PERICOPAL THEOLOGY:
AN INTERMEDIARY
BETWEEN TEXT AND APPLICATION

ABRAHAM KURUVILLA[*]

I. INTRODUCTION[1]

John Wilkins (1614–1672), bishop of Chester, rightly declared that application is "the life and soul of a sermon, whereby these sacred truths [of Scripture] are brought home to a Man's particular conscience and occasions, and the affections ingaged [*sic*] unto any truth or duty."[2] Indeed, application is the culmination of the preaching endeavor whereby the biblical text is brought to bear upon the lives of the congregation to align the community of God to the will of God for the glory of God. That which is historical and distant in the ancient text is, in preaching, made contemporary and near to listeners by application. The preacher, the one to whom is assigned the role of mediating this engagement between Scripture and God's people will, no doubt, confess to the arduous nature of this task of moving from the *then* to the *now*—an attempt "to conquer a remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter."[3] A critical issue in this undertaking is how application may be derived that is both faithful

---

[*]Abraham Kuruvilla is Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary.

[1]Portions of this paper were presented at the Annual Conference of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Birmingham, Ala., October 16–18, 2008, at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, R.I., November 19–21, 2008, and the Annual Meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature, Boston, Mass., November 22–25, 2008.

[2]John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes, or A discourse concerning the Gift of Preaching As it fals* [sic] *under the Rules of Art: Shewing The most proper Rules and Directions, for Method, Invention, Books, Expressions, whereby a Minister may be furnished with such abilities as may make him a Workman that needs not to be ashamed* (3d ed.; London: Samuel Gellibrand, 1651), 19.

[3]Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (trans. Kathleen McLaughlin; ed. Don Ihde; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974; repr. 2004), 16. Stanley E. Porter asserts: "Anyone who proclaims how easy it is to do this is probably prevaricating, or is very bad at the task, or is so very experienced at it as to have forgotten the intellectual and spiritual task that it is" ("Hermeneutics, Biblical Interpretation, and Theology: Hunch, Holy Spirit, or Hard Work?" in I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 121).

to the textual intention (i.e., authoritative) and fitting for the listening audience (i.e., relevant).

Particularly pertinent is how this may be achieved with respect to the self-contained and well-defined portion of the scriptural text that is regularly employed in the homiletical activities of the church—the pericope.[4] As the fundamental unit of the canonical text handled in any given assembly of the people of God, the pericope is the basic textual element of its weekly rendezvous with Scripture, and the divine instrument of its life transformation. It is through pericopes, read and exposited in congregations, that the community of God encounters the Bible. The impossibility of grasping the entirety of the magnificent breadth of canonical thought on any single occasion, within the constraints of time spent in the corporate assemblies, dictates the employment of a smaller amount of text that may be conveniently read and adequately exposited.[5] Moreover, while Scripture is considered a unified corpus, it obviously does not comprise one unbroken, run-on thought: a diversity of issues pertaining to the Christian's life and relationship to God is addressed within its canonical scope. A pericope, on the other hand, is essentially a self-intact sense unit bearing a relatively complete and integral idea that contributes to the whole.[6] Therefore, handled one at a time, pericopes allow a more intensive exploration of the depth, force, and trajectory of the biblical text, enabling the particularity and potency of each pericope to impact the congregation. Thus, sermon by sermon, pericope by pericope, the various aspects of Christian life, individual and corporate, are effectively brought into alignment with the will of God. The goal of the homiletical endeavor, after all, is not merely to explicate the content of the chosen pericope, but to expound it in such a way that its implications for current hearers are brought home with conviction, to transform lives for God's glory.[7] Life change is not a one-time phenomenon, and neither

---

[4]While acknowledging its more common connotation of a portion of the Gospels, "pericope" is employed here to demarcate a segment of Scripture, irrespective of genre or length, that forms the textual basis of an individual sermon.

[5]Justin Martyr reports on a Sunday gathering of Christians where the Gospels and the Prophets were read "as long as time permits" (μέχρις ἐγχωρεῖ; 1 Apol. 66), suggesting that a relatively fixed period of time had been allocated for the weekly event.

[6]Often, the text itself demonstrates internal demarcations corresponding to its divisions into these discrete sense units. Textual clues that identify the exposed seams between pericopes include: repeated terms or phrases (e.g., καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς in Matt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1); significant discourse markers; rhetorical questions (e.g., וַאֲמַרְתֶּם, "but you say . . . ?" in Mal 1:2, 6, 7, 12, 13; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13); changes in time, location, or setting, within narratives; thematic announcements (e.g., as with περὶ δὲ in 1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1, [4]; 12:1; 16:1, 12); etc. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 71–72.

[7]Tertullian stated: "We assemble to read our sacred writings, . . . with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits" (*Apol.* 39).

is it accomplished instantaneously; sanctification is a lifelong process. Therefore, in the history of the church, a unit-sized pericopal block of Scripture, incorporating a single thrust or theme capable of being assimilated and applied, has been the object of homiletical consideration in the weekly gatherings of Christians. For the edification of believers, then, the employment of pericopal portions of the biblical text for preaching is of considerable significance.

The burden of the homiletician in this endeavor is to move from the particular pericope of Scripture rooted in the historical context of its inscription, into valid application for hearers grounded in their own contemporary contexts. For this crucial hermeneutical undertaking, there is, unfortunately, very little guidance offered preachers. David Buttrick declared:

> Many books have been written on "biblical preaching"; specifically on how preachers can move step by step from the Bible passage to a sermon. . . . But in all such books there seems to be a gap. There's something left out in between. The crucial moment between exegesis and homiletical vision is not described. The shift between the study of a text and the conception of a sermon—perhaps it occurs in a flash of imagination—is never discussed. So alert readers are left with the odd impression that we move from the Bible to a contemporary sermon by some inexplicable magic![8]

This paper is part of a larger attempt to render this "magic" less mysterious and to span that bemoaned lacuna between the Bible and sermon. Here, the focus will be upon three areas: the complication for biblical interpretation posed by the nature of textuality; a cure for that complication based upon the work of Paul Ricoeur; and a case-study from 2 Samuel 11–12 in the employment of that remedy.

II. COMPLICATION: TEXTUALITY AND DISTANCIATION

Discourse is the mediator between mind and world, manifesting its inherent "power of indefinitely extending the battlefront of the expressed at the expense of the unexpressed."[9] Textuality is a particularly effective means of expressing what is unexpressed, for texts are unique communication acts, and their singular quality of writtenness generates a peculiar set of exigencies. At the moment of inscription of an utterance, a radical breach is created between the event of that utterance and its meaningful content, between the act of saying and what was said. The action is now distanced from the

---

[8]David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 89.

[9]Paul Ricoeur, "Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (ed. Mario J. Valdés; Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 69. Or, as T. S. Eliot put it, "a raid on the inarticulate" (*Four Quartets*, "East Coker," V).

content, frozen as the latter is in its writtenness. This is the phenomenon of *distanciation,* a constitutive element of the transaction of writing. The separation of the act of saying from what is said is, however, not without consequences.

First, distanciation causes an exploding of the dialogical situation, leading to an estrangement of the author; the text's career has escaped from the finite horizons of its creator. This is not to say that distanciation renders the text utterly autonomous, for the text bears with it artifacts of the event of the utterance or writing; fingerprints of the author are sufficiently present in most texts to establish the writer's purpose.[10]

Second, from an oral-aural world, a text has irrupted into a new sensory world of vision that virtually transforms the way one thinks. A secondary code of writing is superimposed upon the primary one of speech, now rendering it a discourse that is fixed, archived, and capable of dissemination. Hearers have been turned into readers, for the text has escaped not only the author, but also those within earshot, and it is now rendered accessible to a potential universe of reading audiences situated anywhere, anytime.

Third—and this is perhaps one of the more notable consequences of distanciation—it affects ostensive referents: those items referred to in oral communication that can be shown, pointed out, labeled, or otherwise indicated by virtue of the collocation in time and space of speaker and hearer. The "orphaned" text, on the other hand, dislodged from its generating agent, event, and original addressees, has rendered such ostensive referents no longer immediately and directly accessible to readers.[11]

Distanciation is an important property of texts. Neither a vestige of vocality, nor an epiphenomenon of inscription, it is, rather, an integral facet of writing. Radical though it might appear—and it indeed is—distanciation is a *necessary* condition for the preservation of meaning across time and space, therefore necessitating the enterprise of interpretation. This distanciation of discourse (and its resultant "decontextualization" from its originating circumstances) "becomes a condition for all subsequent interpretation for in preserving the text it also keeps it open for new interpretations. In other words, it makes possible the subsequent recontextualization of its message." Distanciation is therefore essential for any participation in the meaning of the text by readers stationed far beyond the text's

---

[10]Even the determination by a reader of the language of the written composition is a concession to intentional authorial choice manifest in the text (Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction," *Critical Inquiry* 14 [1987]: 55–57). The phenomenon of "false friends" illustrates this eloquently: Should "g-i-f-t" be read in English or in German (= "poison")?

[11]Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (ed. and trans. John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 134, 139–40, 145.

generative situation. In other words, textuality is designed to overcome the time and space restrictions imposed by orality.[12]

With regard to Scripture, these same consequences of distanciation operate: the human author is unavailable;[13] readers are located far from the origin of the text; and ostensive referents are not accessible in direct or immediate fashion. Read and preached to its contemporary readers/hearers in locales far removed from those of its initial utterances, Scripture has undergone distanciation by virtue of its textuality. Yet, this unique discourse of the biblical text mandates its own application in times and spaces distant from the circumstances of its provenance. If Scripture is to be employed in these new locales, its gap of distanciation must be bridged. All interpretation, particularly that engaged in by the homiletician seeking valid sermonic application, is an attempt to counter these consequences of distanciation. How may this be faithfully and fittingly achieved?

III. CURE: WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT AND PERICOPAL THEOLOGY

Here is where what is considered to be Paul Ricoeur's most important contribution to interpretation theory, the *world in front of the text*, achieves notability, for it is by means of this "world" that distanciation may effectively be neutralized. Ricoeur's notion of the *world in front of the text* provides the framework for the fruitful transaction of interpretation that is intended to culminate in application.[14]

A. World in Front of the Text

The text is not an end in itself, but the means thereto, an instrument of the author's action of employing language to project a transcending vision—what Ricoeur called the *world in front of the text*. He explains:

---

[12]Ibid., 147. Lawrence Lessig expresses it pungently: "Texts are transportable. They move. Because written, they are carried. Because carried, they are read—in different places and at different times. Nothing . . . can stop this semiotic peripateticism. If you write it, it will roam" ("The Limits of Lieber," *Cardozo Law Review* 16 [1995]: 2249).

[13]For the Scriptures, it is, of course, only the human author who is unavailable. Nonetheless, it is this very "estrangement" of the human element (that includes the author's language, literary style, historical context, and referents, etc.) that necessitates interpretation.

[14]This essay appropriates Ricoeur in a distinctive way, to address the specific issue of moving from biblical text to sermonic application. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (LNTS 393; London: T & T Clark, 2009), 19–30. Ricoeur's own philosophical perspectives on these and other issues were generally more latent than concrete, works still in progress at his demise in 2005. See his "Reply to Lewis S. Mudge," in Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Lewis S. Mudge; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 41.

> In oral discourse, face-to-face interlocutors can, in the final analysis,
> refer what they are talking about to the surrounding world
> common to them. Only writing can . . . refer to a world that is not
> there between the interlocutors, a world that is the world of the text
> and yet is not in the text. . . . This issue of the text is the object of
> hermeneutics. It [the world of the text] is neither behind the text as
> the presumed author, not in the text as its structure, but unfolded
> *in front of* it.[15]

Literary texts, in other words, are unique referential phenomena.
One does not attend, for instance, a performance of *Macbeth* to
acquire knowledge of the history of Scotland; instead, one goes to
the play to learn what it is to gain a kingdom and lose one's soul.[16]
Thus a text may not only tell the reader about the world *behind* the
text (what "actually" happened—the historical elements), and about
the world *of* the text (the assemblage of its linguistic and literary
elements), it also projects another world *in front of* the text that bids
the reader inhabit it.[17] Especially for a text intended to be applied in
the future, far from the circumstances of its origin, interpretation
cannot cease with the elucidation of its literary and linguistic
elements and the history it represents, but must proceed further to
discern the *world in front of the text*. This projected world forms the
intermediary between inscription and application, between the
writing of the text and the response to it.

For instance: *A* tells *B*, "Hey, you're standing on my foot!"
Clearly, the application for *B* in this utterance is relocation from that
traumatic station upon *A*'s anatomy, even though such a response
was not explicitly required. While what the speaker *said* simply
asserted the spatial location of *B* upon the lower limb of *A*, what the
speaker *did with what was said* was implicitly to portray a world
where no one would ever be stationed upon *A*'s lower extremities to
produce distress—this is the thrust of the text: "I don't want anyone,
anywhere, anytime standing on my foot causing me discomfort!"[18]
A's desire for *B* (application) is the alignment of the latter with
such an ideal "nobody-ever-standing-on-my-foot-to-cause-me-pain"
world. *B*, by moving the offending extremity off *A*'s person,
conforms to the demands of that world, thus "inhabiting" it.[19] Valid

---

[15]Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," *USQR* 34 (1979): 217 (emphasis added).

[16]Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1964), 63–64.

[17]Such texts are "poetic" in the Aristotelian sense, for what *actually* happens, even if representing historic reality (τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον, the specific), is portrayed as what *generally* happens (τὰ καθόλου, the universal): in this Shakespearian tragedy, the gain of a kingdom at the cost of a soul (Aristotle, *Poet.* 9.1–4, 9–10).

[18]The prime example of the disjunction between the two categories—what is *said* and what is *done with what is said*—is the employment of metaphor and irony. The analysis of what is *done with what is said* is the business of the field of pragmatics. See Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12, 17.

[19]Such layered intentions of utterances and texts are labeled "secondary illocutions" or "indirect speech acts" in Speech Act Theory. See François Recanati,

application—i.e., application consistent with the thrust of the text—is the inhabitation of that *world in front of the text*, which, of course, requires alignment to the demands of that world: in this case, the removal of *B*'s person from the foot of *A* so as to relieve the latter's agony. This specific application to *B* is, then, an integral element of this *world in front of the text*, and implicit in it. It is obvious that this ideal world governs application not only for *B*, the one directly addressed, but also for all who might potentially consider standing on *A*'s foot at any time. In other words, this projected world is the text's (or utterance's) direction for application in the future. It is by the recognition of this text-projected world that valid application may be discerned. The elucidation of this world is, therefore, an essential aspect of the interpretation of texts for the purposes of application.

While the projection of a *world in front of the text* is applicable to all texts (a feature of "general" hermeneutics), what gives this concept momentum for biblical interpretation are the unique features of Scripture ("special" hermeneutics, applicable to this unique text alone): the singular nature of its textual referent (God and his relationship to his creation), its ultimate Author, the normative quality of such texts, and the spiritual and moral transformative power of the text—the *"viva vox Dei* addressing the people of God and generating faith and obedience."[20] It is the special nature of this hermeneutic, by which the church has recognized the biblical text to be its Scripture, that lends this opus gravity and declares it (and every pericope it contains) worthy of being preached and applied. Such a construal by the church also renders the canon potentially relevant for every believer in every era. Asserting the universality of the canon's relevance and readership, Gregory the Great asked rhetorically: "For what is sacred Scripture but a kind of epistle of Almighty God to His creature?"[21] In like manner, Chrysostom proclaimed that what was written in the Bible was written "for us" and, therefore, worthy of diligent attention.[22] Distanciation, then, is intended to be overcome, for the purposes of applying this universally relevant text. This essay suggests that for preaching purposes, the homiletician employ the *world in front of the text* to accomplish that goal.

Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics of Performative Utterances (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 254–58; and John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 30–57. Also see Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 30–35.

[20]John Webster, *Word and Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 58.

[21]*Epistula ad Theodorum medicum* (PL 77, 706 A).

[22]Προσέχετε, παρακαλῶ, μετὰ ἀκριβείας τοῖς παρ' ἡμῶν λεγομένοις (*Homiliæ in Genesim* 2:2 [PG 53, 27]). The Bible itself consistently affirms the relevance of its message for future generations: see Deut 6:6–25; 29:14–15; 31:9–13; 2 Kgs 22–23; Neh 7:73b–8:18; Ps 78:5–6; Matt 28:19; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 9:10; 10:6, 11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; etc.

B. Pericopal Theology

The *world in front of the text*, located between ancient inscription and contemporary application, forms the hermeneutic intermediary by which application is facilitated. The textual corpus *in toto* projects a canonical *world in front of the text*. Scripture, in this reckoning, displays to readers how God relates to his creation, by portraying a world governed by divine priorities, precepts, and practices, and offers to believers the possibility of inhabiting that projected world by subscription to those criteria—a new way of living: God's way. The biblical canon as a whole projects this composite "divine" world, a world into which God's people are beckoned to enter.

However, in the weekly homiletical transaction of the church, it is the pericope that remains the most basic quantum of Scripture handled. It is as individual pericopes that the people of God encounter the inscripturated Word of God, coming face to face with the particularity and potency of each text. Each pericope projects a segment of the plenary world of Scripture. The cumulative projections of all the individual pericopes of Scripture constitute the integrated, singular, canonical world. The people of God are called weekly to respond to the preached text by inhabiting the pericopal segment of the larger canonical world, the details of which segment are unique to that portion of Scripture and derived from its particulars. The goal of these ecclesial and homiletical transactions is the gradual alignment of the church, week by week, pericope by pericope, to that plenary canonical world. This is to adopt God's new way of life that is open to all those who, in obedience to Scripture, choose to live in the will of God by orienting their lives to that world. A biblical pericope is thus a literary instrument projecting a specific segment of the canonical world for God's people, inviting them to organize their lives in accordance with the priorities, precepts, and practices characteristic of this world-segment as revealed in that pericope. One pericope at a time, the various aspects of Christian life, individual and corporate, are progressively and gradually brought into alignment with the will of God for the glory of God— the goal of preaching.

Herein it is proposed that the world-segment projected by the pericope is the *theology of the pericope*, inasmuch as it portrays God and the relationship he intends to have with his people. It is a normative world wherein God's priorities are supreme, his precepts operate, and his practices are enacted. That world is not necessarily the way the world actually *is*; rather, it is a world that *should be* and *would be*, were God's people to align themselves to it—an "eschatological" world. Divine discourse is forward looking, for the *world in front of the text* is the world that God is graciously inviting his people to inhabit. This eschatological world guides believers to

future action, to fresh application of the pericope into their own particular contexts.[23]

Pericopal theology thus bears potential for the realization of God's kingdom; it is an eschatological concept, not yet completely fulfilled or operative until actualized by the Christian living a life that is lived in accord with the demands of God.[24] To this potential world, God's people are bidden to make their lives congruent—application involves discovering the world projected in front of the text and aligning oneself to that world. Such an alignment sustains the relationship between God and his community. This projected world can therefore rightly be called "theology"—"that skein of thought and language in which Christians understand themselves, the Bible, God, and their everyday world."[25] All these discrete units of pericopal theology together compose a holistic understanding of God and his relationship to his people; and each individual quantum of pericopal theology forms the ground of life transformation by calling for alignment to the demands of God as propounded in the projected world. Thus *pericopal theology* may be defined as the theology specific to a particular pericope, representing a segment of the plenary world projected by the canon, and which, implicitly bearing a future-directed intention, functions as the crucial intermediary in the homiletical move from text to praxis. What was there-and-then is thereby permitted to speak validly in the here-and-now, as distanciation is being overcome.

A response to the text from readers is thus essential, for the segment of the world projected by the pericope beckons and awaits an answer. Indeed, the text demands to be appropriated in this fashion, for Scripture is not content with its claim to be merely a historic reality; rather, its projected world is "destined for autocracy," and, unlike other worlds spun to enchant or flatter, this biblical world seeks the readers' subjection.[26]

---

[23]Lewis S. Mudge likens the world in front of the text to a model in the natural sciences which functions as a heuristic device; in similar fashion, the projected world re-describes reality enabling readers to discover how that new world, a world according to God, may be actualized in their lives ("Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation," in Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* [ed. Lewis S. Mudge; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 25).

[24]"You may call that eschatology in the sense that it's the horizon of another world, the promise of a new life" (Paul Ricoeur, "Poetry and Possibility," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* [ed. Mario J. Valdés; Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991], 455).

[25]Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 9.

[26]Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. Willard R. Trask; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 14–15.

> We may reject it. We may say, It is nothing. . . . But we may not
> deny nor prevent our being led by the Bible "history" far out
> beyond what is elsewhere called history—into a new world, into
> the world of God.[27]

A text, thus projecting the possibility of praxis is more than *informing*; it is potentially *transforming*, for application of pericopal theology aligns human lives with divine will. In the regular preaching of pericopes, this is accomplished by a consistent, sequential projection of segments of the canonical world (i.e., pericopal theology) to which listeners are enjoined to orient themselves. The crucial nature of this transaction charges the preacher to generate, from theology, application that is valid—the specific response to be undertaken by hearers to the expounded pericope.

There is, thus, a twofold aspect to the overall homiletical undertaking: the exposition of the theology of the unit text, and the delineation of how the latter may be applied in real life. The first move, from text to theology, draws meaning *from* the biblical text with authority, the second, from theology to praxis, directs meaning *to* the situations of listeners with relevance.[28] In so actualizing theology in the latter move into the discrete and specific circumstances of believers, the values of the cosmos are gradually subverted and undermined, and those of God's world are progressively established in the life of the community. This is part of what it means to acknowledge, "Thy kingdom come." The theology of the pericope thus functions as the bridge between text and praxis, between the ancient circumstances of the text and those of the contemporary reading community, enabling the move from the "then" to the "now," from canonical inscription to valid sermonic application.[29]

The interpretation of a pericope at the weekly gathering of the community of God must therefore discern the particular portion of the canonical vision featured by that pericope. In other words, each homiletical undertaking must delineate the theology of the pericope

---

[27]Karl Barth, "The Strange New World within the Bible," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (trans. Douglas Horton; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 37.

[28]"The honest rhetorician therefore has two things in mind: a vision of how matters should go ideally and ethically and a consideration of the special circumstances of his auditors. Toward both of these he has a responsibility" (Richard M. Weaver, *Language Is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric* [ed. Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks; Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1970], 211).

[29]Theology stands "midway between the Bible and actual church preaching" (Heinrich Ott, *Theology and Preaching* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 17). The concept of theology as a bridge between text and sermon has oft been proposed in the past, although what "species" of theology it is or how exactly it performs this role has not been explicated. See John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 43; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 137; and Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," *BSac* 148 (1991): 463–86.

under consideration, elucidating what that specific text affirms about God and his ongoing and dynamic relationship to mankind. This theological role played by pericopes and their exposition has not been a matter that has attracted much academic interest. While attention has been lavished upon the theology of individual books and upon that of the canon as a whole, as well as that of themes traced through the timeline of the Bible, consideration of the theology of these homiletically critical tracts of Scripture has languished. Such a neglect is all the more regrettable since it is by these regular encounters with the pericopes of the biblical text that life change is addressed, so that individual and community may come to abide in the will of God. Due respect for this instrumentality of pericopes is therefore essential for proper ecclesial practice. As pericopes are sequentially preached from in the homiletical setting, the resultant transformation of lives, in the weekly application of pericopal theology, reflects a gradual and increasing alignment to the values of God's kingdom.

The derivation of the theology of a specific pericope will form the case-study to illustrate this critical movement. This process of discovery of pericopal theology, it will be seen, is an endeavor focused on the text and all the properties of its textuality. The *world in front of the text* is peculiar to that text and derived from the particular features inherent to it and proposed by it: "[f]or every unique text there is such a world" proper to it.[30] The next section details the discernment of the world unique to 2 Samuel 11–12.

IV. CASE-STUDY: PERICOPAL THEOLOGY ILLUSTRATED, DISTINGUISHED, AND APPLIED

In the collective corpus of 1–2 Samuel, the results of unfaithfulness and the fruits of faithfulness are represented in the lives of the two kings, Saul and David, whose individual dramas unfold in structured sequence (1 Sam 13–2 Sam 24). Though 2 Samuel 10–12 forms an integral narrative unit and part of a larger whole that spans chapters 9–20, for the purposes of this analysis the focus will be upon the specific pericope dealing with David's adultery and murder and his subsequent indictment (2 Sam 11–12).

A. Pericopal Theology Illustrated

Considering 2 Samuel 11–12, which narrates King David's misdemeanors, one discovers four specific aspects of the discourse that point to the distinctive theology of this pericope—the world the author projects in front of the text.

---

[30]Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Ideology, Utopia, and Faith," in *Protocol of the Seventeenth Colloquy, 4 November 1975* (ed. W. Wuellner; Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 11–12.

1. The Send Motif

A striking feature of the narrative is the recurrence of the verb שׁלח ("to send"). Altogether in 2 Samuel 10–12, this term appears twenty-three times, while in the larger unit of 2 Samuel 9–20, it is utilized forty-four times; only thirteen instances occur in the rest of 2 Samuel. For the most part, it is the king here who does all the sending—he *sends* to inquire about Bathsheba, he *sends* for Bathsheba, he *sends* for Uriah, he *sends* Uriah back to the battlefront bearing his own death warrant, and so on (11:1, 3, 4, 6 [×3], 12, 14, 27). This repeated element is a motif indicating regal power and imperial authority, as David, supreme in his kingdom, sends people hither and thither; they all jump to do his bidding.[31] Here was a potentate abusing his power in the service of his immoral desires; indeed, this was power that was not inherently his, but that had been granted him in the first place. Yahweh, exercising his sovereignty, had chosen David from being a "nobody," to replace a predecessor who had himself been warped by his own fantasies of omnipotence. David, exercising *his* "sovereignty," chose to have his own way, not God's. The *send* motif thus points to a significant facet of the theology of the pericope (the world it projects): *faithful allegiance to God, the true sovereign, is a priority to which believers are called to be aligned, manifest in the reined exercise of power.*[32]

2. The Hittite Model

Significant contrasts emerge between the Jewish king and the Hittite warrior, Uriah, as the narrative negotiates its nuanced turns. Uriah, at the battlefront with the army, was engaged in war; David, at home, was engaged in illicit pleasure, lying with another man's wife (שׁכב, 11:4). When summoned from war, Uriah refused to succumb to the joys of rest and relaxation at home while his compatriots (and the ark) were encamping on open ground. This loyal soldier, instead, chose to lie at the door of the king's house (שׁכב, 11:9), rather than go home to lie with his wife (שׁכב, 11:11), as David was manipulating him to do. Later, even while inebriated, Uriah opted to "lie" with the servants of the king (שׁכב, 11:13). In desperation, Uriah is sent (again שׁלח, 11:14) to his death. David's fornication that began under cover of darkness ("evening," 11:2) had now become cold-blooded murder in daylight ("morning," 11:14). Wanton sexual morals, rooted in base self-indulgence, had culminated in a tyrannical unconcern for the wounded "third-party." Uriah was heartlessly slaughtered, the zenith of an unbroken sequence of escalating malignity. Indeed, this last act succeeds in

---

[31]John I. Lawlor, "Theology and Art in the Narrative of the Ammonite War (2 Samuel 10–12)," *GTJ* 3 (1982): 195–96; Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Bib* 48 (1967): 209.

[32]This is, of course, a positive restatement of the negative example of David's life.

getting not just one man killed, but many, some of them the nation's best warriors (11:16). So, on the one hand was the king of Israel, unfaithful and disloyal; deliberately and willfully he engaged in adultery with the spouse of one of his warriors. On the other hand was that very warrior, besotted Uriah, emerging more faithful to Yahweh, liege, and comrades, than was the sober and scheming David. The loyal, abstinent, and self-sacrificing soldier is requisitioned as a foil for the disloyal, indulgent, and selfish king: the theology of the pericope thus depicts a practice desirable in the projected world: *faithfulness to Yahweh is manifested in the restriction of one's self-indulgent passions.*[33]

3. The Ophthalmic Malady

Quite strikingly, the narrative of 2 Samuel 11 fails to make any mention of Yahweh, until one gets to 2 Sam 11:27. There, the main character in the *dramatis personæ*, Yahweh, finally makes his appearance. Following right after David has just cavalierly remarked to Joab through a messenger, "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes" (בְּעֵינֶיךָ, 11:25), divine disapprobation is registered in no uncertain terms: "But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (בְּעֵינֵי יהוָה, 11:27b).[34] There appears to have been an ophthalmic incompatibility between David and Yahweh: king and God were not seeing eye-to-eye. What David saw as not evil was expressly seen and condemned as evil by Yahweh. Then, as if to rectify any misconception about the presence of deity on stage, from this point onwards, Yahweh, "absent" in the previous scenes, becomes almost visible: the Tetragrammaton occurs thirteen times in 2 Samuel 12, in the section that details the judgment, sentence, and punishment of the king. God had seen, and now would himself take

---

[33]Even after he is disposed of, the storyteller does not allow Uriah to vanish from the narrative: in 2 Sam 11:26, the awkward recurrence of that soldier's name in "the wife of Uriah" and "Uriah her husband," and the repeated assertion in the same verse of Bathsheba's marital status (אִישָׁהּ and בַּעְלָהּ, "her husband") keep the focus unwaveringly upon the innocent victim of David's egregious actions. The child that is born to this illicit union is also referred to as the one that *Uriah's widow* bore (12:15). Uriah also makes an appearance again at the very end of the book (23:39). The narrator does not intend that the reader forget this ignominious incident, and, to the very end, this brazen malfeasance blacklists David.

[34]This verse, 2 Sam 11:27b, turns out to be the focal point of the chiastic structure of 2 Sam 10–12, emphasizing the crux of the narrative—what God considered "evil in his eyes."

10:1–19	A	War—partial victory over the Ammonites
11:1–5	B	Sin; Bathsheba conceives
11:6–13	C	Concealment of David's sin
11:14–27a	D	Murder of the innocent Uriah
11:27b	E	Evil in the eyes of Yahweh
12:1–6	D'	Murder of the lamb
12:7–15a	C'	Exposure of David's sin
12:15b–25	B'	Death; Bathsheba conceives
12:26–31	A'	War—complete victory over the Ammonites

action to bring justice and closure to this sinister episode. For the development of the theology of the pericope, this is an integral practice of the projected world: *faithfulness to God involves recognizing evil for what it is in God's eyes.*

4. The Punishment Merited

That the climax of the narrative has been reached in 2 Sam 11:27b is also indicated in the very next verse as the prophet Nathan is commissioned to play the prosecuting attorney. For a change, Yahweh is the one now doing the sending (שׁלח, 12:1—"Then Yahweh *sent* Nathan . . . "). The tables had finally been turned! The punishment would now fit the crime: Yahweh would take David's wives (לקח, 12:11)—a grim reminder to David of how he had taken Bathsheba (לקח, 11:4; 12:9, 10), just as the rich man had taken the poor man's ewe lamb (לקח, 12:4).[35] This taking by Yahweh would be "in his [David's] sight"—his wives would be lain with "in the sight" of the sun (12:11; see 16:22 for Absalom's fulfillment of this curse, upon the same roof whence David had commenced his contemptible conspiracy). The scorning of Yahweh and his word (12:9, 10) was heinous indeed, and that not by a private individual but by Yahweh's anointed, the king of God's chosen people (Israel/Judah is mentioned five times in 12:7–15). David had despised both Yahweh and his word (12:9, 10). The fact that these nefarious affairs had given occasion for the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme him (12:14) would also not be forgotten. Indeed, the fourfold punishment (for the "lamb," 12:6), when exacted, would take the life of four of David's children: Bathsheba's newborn, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah.[36] In the theology of the pericope, the corollary to the precept that faithfulness to God yields blessing is that *unfaithfulness to God, manifest in the disrespecting of his word and the public dishonoring of his name, will often get its just deserts.*[37]

---

[35]In Nathan's denunciatory fiction, the poor man's lamb would eat (אכל) of his bread and drink (שׁתה) of his cup and lie (שׁכב) in his bosom (12:3). Earlier, in response to David's urging that Uriah go home—an attempt by the king to hide his own paternity of Bathsheba's illegitimate child—that soldier had indignantly replied, "Shall I then go to my house to eat [אכל] and to drink [שׁתה] and to lie [שׁכב] with my wife?" (11:11). David, the prophet implies, was as callous as the parabolic rich man who slew the poor man's favorite pet.

[36]The *leitmotif* of שׁלח also resurfaces in 2 Sam 13. There, it is David who *sends* Tamar to Amnon (13:7; she is the victim in an illicit sexual encounter); and it is David who *sends* Amnon with Absalom (13:27; Amnon is killed). In distinction to 2 Sam 11, where David *sends* for the victims of his predatory actions, in 2 Sam 13 he unwittingly *sends* his own children, to have visited upon them the evils he perpetrated upon Bathsheba and Uriah (James S. Ackerman, "Knowing Good and Evil: A Literary Analysis of the Court History in 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2," *JBL* 109 [1990]: 48–49).

[37]A remedial thrust is also part of the narrative, portraying the grace of God to the repentant sinner (2 Sam 12:13). David's sins take their tragic and traumatic toll, but the accusatory unit ends positively. Once again Yahweh *sends* (שׁלח), and once again it is Nathan who is sent by him, but this time with a message of tenderness: the second

In summary, considering the story in its broader context, the theology of the pericope (the segment of the world in front of this text) may be summarized positively, attending to the four aspects of the discourse pointed out: Reverence for God and deference to his word is manifested in the reined exercise of power, the restriction of self-indulgent passions, and the recognition of evil as reprehensible in the sight of God; such a respect for the authority and rulership of the true sovereign brings blessing.[38] It must be remembered that in the broad context of 1-2 Samuel it was not only the nation's kings who were unfaithful. Even before the regents registered their infidelity, the people, in calling for a monarchy, had themselves dismissed Yahweh: "They have rejected me," God declared, "from being king over them" (1 Sam 8:7), a unilateral abrogation of the Mosaic covenant whereby God was to be the nation's ruler (Exod 15:18; 19:5-6). Therefore, the theology of this pericope is a lesson for both ruler and ruled, both crown and commoner. As is evident in the analysis of 2 Samuel 11-12, pericopal theology imparts to the textual particulars a significance that transcends their historical circumstances of origin, rendering its significance perennial. Ultimately, this pericope (and, indeed, the entire Davidic saga in 1-2 Samuel) is more than a narrative about a historical personage, "but about the highest values in the narrated David (as shown or as violated by him) which are the same as those of our own human existence."[39] This essay suggests that the world in front of the text—the theology of the pericope—portrays these "highest values"—the priorities, precepts, and purposes operating in the

---

child of David and Bathsheba would be "beloved of Yahweh" (12 24) Though the consequences of sin would long remain, forgiveness had been achieved

[38]While pericopal theology is concerned with the divine priorities, precepts, and practices to which God calls his people to be aligned, these elements must be distinguished from "principles" as are commonly encountered in homiletical literature—"timeless abiding truths" (Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 152). Principles are, no doubt, of value in biblical interpretation for application, particularly when seeking to find application in biblical law—the Bible itself uses principles, but, invariably, the one seeking to discover them is searching "behind" the text for whatever it was that prompted the writing of that text Therefore, cultural issues—and, apparently, literary genres—"intrude" on the text, a distraction from the principle behind the text (Walter C Kaiser Jr , "A Principalizing Model," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology* [ed Gary T Meadors, Grand Rapids Zondervan, 2009], 21) The discernment of pericopal theology, on the other hand has its focus "in front of" the text, as the interpreter seeks to determine from the text (and its genre) what the author was *doing* with what he was *saying* Nor does the determination of pericopal theology remove the text from any further consideration in the sermonic process (as is likely, after the discovery of principles "behind" the text) Pericopal theology is simply a hermeneutical aid to identify the primary theological thrust of the text that is to be conveyed by a preacher to an audience The preacher will, as necessary, explicate in the resulting sermon the historical detail, literary nuances, emotional impact, narrative trajectory, and contextual support—all of which are derived from the text and its literary environs, and help shape the pericope's theological thrust

[39]J P Fokkelman, *King David (II Sam 9-20 & I Kings 1-2) (Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* 1, Assen, Netherlands Van Gorcum, 1981), 423-24

projected world, propounded for appropriation by readers (and, via
the preacher, by listeners of sermons). This was not merely history
that was being written in the biblical text; the author was adapting
his material in such a way that the universal human value would be
emphasized, allowing the past to flow over into the present,
overcoming distanciation.

B. Pericopal Theology Distinguished

Pericopal theology, in this conception, is neither the imposition
of a systematic or confessional grid on the raw material of the text,
nor the result of an exclusively historical, sociological, or
anthropological focus on the subject matter. Rather, the textually
mediated theological truth of a given pericope is elucidated,
attending to the contribution of that specific text to the plenary
canonical world that displays God and humanity rightly related to
him.

In this, pericopal theology differs from systematic or biblical
theology (at least as they are commonly defined). Systematic
theology, attending to the entailments of what is written, draws
conclusions deductively from one text and integrates those with
deductions from other texts (for instance, the ascertainment of the
divinity of the persons of the Trinity from a number of discrete
biblical passages). By virtue of its systematizing and integrating
activity, it operates at a level more general than does pericopal
theology. The latter, on the other hand, is more inductively derived,
and is constrained by the trajectory of a specific pericope.[40] It deals
with matters pertaining to the relationship of God to his creation as
proposed in *that* pericope. The operation of biblical theology, too,
tends to be more general than that of pericopal theology, identifying,
as it does, the development of broader biblical themes across the
canon.[41]

For the preacher, there is a singular advantage in the
employment of pericopal theology in the homiletical undertaking: by
way of its greater degree of specificity for the chosen text, it makes
possible the weekly movement from pericope to pericope, for those
who seek to preach in that fashion. The theological thrust of a given
book is thereby elucidated pericope by pericope, with the
homiletician faithfully discharging the responsibility of generating
specific and discrete application in each sermon. On the other hand,

---

[40]This, of course, is not to deny the development of themes in contiguous
pericopes, or that adjacent pericopes, together making up an entire book, influence the
theology of the specific pericope being exposited.

[41]See B. S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed.
T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2000), 10; Sidney
Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical
Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 267; and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-
Centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-Theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham:
Apollos, 2006), 68, 271.

with systematic and biblical theology as the basis of individual sermons, distinctions between the theological thrusts of successive pericopes preached are harder to maintain. Operating as these species of theology do, at a level of generality somewhat removed from the immediacy of the text and its details (at least at a level further removed from the locus of pericopal theology), sermons on contiguous pericopes often tend to have similar applications, making *lectio continua* difficult to sustain. On the other hand, given the degree of specificity prescribed by pericopal theology, the sequential preaching of pericopes would not be impeded by this handicap; the specific theological thrust of each pericope would be heard clearly.

Such an approach does not devalue sermons based upon systematic or biblical theology. The goal of this proposal is simply to complement other preaching modalities with one that will conceivably aid the preaching of Scripture pericope by pericope on a weekly basis, gradually unveiling the world projected by the canon.[42] Pericopal theology, as defined here, will help such preachers bring that specific portion of the biblical text to bear upon the situation of the hearers, thereby aligning congregation to canon, God's people to God's word. Week by week, and pericope by pericope, the community of God is thus increasingly oriented to the will of God as it progressively inhabits the canonical world. Therefore in each such expository undertaking geared for application, homileticians might want to set the interpretive focus squarely upon the theology of the particular pericope utilized. By means of this intermediary, pericopal theology, that specific pericope is applied to the gathered Christian community. In such application, readers (or listeners of sermons) inhabit the *world in front of the text*, thus moulding the community of God—of all time and in all places—to the will of God. How this is accomplished through sermonic application will be considered briefly in the next section.

C. Pericopal Theology Applied

That theology involves praxis is undeniable. James 1:22–25 emphasizes the importance of application—"prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves"; the

---

[42]It must be noted that this essay deals with one particular kind of Christian proclamation—the preaching of a sermon from a demarcated pericope. Even for this specific endeavor, systematic and biblical theology are invaluable: what is discerned in the theology of the pericope must be consistent with the organized datum of theological information obtained from the remainder of the canon. The construal by the church of the biblical corpus as a singular work—a whole, comprising discrete parts—mandates a reading that assumes coherence between its various components. Moreover, such a coordinated reading attenuates the threat of dislodging a narrow sliver of text (the pericope) from its broader context in the canon. Systematic and biblical theology provide a schematized version of biblical information, outlining the gradual revelation thereof along the timeline of biblical history. A comprehensive grasp of both these facets of theology are essential for accurate interpretation and effective preaching.

one who applies the text is "an effectual doer . . . blessed in what he does." It is not enough to *know*; one must also *be*. Only in personal appropriation does the text "accomplish" its meaning; therefore, Gadamer could assert that application was an integral part of the hermeneutical process.[43] A response to the text from readers is thus essential, and pericopal theology is the authoritative guide for this faithful-yet-new response to the text in the unprecedented situations and circumstances of each new generation. Application of Scripture is thus the culmination of the move from text to praxis.[44]

The drama of David, in the pericope discussed above, serves, by way of its theology, as an unmistakable deterrent for the one tempted to drift into unfaithfulness to God through sensuality. Considering the position of the king as one wielding considerable authority, the thrust of this narrative may be brought home effectively to those who are in positions of leadership and authority. To live faithfully under the hand of God in such situations, one must be resolute about exercising power with utmost responsibility, with great care and concern for one's subordinates, especially when tempted by lusts of the flesh to fall into debauchery. Obviously not all in a congregation are heads of state or those who administer the kind of power that was wantonly abused by David. But even for the one who might not belong to any such hierarchy, the lesson of turpitude degenerating into further baseness, when uncurbed by the moral demands of God to honor his name and his word, is one to be taken to heart, for many a Christian has fallen prey—and, sadly, many still do—to such licentiousness. While 1–2 Samuel deals primarily with the iniquities of two Israelite kings, the lessons therein for the people of the nation (and thus for *all* subsequent readers and hearers of the text, whether they themselves are in stations of authority or not) must not be neglected. The misdoings of their rulers simply reflected the people's own unfaithfulness to God (1 Sam 8:7).

---

[43]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2d rev. ed.; trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; London: Continuum, 2004), 307. Justin Martyr's description of a second-century worship service in Rome noted that after the reading of the Gospels, "the presider verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things" (1 *Apol.* 67). Augustine, too, decried the futility of persuading hearers of the truth, or delighting them with style, if the learning process did not result in action (*Doctr. chr.* 4.13.29).

[44]Classical rhetoric knows of three directions of audience responses that may be sought by a rhetorician: a *judicial* assessment of past events, a *deliberative* resolve with regard to future actions of the audience, or an *epideictic* appreciation of particular beliefs or values in the present. See Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.7–9; Anaximenes, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1421b; also see C. Clifton Black, "Rhetorical Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 261. Application, in parallel to this three-fold shape of rhetorical purpose, may also be considered broadly as responses culminating in a change of mind (a response of cognition), a change of action (a response of volition), or a change of feeling (a response of emotion).

A controlled exercise of passion and power as demanded by the theology of this pericope necessitates accountability to God (and to his agents), as one strives to "see" things the way God does, to live humbly and contentedly under him who alone holds supreme power, and to recognize immoral behavior as evil in the eyes of God. The homiletician might perhaps propose the setting up of an accountability group of godly, responsible people that, corporately personifying the prophet Nathan's office, would be granted the freedom and authority by individual Christians to provide them counsel, as well as correction, when necessary. Such an application, when put into practice, is a means of realizing the pericope's theological imperative of living faithfully unto God, under God. It must be noted that the particular characteristics of a given congregation will determine the specific nature of the application proposed by the homiletician—the element of relevance. At the same time, such application is to be governed by the theology of the pericope—the element of authority. The text is thus endowed with potential for universal applicability, the specifics of application in any given sermon being dependent upon the situation of address and the station of the addressees in that particular homiletical event.

The homiletician thus serves as the conscience of application for the community of God, with the dual responsibility to understand what God has said (text) and to generate valid application (praxis), in order that God's people may be aligned to the specific demands of the world-segment projected in front of the text—the theology of the pericope.

V. CONCLUSION

Inherent in textuality is the phenomenon of distanciation—the disruption of the dialogical situation between speaker and listener. Texts, by virtue of their writtenness, are transported across vast gulfs of space and time. For a contemporary reader, the ancient text of Scripture also has undergone distanciation; its interpretation, too, is geared towards the neutralization of this exigency. Especially for those texts intended for future application, Paul Ricoeur's *world in front of the text* functions as the interpretive bridge between distanciated text and reader. For Scripture, such a projected world, concerned as it is with God and his relationship to his creation, is the theology of the pericope. Therein are portrayed divine priorities, precepts, and practices, to which God calls his people to be aligned. In the regular preaching of pericopes, the sequential exposition of their theology thus facilitates the alignment of God's people to the demands of his world. A pericope, thus projecting the possibility of praxis is potentially transforming, for as the people of God inhabit the world-segment it projects, they are aligning their lives to the theology of the pericope, thus becoming rightly oriented to God's will for God's glory.