



# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

David McCullough tells a wonderful story of Simon Willard, a clockmaker in Roxbury, MA. He was known to build clocks using *only his hands and eyes* to cut the brass wheels and to measure the seconds and minutes. One historian wrote, "It is doubtful if such a feat in mechanics was ever done before." Simon built his most important clock in 1837, when he was over 80 years old. This clock hung in the north doorway of Statuary Hall where the House of Representatives used to meet. Amazingly, this clock still accurately keeps time there today - over 180 years since it was built by Willard's skillful hand and eyes! As we marvel at this remarkable feat, let us not forget our skillful Creator. He not only made everything in heaven and earth, but He continues to "uphold all things by the Word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). Truly, He is a great and powerful God!



**E**ric Lehner graduated from VBTS in 2005 with his Master of Theology and then started teaching at VBTS the next year. In 2009, he began serving as the interim Academic Dean until he completed his Ph.D. in 2012, at which point the Board made his appointment permanent. Dr. Lehner is not only skillful in teaching theological truth, but he is also an astute administrator — a rare combination! Under Dr. Lehner's leadership as Dean, the seminary has flourished. He has not only been a blessing to the VBTS family, but he and his family are active members of Colonial Baptist Church and have been a means of encouragement to many within the assembly. When asked about his driving passion, Dr. Lehner said, *"My driving passion is to understand God's truth, and to teach it in a manner that is clear and applicable."* Thank you, Dr. Lehner, for your leadership and oversight of the seminary. Your godly influence is shaping lives to be like Jesus Christ.



## Truth for the Agora: *Basic Elements for Theological Method*

~ Dr. Eric J. Lehner, VBTS Professor of Theology

All Christians should know what they believe, and why they believe it. For this reason, it is important for all Christians to give some thought to how they form their understanding of Bible doctrine. This brief article summarizes some useful guidelines for developing a theological method informed by Scripture.

**Theological Method.** Throughout church history, theologians concerned with Paul's command to teach sound doctrine have sought to understand the best way to do this. This enterprise is often referred to as "theological method." Theological method seeks to explain the patterns and priorities that best serve as a reliable guide to speaking truthfully of God's nature and His work in creation. Although Bible-believing theologians throughout the years have suggested a variety of different approaches, there is a discernible pattern of agreement regarding the best practice for doing theology. This pattern can be seen within the umbrella of the five basic elements explained below.

**Identification of a Governing Source.** A systematic theology informed by Scripture will engage the biblical disciplines of exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, and practical theology. Although each of these disciplines contributes to the understanding of the other, it is the exegesis of Scripture which exerts the governing role in the process of forming final theological conclusions.

**Recognition of Presuppositions.** The existence and attributes of God, the distinction between the Creator and His creation, the image of God in humanity, and the adequacy of human language are significant pre-commitments which guide the student of theology.

**Confirmation through Consistency.** Because God is perfect, without error, and without contradiction, He is without contradiction in all He is, and does, and says. Therefore, God's people will strive to represent God and His Word through theology in terms which are internally consistent and thoroughly unified.

**Authentication by source citation.** The practice of "proof-texting," once held in the highest esteem by the church, has, on account of abuse, fallen into disrepute. Yet the responsible use of proof-texts is ultimately necessary to display the biblical rationale for theological conclusions. Furthermore, proof-texts provide transparency, ensure accountability, and invite scrutiny. In so doing, proof-texts ensure that theology remains in the possession of the church as a whole rather than church officials or academic professionals.

**Relation to the Audience.** Doing theology is the act of communicating what is true regarding God and His word. Consequently, disregard for the listener's capacity to understand the message impedes the goal of theology. Although God's truth is unchanging and universal, efforts to convey God's truth clearly will take into account the language and culture of the listener to ensure that all that God has proclaimed to be true in His word is clearly understood by the listener.

Every believer is a theologian, because every believer *thinks* and *speaks* about God. Careful attention to the authority of Scripture and our own presuppositions prepares us to *think* about God in terms that are consistent. Similarly, taking the time to cite Scriptural evidence and to understand other people empowers every believer to *speak* about God with transparency, authenticity, and clarity.