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Book Review: Taking God at His Word

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presented by most of the views in this book are inadequate to uphold the biblical account and will be concerned about the consequences for future generations.

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Kevin DeYoung. *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014. 138 pp. £8.99/\$17.99.

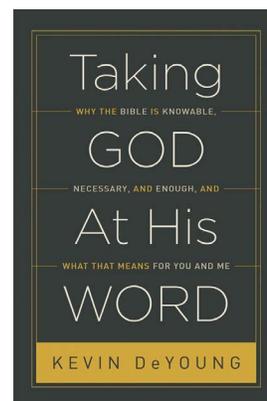
A growing practice even in evangelical circles is to look down on a high view of Scripture. To elevate the doctrine of Scripture, some urge, is to misperceive the nature of the Bible and is the result of a distorted depth perception that mistakenly prizes devotion to the written word over interaction with the living Word, Jesus himself. In this volume, pastor Kevin DeYoung aims to give readers a different line of sight by arguing that a high view of Scripture is actually the only means by which we can see God, ourselves, and the world with clarity.

DeYoung begins with an extended reflection on Ps 119 and 2 Pet 1:16–21. These strategic biblical passages share a high estimation of written revelation. The psalmist expresses fervent devotion to God’s laws, commandments, and statutes with language that conveys a longing to lift up and exult in the word of God (pp. 11–25). Peter likewise demonstrates that the gospel is worthy of trust because of the trustworthiness of the “prophetic word” and the apostolic testimony (pp. 27–44). In these opening chapters, DeYoung seeks to establish the value and validity of God’s revelatory words.

In the center of the book, DeYoung devotes a chapter each to four of Scripture’s attributes: “God’s Word Is Enough” (sufficiency), “God’s Word Is Clear” (clarity), “God’s Word Is Final” (authority), and “God’s Word Is Necessary” (necessity). For DeYoung, reflecting on these characteristics is “eminently practical” because “counselors can counsel meaningfully because Scripture is sufficient. Bible study leaders can lead confidently because Scripture is clear. Preachers can preach with boldness because their biblical text is authoritative. And evangelists can evangelize with urgency because the Scripture is necessary” (p. 92).

Following these chapters, DeYoung asks the question, “What did Jesus believe about the Bible?” (p. 95). For him, this one question “must undeniably shape and set the agenda for our doctrine of Scripture” (p. 95). Reflecting on John 10:35–36, he argues that Jesus viewed his Bible as an “unbreakable” one (pp. 95–110).

DeYoung ends his volume with a discussion of 2 Tim 3:16, the *locus classicus* for a doctrine of Scripture. Here he explains that his entire reflection flows from the headwaters of this passage. He writes, “Everything in the Bible comes from the mouth of God. Sufficiency, clarity, authority, and necessity—they must all be true if 2 Timothy 3:16 is true, and they would all be false if 2 Timothy 3:16 were a lie” (p. 111). In this way, “there is no more important verse for developing a proper understanding of Scripture” (p. 111). DeYoung concludes by highlighting Scripture’s ability to transform readers, its origin in God the Spirit, and its powerful practicality in the life of the churches (pp. 116–24).



DeYoung's volume as a whole will help sympathetic readers carve out a conceptual space in their thinking deep enough for a high view of Scripture. There is an educated impulse that regards the language evangelicals use of Scripture as "bibliolatry." We should worship God, not a book. DeYoung implicitly addresses this sentiment from the outset. He simply takes a walking tour through the poetic rhetoric of Ps 119, a text he calls a "love poem" (p. 11). DeYoung highlights the emotive language that the psalmist uses to express his relationship to God's word (affection, love, longing) and also to those who set themselves up against it (anger, zeal, fury). His point is that because the Psalmist himself adopts this disposition when speaking about God's words, commandments, and statutes, it is not de facto bibliolatry for believers to take their cues from the psalmist when they characterize the Scriptures.

Accordingly, DeYoung's aim is "to get us to fully, sincerely, and consistently embrace" this disposition (p. 16). All of his arguments are designed to convince the reader "that the Bible makes no mistakes, can be understood, cannot be overturned, and is the most important word in your life, the most relevant thing you can read each day" (p. 16). In this way, "Psalm 119 is the explosion of praise made possible by an orthodox and evangelical doctrine of Scripture" (p. 16). Later in the book, DeYoung shows that Jesus himself echoes the psalmist's striking disposition toward the Scriptures (see pp. 106–07).

Any articulation of a doctrine of Scripture that seeks to unpack "what the Bible says about the Bible" (p. 23) will raise a number of interpretive issues. DeYoung notes that this focus raises questions of canon and explains that his book is not an apologetic or historical defense of Scripture. This is a helpful clarification, but because he presents "a doctrine of Scripture derived from Scripture itself" (p. 23), the *hermeneutical* question of canon is actually foregrounded. That is, when Scripture "refers to itself," what exactly is in view *for the biblical writer*? Further, is there any sensitivity to the fact that a biblical text will function differently when read in its literary context than when it forms a part of a doctrine of Scripture? There is a definitional imperative here that is often neglected in popular bibliology.

Typically, throughout DeYoung's volume, the phrase "God's Word" refers to the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon. However, when he discusses biblical texts, there is sometimes a blurring of the distinction between God's speech in a narrative, a literary corpus (e.g., the Law), and the Bible as a whole. There are a number of places where the transition from "God's revelation in words" to "the Bible itself" happens very quickly (p. 12). For instance, Ps 119 speaks of the "Law" and also of "God's words" in the form of statutes, commands, and precepts. DeYoung notes that there are "different shades of meaning" for each concept, but that they "all center on the same big idea: God's revelation in words" (p. 12). In the next sentence, though, DeYoung identifies the subject of the psalm as "the Bible itself" (p. 12). In Ps 119, the sense of "God's Word" as the two-testament Bible of the church is not present on any reading. Some verses seem to speak of the "law of the Lord" as a literary entity, but even here, the referent is most likely the Law (i.e., the Pentateuch). The same tension shows up when DeYoung talks about texts like Heb 4:12 (p. 51) and Rev 22:18–19 (pp. 53–54). DeYoung helpfully exposit these passages, but in none of them does the "word of God" have the sense of the Bible as a whole.

This is a subtle but significant issue because many objections to a high view of Scripture begin at just this point. DeYoung clearly demonstrates the value of these passages for a doctrine of Scripture. However, utilizing a text that speaks of the Pentateuch or refers to divine discourse in a narrative requires a bit of theological work. Making this move in a careful and appropriate way is one of the most crucial tasks of bibliology. In the book, DeYoung mostly assumes this link rather than explains it. For instance, he notes that "God's verbal revelation, whether in spoken form or in redemptive history (i.e., the Bible), is unfailingly perfect" (p. 18). When discussing 2 Tim 3:16, DeYoung hints at the issue when

he describes the Bible as “the sacred writings of the Old Testament, which Paul first of all had in mind, and the inspired writings for the new covenant church, which Paul understood himself to be issuing (1 Thess 2:13) and Peter understood to be in the process of being written down (2 Pet 3:16)” (p. 118). A more robust discussion of this particular nuance would help readers grapple with the hermeneutical glue that binds together the biblical building blocks of an evangelical bibliography.

The target audience for this book is those who know and love the Scriptures, and who would like to grow in these pursuits (p. 25). Recognizing this feature of his work, DeYoung aims his final exhortation at just these readers. With pastoral verve, he pleads, “Don’t forget what you know and have already learned. Don’t lose sight of who you are. Stay on track. Keep on going” (p. 112). “This,” DeYoung concludes, “is God’s never-changing instruction to us: stick with the Scriptures” (p. 113).

DeYoung’s pastoral urgency acknowledges the value of Scripture for the life and ministry of the believer, and his conversational tone will enable his reflection to reach a broad audience. While this volume is certainly not the last word on the doctrine of Scripture, it provides a glimpse into the riches that an evangelical articulation of God’s Word can offer to those looking for a clear line of sight into God’s work in the world.

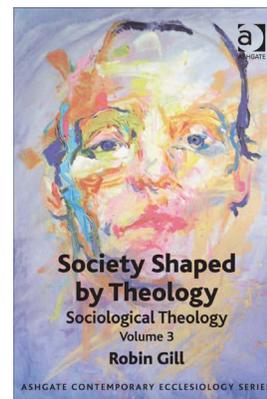
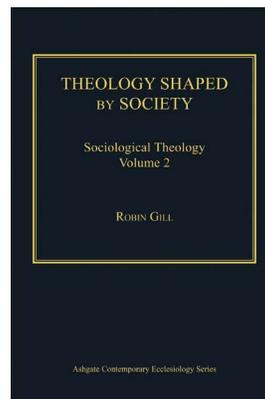
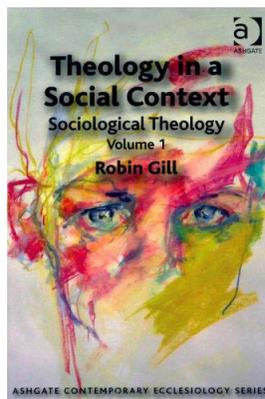
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Robin Gill. *Theology in a Social Context: Sociological Theology, Volume 1* [TSC]. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012. pp. 240. £19.99/\$39.95.

Robin Gill. *Theology Shaped by Society: Sociological Theology, Volume 2* [TSS]. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012. pp. 219. £19.99/\$39.95.

Robin Gill. *Society Shaped by Theology: Sociological Theology, Volume 3* [SST]. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012. pp. 252. £19.99/\$39.95.

For more than half a century Robin Gill has negotiated the scholarly interface between sociology and theology. This trilogy brings together his work as an Anglican academic. The two initial volumes, he says, can be read in “stand alone” terms. But this review restricts itself to a brief overview of the three volumes.



Together they constitute Gill’s systematic account of his “theological social system”, his “sociological theology”. They collate a lifetime’s work of substantial breadth and depth, a testimony to the care and persistence of its academic and clerical author. Gill’s three volumes hang together as a considerable academic contribution.