pressures come from many quarters. On the right, we may want to come up with 'safe' exegeses that reinforce the biases of our own confessional group. After all, we will gain in influence and authority within that group if we maintain the stances of the group's elders. Interpretations that justify all the details of one's heritage are likely to be received with approval by the leaders of that heritage. On the left, the pressure to be seen to be academically respectable may push some of us towards exegetical conclusions that are in line with the kosher academic orthodoxies of our day, divorced



from any sense of a heritage of confessionalism. Especially attractive for some is the deployment of newly developing literary ‘tools’ that promise insights that no one has ever had in the history of the church. Both of these pressures, of course, have to do with our own identities within particular groups, whether of the right or the left.

For others of us, cut from more nonconformist cloth, the temptation to come up with independent conclusions on just about everything is more appealing. We glory in our ‘creative’ approaches and interpretations, maintaining scant regard for two millennia of work done before us. Still others of us focus so strongly on *Wirkungsgeschichte* that we never have to decide anything: that is, we are so interested in the history of the interpretation of particular passages or books, carefully sifting every exegetical byroad, that our main point seems to be that there have always been great diversities of interpretations, so let’s not get too excited about any one interpretative tradition, and let’s be very careful not to say that any one of them is right and that others are correspondingly wrong.

If I were to begin to flesh out examples to illustrate these various interpretative temptations, this essay would immediately triple in length. But my main point here is simple: those who are well-trained in exegesis and hermeneutics are more capable than most in finding evidence and aligning it in such a way that the ‘right’ answer comes out. Being better trained in exegesis, including the background knowledge acquired in a lifetime in biblical studies, does not guarantee faithful interpretations. It may enable us to justify particularly ‘clever’ interpretations.

What is needed is the integrity that genuinely and patiently ‘listens’ to the text. This is not easy, often because of weaknesses that are polar opposites.

1. On the one hand, those who are prone to ‘clever’ interpretations that are highly creative may nurture very little regard for those that have come before. They might benefit from learning a bit more about the history of interpretation. More importantly, they need to bear in mind Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: ‘What you have heard from me, keep as *the pattern of sound teaching*, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us’ [2 Tim 1:13-14]. In other words, the Bible is not made up of discrete clever bits that can legitimately be slapped together any which way; rather, there is a *pattern* to the Bible’s ‘sound teaching’ that must be patiently teased out, a pattern that then constitutes a sort of grid to screen out the least credible bits of imaginative innovation that would destroy that pattern. After all, Jehovah’s Witnesses have the same Bible we do; moreover, they operate with a high doctrine of Scripture’s authority, even though the *pattern* they find in the Scripture is very different from that of historic confessional Christianity. Of course, everyone concedes that patterns can be bad, and that bad patterns have to be ruled out by careful and detailed exegesis of text after text. My point, however, is more focused. All of us think we discern patterns of thought in the Scripture, but Paul insists that not all patterns are equal. He wants to encourage Timothy to adopt a particular pattern of ‘sound teaching,’ and today’s interpreters should endeavour to follow the same course.

2. On the other hand, theologians may judge that the pattern they adopt, whether from the right or the left, *is* a sound pattern. They will then find reasons to manipulate the text being studied into the pattern already adopted. Thus the very virtue advocated under the first of these opposite weaknesses – that is, avoiding atomistic and clever exegeses by making reference to a larger pattern – now becomes a vice under this second – viz., allowing the *pattern* to enjoy such control, that texts are manipulated for exactly the *opposite* reason.

I do not see any infallible escape route from this pair of challenges. There is no decisive key or hermeneutical trick that enables us to walk unscathed between this Scylla and Charybdis. But a humble mind, learning from the past without being chained to the past, persistent prayer for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, willingness to talk things over with others of greater experience and skill, willingness to be corrected, a passionate desire to bring glory to God by representing what he says faithfully, living within the context of a local church – all these disciplines and graces contribute towards encouraging those in biblical studies to avoid manipulation of biblical texts.

### **Priorities**

Those in biblical studies who go on to engage in a ministry of serious writing require some attention, because another array of challenges spring from a barrage of choices that must be made by them. These can be grouped into three foci:

1. What subjects should I tackle? What projects should I take on? Do I want my projects dictated by publishers who offer me contracts to do this or that? Or do I accept such assignments with considerable reserve in order to preserve a place for projects that I want to do because I think they are important or because I am interested in them, even though I do not (yet!) have a contract for them? What part of my study and writing time should be devoted to ‘answering’ positions with which I disagree, as opposed to writing positive expositions? Should I choose something on Old Testament or New Testament ‘introduction,’ as opposed to commentary or biblical theology? What place should I devote to editing volumes written by others?

There are no ‘one-size-fits-all’ answers to such questions. It is not so much a matter of good choices and bad choices, as a matter of choices and entailments. Which entailments an individual scholar might prefer will often depend on highly individual gifts. Some scholars, such as Colin Hemer, are utterly superb when it comes to wrestling with Greco-Roman and archaeological sources that serve to flesh out the New Testament, but by instinct, preference and training, they are unlikely to focus much attention on, say, the writing of standard commentaries or on the literature of Second Temple Judaism and its bearing on New Testament interpretation. Some scholars, such as Donald Guthrie, devote their entire careers to one domain, in his case New Testament introduction. Some will be Pauline scholars, or Johannine scholars, all their lives, and refuse to write

outside their chosen specialisms. Few will demonstrate mastery across a wide spectrum.

At most it is possible to give a few hints as to how to address these kinds of questions. All things being equal (as they rarely are!), if you can write material at the top rank of scholarship and at a more popular level, attempt both – and do not let the latter devour the former. Try not to develop a reputation for responding to everyone while writing little that is positive; on the other hand, when you are in a position to provide a strategic response to an egregious trend, it may be the mark of elementary Christian discipleship to take on the project. If you develop a heart for a couple of big research and writing projects, do not let all the little writing demands and offers deter you from your vision.

2. For whom am I writing? For scholars? Pastors? The well-read layperson? For unbelievers? For students? At what level am I trying to pitch my piece? How much of my time should I devote to relatively ephemeral pieces (not least blogs) that may achieve comparatively wide circulation but that will not last long in public memory, over against major books that are read by far fewer people than are blogs, but which may be consulted for generations and, in the best cases, help to shape the direction of entire disciplines? It may take you three or four years to write a book that is published in Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series or in Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*, and then you discover that the publishers print and sell only about

a thousand copies, most of which are bought by libraries. On the other hand, that work may become the seedbed of decades of other work, cited by generations of commentary writers.

Once again there is no formula that will decide what course is best. Much depends on gift and grace and calling. But your choices will affect your vocabulary as you write, your footnoting, your use of technical terms, your choice of publisher, how explicitly and immediately edifying you try to be, and so forth.

3. How can I avoid a ‘lone ranger’ complex in my writing – a complex that can lead, on the one hand, to discouragement and despair; and on the other, ironically, to unmitigated arrogance? What choices should I be making to ward off these dangers?

Writing is an essentially lonely business – or, more accurately, it is an essentially alone business. Much of it has to be done alone (whether or not one feels lonely). This easily breeds many distortions in perception. Most doctoral students in biblical studies, for example, even the most emotionally stable of them, oscillate between thinking that their work is the greatest piece of theological reflection since at least Calvin, and being convinced that if doctoral degrees are handed out for rubbish of this order, then the degree cannot be worth much. Transparently both perceptions cannot simultaneously be true; usually neither is. But what can be done to damp down these oscillations? More importantly, how can the actual product, the writing itself, be improved by avoiding the ‘lone ranger’ syndrome?

The ideal, of course, is to work in collaboration. This does not necessarily mean that you have co-writers for a particular essay or book. It means, rather, that you develop friends, students, and colleagues with whom you share your work, and whose work you share. This may take the form of semi-formal discussion (such as ‘The Inklings’, that circle of friends around C.S. Lewis); or getting your doctoral students to read and critique your work; or at very least, having informal discussions with colleagues about the approaches and arguments you are adopting. Very often, and especially if you are writing in domains that do not fall within your primary areas of expertise, you are well advised to ask friends with more expertise than you enjoy in those areas to read and critique your work before it goes to press. It is far better to receive such criticism at that point than in reviews. Be sure to find some readers who will take stances quite different from yours: they are the ones from whom you are likely to learn the most. This also means, of course, that you will occasionally help other colleagues reciprocally.

### **Concluding reflections**

Scanning this brief list of domains that generate trials for those engaged in biblical studies – whether ‘trials’ in the sense of difficulties, or ‘trials’ in the sense of temptations – I am struck by how interrelated they are. And as an antidote, one recalls the words of Calvin:

I have always been exceedingly delighted with the words of Chrysostom, ‘The foundation of our philosophy is humility;’ and still more with those of Augustine,

‘As the orator, when asked, What is the first precept in eloquence? answered, Delivery: What is the second? Delivery: What is the third? Delivery: so, if you ask me in regard to the precepts of the Christian Religion, I will answer, first, second, and third, Humility.’<sup>2</sup>

Such humility will teach us the inestimable privilege accorded to those of us who are free to devote many hours each week in studying God’s gracious self-disclosure in holy Scripture, learning to think God’s thoughts after him, working carefully and patiently through words breathed out by God himself (however mediated through highly diverse human writers) that we may better know him and his ways, and above all that we may better know the Word incarnate. The more we revel in the sheer joy of this privilege, the less will we succumb to the trials of biblical studies, and the more will we sing the new song of those who have been redeemed by the Lamb; the less will we be seduced by the lust for mastery, and the more will we delight in him who is Master of all.

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2. Calvin, *Institutes* II.ii.11. I am grateful to Nathan Busenitz and Andy Naselli for drawing my attention to this passage.