

Title: Understanding the Mind of God: John Owen and Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Methodology

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## ABSTRACT

The biblical exegesis of the seventeenth century has been criticized for (1) serving only to proof text dogmatic, polemic works; (2) reverting to the scholasticism of medieval times, ignoring the vitality of the Reformer's humanism; and (3) being academically inferior due to the neglect of scientific advances in biblical studies. John Owen's interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews is used to evaluate the legitimacy of this criticism.

Seventeenth-century orthodox exegetical techniques reflect (1) precritical assumptions about Scripture (*analogia fidei*, *analogia Scripturae*, scope, contemporary application), (2) developments of Renaissance humanism (biblical and cognate languages; grammatical, linguistic, and lexical advances; text criticism; rhetorical argumentation), and (3) orthodoxy's scholastic heritage (theological definitions and distinctions; continuity with historic faith; the role of reason; demonstrative exposition).

Contrary to the dogmatic proof texting criticism, Owen's commentary on Hebrews 1:1-3 reflects a reluctance to speak on theological issues not directly flowing from the text, while still showing how classical theological constructions concerning the Godhead naturally flow from a careful analysis of Scripture.

Owen seeks to prove the author's reliance on Hebrew originals as the text source for the OT citations in Hebrews 1, supporting his concern for the exegetical priority of the original languages. He further demonstrates how the author appropriately applied each citation according to (1) its original OT context, (2) its OT literal sense, and (3) the scope of both OT and NT periscopes. When the text demands it, Owen cautiously turns to typology, emphasizing the historicity of the type, the type's foreshadowing of only a portion of its fulfillment, the correlation between type and antitype, the escalated nature of the antitype, and a literary aspect in the author's typology.

Owen denounced Arminian use of Hebrews 6:4-6 as the product of poor interpretive methodology. Demonstrating the proper connection between exegetical method and dogmatic outcomes, Owen explains the author's intent and the linguistic features of the text while asserting its basic compatibility with the Reformed doctrine of perseverance.

John Owen's exegetical work so completely defies the traditional assessment of seventeenth-century biblical studies as to call into question the validity of the conventional scholarship on this issue. Owen belongs to a long exegetical trajectory which shows continuity with the methodology of medieval scholastics; the style, presuppositions, and theology of the Reformers; and the academic and intellectual developments arising from Renaissance humanism.