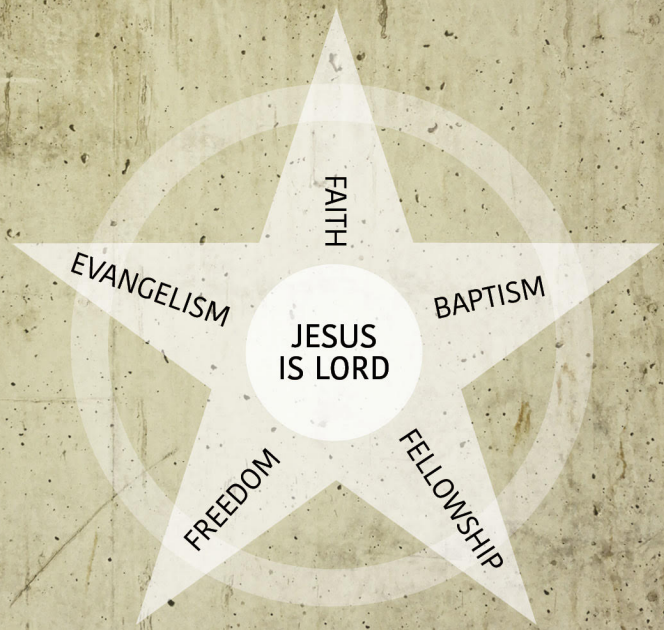


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Editorial

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Baptists have long declared their reliance on scripture, confidently centring themselves on the word of God as it is revealed through the Bible. Yet curiously, this has on occasion manifested itself as a suspicion of the discipline of 'Biblical Studies', almost as if there were something un-Godly about anything other than a 'plain-reading' approach to the biblical text. Yet the Baptist tradition has nonetheless generated many fine biblical scholars, and the current generation of Baptist biblical scholarship is no exception. In this issue we are pleased to publish five articles which demonstrate the breadth of biblical engagement in our churches and Colleges.

Helen Paynter explores the ways in which the conquest of Canaan is represented in three 'exodus psalms' (78, 106, 135), each of which marginalises the events of the conquest within its overall narrative framework. Paynter intriguingly suggests that this may reflect a moment in Israel's post-exilic history when those who had themselves been traumatised at the hands of the Babylonians chose to downplay the commemoration of trauma suffered by others at the hands of their ancestors.

Marion Carson uses a careful study of suffering and hope in Romans 5.1-5 to show how biblical scholarship can inform the work of practical and pastoral theologians. Whilst recognising that for many seeking or offering pastoral care the biblical text is a source of direct comfort, Carson moves beyond 'foundationalism' (what is the Bible telling me to *do*?) to a 'character ethics' approach (who is the Bible calling me to *be*?). In dialogue with Stanley Hauerwas, a reading emerges that challenges individualism, and emphasises instead the importance of community in understanding perseverance through

suffering as a virtue shaped through hopeful relationship with Christ by the Spirit.

Tim Carter stays with the epistle to the Romans for his analysis of the divisions in the Roman Christian community over Sabbath observance and food laws. Drawing on the work of Robert Jewett, Carter sees in Paul's writing to the Romans a call for Christians to address issues of division with tolerance rather than separation. Carter applies this ethic of tolerance to the divisive contemporary issue of same-sex relationships within the church. Carter suggests that differences of approach to scripture lie at the heart of both the ancient debate in Rome, and contemporary debates around sexuality, and that unity in our time might be found in heeding the call for tolerance that Paul issued to the Roman church.

Amanda Higgin turns our attention to the Epistle to the Hebrews, inviting us to engage this early Christian homily 'on its own terms' in its use of the language of 'perfection'. Higgin suggests that this concept is a fundamental principle for the thought-world of the author: not as the end-goal of a call to ethics, but as the starting-point for the Christian journey of discipleship. According to Hebrews, perfection has already broken into the present through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and so the Christian community is called to strive faithfully towards that perfection, even as they endure the imperfections of the present world. Higgin suggests that this affects the way Hebrews engages the stories of Jewish scriptural heroes, reading them not *typologically* but *teleologically* - their imperfection is perfected in Christ. Higgin suggests that such a *teleological hermeneutic* has much to say to contemporary debates around scripture and ethics.

Anthony Clarke locates the current differences among Baptists on attitudes towards human sexuality as being not primarily a disagreement about what the Bible teaches, but of how to read the Bible in the first place. In other words, it is a difference of hermeneutics. In dialogue with four authors who have written on sexuality, Clarke pays particular attention to the differences between their hermeneutical approaches. He concludes with a warning: '*As Baptists continue to discuss the status of same-sex relationships it is vital that we*

are able to think carefully and deeply about our own hermeneutical approaches and convictions and not assume our approach is either universal or simply correct.' This is then followed by 12 key questions for Baptists to consider as they reflect on how their socialisation within their interpretive communities affects the ethical conclusions they draw from scripture.

These five essays speak to the strength of Baptist biblical scholarship in our time, and also of the importance of such scholarly efforts to contemporary theological and ethical debates. The fears of those who might see Biblical Studies as a distraction from a more pure spiritual reading of the Bible are allayed, as the Word of God revealed through the diligent study of scripture continues to speak afresh to the church that Christ calls into being.