



## May/June 2007 Volume 4, Issue 4

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### Editor's Note

9Marks receives daily phone calls and emails from local church pastors asking for advice. Do you know how many questions we receive about preaching? None.

Questions about church membership? Lots. Questions about implementing church discipline? Plenty. About transitioning to a plural elder-led model? Quite a few. But preaching? Never.

Sure enough, the *Pulpit & Pew* research project asked 1,231 solo and senior pastors to rank what they did best among their various duties. In every category of denominational tradition, congregation size, years in the ministry, and gender, the top two answers were (i) preaching and (ii) teaching people about the faith. (Evangelism and administration were ranked last.) Pastors of every persuasion and duration are most confident about their preaching (J. Carroll, *God's Potters*, 115).

Yet may I propose—as gingerly as I can—that 9Marks exists because these 1,231 pastors and those whom they statistically represent do not preach as they should?

We call expository preaching the first mark in a healthy church because we believe if you get that right, the other marks follow. You'll hear this theme surface again and again

in this issue's articles. Mike Gilbert-Smith leads the way by comparing what he calls "authoritative" preaching to recent proposals for "conversational" preaching. Ajith Fernando, Al Mohler, Kevin Smith, and Derek Thomas offer their two cents on that question. Mark Driscoll takes on the proposal for narrative preaching, while former Trinity preaching prof Mike Bullmore presents a defense for expository preaching. And postmodernism, the cause of so much hand-wringing these days about what "should" happen the "pulpit," is reconsidered by "Carl Trueman."

Yet expository preaching does not qualify as faithful simply because it exposes the biblical text; it must also demonstrate how the text—rightly exposed—remains relevant to one's hearers today. That means wisely applying the sermon to our hearers. Dee Reju thoughtfully asks why so many Christians don't look to the Scriptures for life and guidance. Israel Haas exhorts younger preachers to consider the middle aged and elderly, while Aaron Menikoff and Mark Dever exhort all preachers to consider several categories of hearers.

Finally, 9Marks wanted to make sure you were familiar with several excellent resources on preaching and biblically theology, which is why we have included four book reviews by two very careful brothers.

—Jonathan Leeman

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## HOW TO PREACH



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Some say monologues are "out" and conversations are "in." Gilbert-Smith says that's right...and wrong.

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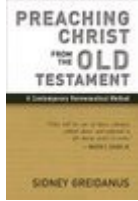
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## PREACHING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



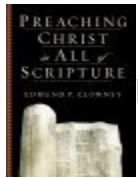
**Book Review:**  
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**Book Review:**  
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## AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

**Life and Ministry with Thabiti Anyabwile:** <http://resources.christianity.com/default/mrki.aspx>

Thabiti tells the amazing story of growing up in a fatherless, African-American home, and how he went from nominal Christianity to Muslim antagonist against Christ to despair to Christian pastor.

**Women and the Church with Russell Moore, Randy Stinson, and C.J. Mahaney:**  
<http://resources.christianity.com/default/mrki.aspx>

What does Randy Stinson say feminism is? Why does Russ Moore say most members of our churches are in "same sex" marriages? Why does Mark Dever think pastors should pay attention? Why does C.J. Mahaney think Mark needs to make a bigger deal of complementarianism vs. egalitarianism than he does?

## Evangelism and the Gospel with Will Metzger

Author and evangelist Will Metzger, who helped shaped Mark Dever's understanding of evangelism, discusses the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to evangelism today."

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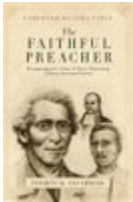
## NEW BOOKS FROM 9MARKS AND 9MARKS' AUTHORS

*Released in April*



***Preaching the Cross*** (Crossway)

by Mark Dever, J. Ligon Duncan, Albert Mohler Jr. & C. J. Mahaney



***The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors*** (Crossway)

by Thabiti M. Anyabwile (Foreword by John Piper)

*To be Released in June*



***What Is a Healthy Church?*** (Crossway)

by Mark Dever

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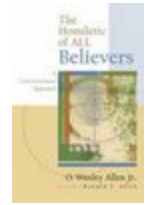
## A Conversational Approach: Will it Preach?

By Mike Gilbert-Smith

An interaction with O. Wesley Allen Jr, *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach*, WJK, 2005, 161 pp, \$19.95

&

Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith*, Zondervan, 2005, 248 pp, \$18.99



"Conversation" is one of the buzzwords in the twenty-first century church. It has very positive connotations, to be contrasted with less amicable words like "debate," "argument," "bickering," "fighting," "commanding," and "condemning". One only has to look at the front and back covers of Doug Pagitt's *Preaching Re-imagined* to see the perceived difference between a monologue and a conversation.



Conversation is polite, respectful, collaborative, revealing, humble and compassionate (Allen, 21-22).

It is also biblical; we must be quick to listen and slow to speak ([James 1:19](#)). Christians who cease to be engaged in authentic conversation with one another and with the world have failed to follow their master. Truth can be powerfully proclaimed and deeply apprehended through conversations. Through conversation,

- Nicodemus discovered that he must be born again;
- the Samaritan woman exchanged her water jar for living water;
- the man born blind received spiritual as well as physical sight;
- Martha's hope of the resurrection became focused upon the one who gives life;
- Peter apprehended forgiveness and re-commissioning.

Biblically centered conversation is a sign that a congregation is truly engaging God's Word.

Why is it then that most Christians, when we gather for the most important meeting of our week, do not have a conversation? Instead, a preacher stands in front of the congregation for thirty, forty, even fifty or sixty minutes and speaks without any verbal interaction from the congregation (except for the occasional "Amen!").

Is it time to replace the single voice in the sermon with something, well, more conversational?

There are certainly conversations out there proposing precisely this.

[Wesley Allen](#) is one such conversation starter. Though Allen doesn't consider himself to be an evangelical, similar approaches to preaching are advocated by so-called post-evangelicals like [Doug Pagitt](#). Pagitt gives an impassioned plea to abandon the centrality of conventional preaching (which he calls *speaching*):

Weekly speaching functions like a repetitive stress disorder for both preacher and parish. Occasional usage won't hurt anyone, but to make a regular practice of speaching may well be an act of relational violence, one that is detrimental to the very communities we are seeking to nurture (25-26).

Some web articles also denounce the "monologue sermon." [Galen Currah and George Patterson](#) suggest that the fruit of such preaching includes believers who are "hearers only," young preachers full of pride, bored congregations, weak communication, and a necessary expertise that inhibits church planting.

Blogs are discussing the same ideas. Typical to the sentiments expressed are those of [Louise](#) from Malta: "Passively sitting and listening to someone else will never change the world and that is what we have been called to do."

Of course, nobody explicitly advocates listening to sermons *passively*. Even those who advocate silent listening to preaching advocate *active* listening, or even "[expositional listening](#)."

Yet the kinds of sentiments voiced by Pagitt or Louise from Malta typify what more and more evangelicals are saying. They critique traditional preaching as authoritarian, irrelevant, monologue, obscurantist, dry, and unengaging, something prized only in relationally weak, disengaged preaching-centers that call themselves churches. But is this characterization just a straw man?

Henceforward, I will refer to traditional preaching as "authoritative preaching." And just to be clear, authoritative preaching consists of *faithfully speaking God's words under God's authority*, much like an ambassador speaks "authoritatively" on behalf of his or her king. Such preaching therefore requires the ears of the congregation who eagerly wait to hear and be transformed by the Lord.

Let me also be clear about what I don't mean. Authoritative preaching doesn't mean the preacher should shout. It doesn't mean the preacher must be ignorant of his own sinful, flawed nature. It doesn't mean that he is unapproachable or unanswerable or that he will refuse to have conversations with those in the congregation after the service or throughout the week.

One frustration I felt in reading about conversational preaching was the lack of clarity in the exact matter being addressed. The term "conversational preaching" can mean several different things in one book, or even in one paragraph.

Thus I shall spend the rest of this article examining the different ideas people are proposing when they recommend "conversational preaching." Some proposals are commendable. Others are reactions to genuine problems in some preaching today, but are nonetheless unhealthy reactions. Still others demonstrate a failure to grasp the nature of the Word of God and the authority of the gospel.

## 1. A CONVERSATIONAL CONTEXT: ONE VOICE PROVOKES ANOTHER

Sometimes an author calls for "conversational preaching" in order to emphasize the fact that churches are not just preaching centers, but communities of believers. Multiple ongoing gospel conversations should occur within the congregation. The preacher should not only preach, but also be involved in relationships where conversations about the gospel are central all week long.

"This kind of preparation requires the preacher to have not only an intimate relationship with the text but also with the congregation" (Pagitt, 187, cf. Allen 93). "[W]hat is normally done between the pastor and a commentary [should also] be done between the pastor and the community" (Pagitt, 189). Truly expositional preaching would also benefit from such interaction.

The desire to see an ongoing conversation about the gospel as a vital part of congregational life is commendable. We should not see the sermon as an isolated event unrelated to the ongoing life of the congregation.

[The church to which I belong](#) certainly cherishes conversation. Every Wednesday evening, the church gathers for an inductive Bible study. Conversation ensues over a verse or two of Scripture and its relevance to our lives. Following this and every other service, people often linger for at least an hour of informal conversations, which the pastors encourage to be centered on the Word just taught or preached. Also, many of our members take part in small group inductive Bible studies throughout the week, as well as less formal gatherings and meals. Twice a month after the Sunday morning service, we hold a Q&A luncheon for college students with the day's preacher.

Authoritative preaching doesn't *ignore* the conversations that happen throughout the rest of the week. Those conversations inform the preacher's application. In our church, the preacher will typically study the text, prepare a sermon outline, but then before writing the sermon itself stop to have lunch with another elder or church member to discuss ways Sunday's text might be applied to the congregation. Authentic, conversation-rich congregational life is the proper context for expositional preaching. The pastor must know his flock.

Another habit that I have picked up at our church has been to look through a page of the church's membership directory when preparing sermons in order to think carefully about how the sermon can be applied to people in different stages of life. Preaching that doesn't seek to engage the particular congregation hearing the sermon falls short of being expositional. The preacher may understand the message of the text, but fail to *preach* it to his particular gathered people.

However, some writers offer more radical statements about the relationship of the sermon to the ongoing conversation of the church.

The sermon ceases to be the starting point or the center of the conversation and becomes a significant contributing factor to the ongoing conversations owned by the community... The pulpit is placed on the edge of the community conversational circle and the preacher's is one voice among many in a matrix of congregational conversations (Allen, 15-16).

As soon as we say that preaching is merely a peripheral voice in the ongoing conversation— rather than the center, fuel, and compass for its conversation— we have forgotten the source and foundation of Christian community. We have no life but that which is imparted by God's Spirit upon God's Word. It is God who builds the life and conversation of the community. That time in the week when his Word is not discussed but heard must remain central if his one clear voice is not to be marginalized by our many confused voices.

## 2. A CONVERSATIONAL TONE: NO VOICE HAS AUTHORITY

"Conversational preaching," as it has been proposed, might also mean that the preacher shouldn't speak with an authoritative tone, and by tone I mean both the tenor of one's voice and the language one uses to frame or package homiletical propositions. Adopting a conversational tone then means that preachers should not so much *declare* the will of God as that they should *suggest* a possible understanding of what the Word of God *might* be.

"There is something dangerous in the life of the preacher who regularly tells others how things are, could be or ought to be" (Pagitt, 32). "When I bring up an idea, I frame it with a phrase like, 'it seems to me' or 'this is my take on it' or 'from the perspective I have.' This language is helpful both for the community and for me" (Pagitt, 200).

Again, I have some sympathy with those who have sat under pulpit-thumping preachers who scold their congregations week after week. A friend told me recently that it's preachers who keep some throat doctors in business! Yet we should not confuse the personal authority of the preacher with the authority of the Word that he preaches. We should also not confuse the general course of authoritative declaration of the text with a wrong dogmatism in areas where textual interpretation is particularly difficult. There's nothing wrong with occasionally saying something like, "Well, this is a difficult verse. Some people think that the angels here are angelic beings, but on balance I think he is talking about human messengers."

Yet to say that some statements in the sermon should be tentative does not mean that all of them should be. A preacher must not say, "*It seems to me* that unless a man is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." This may sound humble. But it's really arrogance. It's a refusal to acknowledge the authority of God's Word. A conversational tone at this point leaves us only with the opinions of a sinner about God's Word, rather than God's Word itself, and so the Word never pleads, exhorts, rebukes, encourages.

The best way to protect against preaching that places authority in the personality of the preaching is to protect what I'm calling authoritative preaching. With authoritative preaching, a preacher knows that what he says comes from having grasped what God has said; he then faithfully applies it to the congregation, trusting that God will do his transforming work. The answer isn't a conversational tone but truly expositional-authoritative preaching.

Anyone who has attempted to preach expostionally should know how humbling it is. I can get up on Sunday morning and say, "It seems to me..." without having done much soul searching. When I know that I will stand before God and men and declare, "The Lord is commanding us today..." I must fall on my knees and beg for God's mercy, that he might grant me faithfulness.

Preachers are not inerrant, which is why preachers themselves should initiate regular conversations for inviting correction. At our church, the pastoral staff and interns hold a weekly service review where we give feedback to those who preach, lead, and otherwise participate in the services. There will almost always be disagreement about some part of the sermon. But insofar as the sermon is faithful to the Bible it is authoritative and should be presented as such. This doesn't mean that the preacher must shout, but it does mean that he should demonstrate a passion appropriate to the burden of the text.

## 3. A CONVERSATIONAL HIERARCHY: NO VOICE MAY LEAD

Perhaps one of the most frequently cited doctrines to suggest that authoritative preaching is unchristian is the priesthood of all believers.

A belief in the priesthood of all believers compels us to reconsider our ideas about speaking and pastoral authority... In truth the idea that a person needs to be specifically educated to understand the things of God is little more than Western conceit.... There was a time when churches believed that a pastor should be the sole speaker for God because he was among the few who could read, as though the only important knowledge of God is the kind that comes from reading (Pagitt, 153).

Every believer has the Holy Spirit, and every believer has been enabled to understand divine truth better than the most intelligent and educated unbeliever. Yet the priesthood of all believers is never taught in Scripture to contradict the teaching gifts of some believers. The Bible is clear that not many of us should presume to be teachers ([James 3:1](#)). Similarly, one biblical office requires that any individual occupying it be apt to teach. If what he is to teach is God's revealed ideas (and it is!), then at the very least he must be someone who can read and, more than that, correctly handle the word of truth ([2 Tim 2:15](#)). Such teaching is also described as *authoritative* ([1 Tim 2:12](#)). In fact, pastors are commanded to teach with authority ([Titus 2:15](#)). It's therefore not arrogant for a preacher to teach with such authority— it's humble submission to God's Word and being obedient in the charge that the Lord has given him within the congregation.

The Holy Spirit lovingly gives pastors and teachers for the edification of the congregation ([Eph 4:11](#)). Advocates of conversational preaching seem to have no category for someone who would lovingly exercise that God-given authority on behalf of others. "If the function of the preaching is mutual edification, then the creation of the preaching must be a collective act" (Pagitt, 39). Why then has God given *some* for the edification of the *whole*? He has deliberately gifted his people diversely. I do not assume that congregational singing would be more edifying if we all took turns on the piano. Why should I assume that preaching would be better if the pulpit were shared by all?

#### 4. A CONVERSATIONAL FORMAT: EVERY VOICE MUST BE HEARD

Allen, in fact, stops short of replacing the sermon itself with a multi-voiced conversation. Pagitt does not stop short.

Progressional dialogue doesn't mean groupthink, discussion, or even agreement. It means we listen to one another in such a way that what we think cannot be left unchanged. We hear what others in our community are saying and have no choice but to let it impact our thinking (Pagitt, 54).

It is certainly true that large group conversation about a biblical text can be very useful in revealing people's understandings and helping many to move toward a better understanding of the text. Every Wednesday night our church has just such a Bible study, as I've mentioned. But the function of authoritative preaching is somewhat different and rather more significant.

Authoritative preaching symbolizes and models the very nature of the gospel. Those who advocate a conversational format misconstrue the relationship between preaching and the gospel. The gospel is *news* to be heralded, not an opinion to be discussed. When we come together as God's people, we need to hear that news proclaimed as a royal edict and brought to bear upon us. The preacher is not the king, but the ambassador. The authority of a sermon does not rest in the personal authority of the preacher, but in the authority of the word he is preaching. He is not a philosopher, but an ambassador. His ideas do not originate with himself; he faithfully proclaims God's ideas to God's people.

We might find this uncomfortable. We are supposed to, for the Word of God is not there to confirm our own wisdom. The Lord speaks and humbles us in our foolishness. Let the earth be silent before him! The congregation's voice is to be heard, but it's to be heard as a response to his revelation. It's to be the unison words of praise, confession, and a committing of ourselves to obedience—in all the diverse ways that might look in our different cultures and individual lives.

#### 5. A CONVERSATIONAL HERMENEUTIC: THE TEXT HAS NO VOICE

My greatest fear for the removal of authoritative preaching from the congregation is that the Scriptures themselves will cease to be treated as authoritative. I fear that people are shy about authoritative preaching ultimately because they want to protect themselves from the authority of Scripture. If every exposition of Scripture is interrupted by a number of "opinions" as to what the Scriptures might *really* mean, the text itself will lose its voice. We will be left with no more than the individual voices and personal perspectives. Why then bother to listen to the text at all?

Many of those who advocate conversational preaching say that it is necessary within the present cultural climate because of postmodernism. People can no longer sit and listen to one voice. No! Postmodernism has made authoritative preaching more important than ever. In a context where texts are presumed to have no meaning, where all authority is relative, where no voice is more authoritative than any other, only authoritative preaching will open up the biblical worldview to a postmodern world. God's voice must be heard with closed mouths. Salvation is not something that we 'find' through a collaborative community process; it's been initiated, declared, and made effective by the one sovereign Lord. While we were still sinners, he took the initiative in sending his Son to die for us. We were confident in our own view of the world and unable to hear his voice, so the Word came.

The gospel confronts the relativistic assumptions of a postmodern age. There is only One source of authority. "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" ([Eph 4:4-6](#)). I wonder if the muddle of so many voices is one of the reasons why Pagitt's book offers no clear expression of the gospel, even though he claims to be evangelical.

In authoritative expositional preaching the question is not "what are the congregation's perspectives upon this text," but "what is this text's perspective upon the congregation." In short, I highly recommend engaging with the congregation in conversation before and after the sermon. I highly recommend using one's words to engage the lives of the congregation throughout the sermon. But if the symbolism of authoritative preaching (one Biblical voice addressing the congregation) is lost, then God's authority to address his people will itself soon be marginalized.

A conversational approach may comfort, engage, and affirm. But, in the end, it will not *preach*.

*Mike Gilbert-Smith is an assistant pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.*

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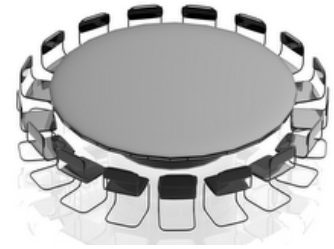
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## 9Marks Pastors' and Theologians' Forum

We asked a roundtable of pastors and theologians the following question:

*Must the sermon be a monologue? If not, should it be? In other words, does the Bible allow for some type of back and forth conversation (like Q&A) to characterize the regular style of the main exposition of Scripture in a congregation? If it does, is it pastorally prudent?*



Answers from

- Ajith Fernando
- R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
- Kevin Smith
- Derek Thomas

### Ajith Fernando

The Bible uses *dialegomai* to describe the proclamation of the first evangelists (e.g. Acts 19:8; 20:29, 24:25; Heb. 12:5). This suggests that there was an opportunity for feedback to the proclamation. However, the use of *dialegomai* in the Bible is different than its use in classical Greek, where dialogue involves sharing ideas so that those in dialogue would arrive at the truth. In the New Testament, the communication of the gospel includes within it the ideas of proclaiming this news as a herald (*κρυσσῶ*) or announcing good tidings (*ευαγγελιζῶ*) with a view to persuading (*πειθῶ*) people. The goal is to change people's minds about the truth and see them accept Christ as their only Lord. The early evangelists knew that they were bearers of the truth that the Creator of the world had revealed once-for-all to his creation, and they wanted to communicate this truth to their hearers.



It seems that a lot of Jesus' teaching was dialogical. Some of his most important truths were communicated through situations that warranted a comment from him. In the same way today, much Christian teaching takes place in informal settings, where leaders disciple other Christians through conversation about the things of God. Actually all Christian proclamation is dialogical even if a verbal response is not elicited. We engage the mind of the hearer in such a way that they are provoked to respond in some way.

However, Jesus spoke with authority. He had a definite message from God to give to the people. We too bear this authority when we proclaim the Word. This authority is not intrinsic to us, as it was to Jesus. It is derived through the Word of God (which gives us the content of the proclamation), the anointing of God (which gives us the license to be proclaimers), and the empowering of the Holy Spirit (which directs us in the use of God's unchanging truth and makes us conduits of his convicting power). Of course, the fact that our authority is derived and that our ministry is by grace removes any cause for arrogance and gives this proclamation a winsomeness which helps to draw people to Christ and his truth.

We must always reckon with the fact that we have been given a message from God to proclaim. Whatever method we use, we must do it in such a way that the authority of the God who spoke a definite word to humanity is borne in the words we speak.

*Ajith Fernando has been the national director in Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka since 1976. He is also the author of the NIV Application Commentary on Acts and Jesus Driven Ministry.*

### R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

The very shape of this question is interesting. In the first place, I would not consider the public proclamation of God's Word to be best characterized as *monologue*. It is one voice speaking, but this voice is not speaking on behalf of himself, but as the one charged with proclaiming and teaching the Word of God. At the same time, there does not seem to be a biblical warrant for a more dialogical form of preaching. If anything, the biblical model appears to assign the preaching responsibility to an individual who dares to speak on behalf of God by presenting and applying God's Word.



I think of a text like Nehemiah 8:1-8. In that setting, Ezra and his colleagues "read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood their reading." Earlier in this text, we are told that "the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law." Those preaching spoke with authority. At the same time, it would not be

appropriate to suggest that these hearers were passive. They were *active* recipients of the preached Word. They were "attentive."

In the same way, a church congregation is not to sit passively in the pew merely observing the preaching of the Word. To the contrary, the congregation should be actively involved in the disciplines of hearing, receiving, and responding to God's Word as it's preached by the one who is invested with those responsibilities and gifts.

A similar approach is evident in the New Testament. When Paul instructs Timothy about his preaching responsibilities, nothing in the text suggests that Timothy will be involved in a dialectical enterprise with the congregation. Instead, Paul charges Timothy with the sacred and solemn responsibility to preach the Word "in season and out of season." If anything, he warns Timothy against taking the response of his hearers into too much consideration. This can hardly be described as a dialogue.

As I see it, the push for a more dialogical form of preaching is a redefinition of preaching as described in the Scriptures. This shift seems to go hand-in-hand with larger cultural movements against the idea of teaching authority and the very idea of an authoritative Word. The last thing modern evangelicalism needs is the substitution of congregational "dialogue" for biblical preaching. This plays into all of our modern temptations and, in the end, threatens to remove the authoritative Word from our midst.

*R. Albert Mohler is the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has contributed to numerous books. More of his work can be found at [www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com).*

### Kevin L. Smith

**Black People Gonna Talk!** "Black preaching" is dialogical. Regardless of how one feels about the term "black preaching," any sincere observer must acknowledge that something a little different occurs during the preaching moment in the typical black church. Black preaching is intentionally or unintentionally dialogical due to the historic element of "call and response" associated with black religion. This interaction between leader and participants is often traced back to the cultural remnants that Africans retained when brought to the West as slaves.



To the question of whether this should be the case, my answer is, it depends! Theologically, the answer is "no." Homiletically, the answer is "probably, yes." Am I being ambivalent? Perhaps. Yet the reality is this: black people in a black church with a black preacher do not expect to hear a "white" sermon; nor will they be especially receptive to one. That's just reality.

Fortunately (I think), my biblical theology drives my homiletics. **Therefore, I do not believe the preacher should strive to be intentionally dialogical in "preaching a sermon," regardless of the ethnic setting.** Certainly, we have no scriptural model for being dialogical. Any consideration of the elevated pulpit in Nehemiah chapter eight, or the noticeable authority associated with Jesus' proclamation in the gospels, or the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, shatters the myth that the preacher's voice is "one voice among many." No, no, no. The preaching of the sermon is a moment for God to speak and for his people to shut up and listen.

Further, as a practical matter, the general biblical illiteracy associated with much of the so-called Christian community today should halt the contemporary preacher from considering a dialogue model of preaching. This is often my struggle as a black preacher. Often, I have to correct non-biblical erroneous dialogue – which can be an awkward moment in the often intense emotional exchange between pulpit and pew in the black church. Nothing kills the dialogue like telling your dialogue partner (in this case, the congregation) that they are wrong.

However, to maintain my ambivalence, I must say, it feels real good as a preacher when a seasoned saint affirms the truth of the Scripture by yelling out, "Preach it!" or "Tell 'em one more time!"

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### Derek Thomas

Preaching (as opposed to a Sunday School lesson or a carefully led inductive Bible Study) should be monological because it

(i) best reflects what the New Testament intends by *kerygma* (what is preached, message, proclamation; and its related word *kērussō*—proclaim, make known, preach, to cry or proclaim as a herald), which is the



Greek word it uses for preaching (see Luke 4:18-19, Romans 10:14, Matthew 3:1);

(ii) reflects the pattern of *kerygmatic* preaching of the apostles and prophets in both testaments;

(iii) reflects Jesus' authority in his own preaching;

(iv) effectively accomplishes what preaching is—not merely conveying information, but conveying biblical truth with passion, earnestness, and authority to convict of sin and command obedience by gospel-focused motives;

(v) creates a listening domain which best reflects the meaning of the text by studied grammatico-historical exegesis by a recognized elder/teacher (rather than a postmodern democratic epistemology and perspectival pluralism).

Monological preaching thus best complies with the divine command to repent and believe, urging obedience rather than dialogue and debate. It is necessarily *counter*-cultural rather than accommodative of postmodern, deconstructive opinions of the nature of truth.

Having said this, I consider the best monological preaching to be dialogical in that it asks rhetorical questions and addresses individuals with a view to soliciting and urging a response. Such preaching should be thoroughly applicatory to the mind, will, and the affections and should not reflect clerical hegemony.

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## A Narrative Approach: Will it Preach?

*By Mark Driscoll*

Narrative preaching is one of the latest cool, avant-garde trends in preaching today. Narrative preaching is in and propositional preaching is out, they say. "Be a good story teller."

So what do we make of narrative preaching?

### CONS

I have a number of concerns with narrative preaching. First, it does not emanate from those churches, seminaries, and theologians that hold to the doctrine of inerrancy and have a high view of preaching and teaching. It tends to emanate from the more liberal and mainline churches with a low view of the Bible and of Jesus.

Second, the call for narrative preaching can indicate a move away from propositional truth in favor of relativism and perspectivism, as if transformation were possible without information.

The trend today is away from propositional truth: "We don't need propositional truth. We need narrative truth and embodied truth." Actually, if we're going to be multi-perspectival, we need all of it.

Propositional truth tells me who God is, who I am, why I'm here, how I've fallen short, who Jesus is, and what he has done. I can't have a good Christology with a finger painting. You need to tell me something. Someone might say, "I've read Wittgenstein, and he said that there are limits to language and words." I understand that. But God has chosen to speak through his Word and the same Holy Spirit that inspired the words to be written illuminates the understanding of the children of God. We're not stuck in the cul-de-sac of Wittgenstein. The Holy Spirit is the great variable that makes the Word of God known to the people of God. We believe in the miraculous. We're not just a natural people relying on the three-pound, fallen brain to make revelation clear. We also have God who loves us. And like John Calvin said, God is willing to stoop down and speak baby-talk, so that we would understand who he is and what he's trying to say.

That doesn't mean that we are pure modernists who believe that everything is clear as a bell. Paul says that we see in part and we know in part. Deuteronomy says the secret things belong to the Lord. Isaiah says that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. The difference is not that we don't know, it's that we don't know apart from faith. That's our epistemology. We're not modern or postmodern, we're Christian! We believe that God reveals, the Holy Spirit illumines, and by faith we believe. That's a Christian epistemology.

Those who believe in a modern or postmodern epistemology do great damage to the Bible. The modernists are solely about propositional truth and not embodied or narrative truth. The postmodernists tend to be exclusively communal, participatory, narrative, and dialogical, but they miss the propositional nature of the truth. But if you want a multi-perspectival truth, we say you need it all. That means that your theology leads to your doxology, which results in your biography. What you believe (theology) enables you to worship (doxology), and through worshipping, you become like that which you worship (biography). It goes from proposition, to worship, to transformation. You get to know who God is. You worship him. Then you become like that which you love.

Third, one of the essences of postmodernism is that there is no overarching story that rules over all times, cultures, histories, and people. Everything is contingent on culture and perspective. So in narrative preaching the Bible can become just another series of stories. It's somewhere in between Aesop's fables and Joseph Campbell's myths.

But Christians don't believe that. We believe the Bible is the metanarrative. It is the overarching story under which all of history is to be understood and interpreted. We reject reducing the Bible to yet another good story. It's the story of who God is, what God has done, what we have done, and what God has done to save us. The rejection of any authoritative narrative we reject.

Fourth, narrative preaching is reductionistic. It says everything in the Bible is a story and should be taught as a story. But there are books that are largely propositional. I defy anyone to preach Proverbs narratively. Good luck! There are narratives

interspersed in Proverbs, but the book is not a narrative. Where's the hero? Where's the antagonist? Where's the conflict and resolution. Books like Romans, too, are largely propositional. Those who say preaching should be narrative are essentially saying, "Impose on the Bible a form that the Bible itself does not possess." I believe that when we come to the Bible we don't come looking to proof-text truth-statements, but we must respect the genre of literature, whether it's a prophetic book, epistle, or a narrative. Not only are the words and concepts inspired, but the literary form is inspired as well. The medium is sometimes the message, and if you ignore the medium, you will mangle the message. So Song of Solomon is a beautiful, poetic love story—it's a great narrative. But Romans isn't. And the way you teach these two books will be different.

## PROS

Yet here are some things that I think are good to consider with narrative preaching. It can mean—in the best sense—that the Bible itself is a story, and that every sermon that you preach must connect to that big story. If that's what we mean by narrative preaching, I'm all for it. We are in danger whenever we launch into a portion of the Bible and don't connect it to the story of the whole Bible.

So the question becomes, "How does a sermon text fit into the story of creator, creation, sin, the curse, the longing for the Messiah in the covenant community of Israel, the coming of Jesus, and his death and resurrection?" That way, when we come to the epistles and Paul's instructions on putting a church together in 1 Timothy, the church understands that what Paul is saying is part of a big story. God has been working for many years to get to the point where elders will shepherd the people who have been saved by the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Narrative preaching can also mean that the sermon is not so predictable. The hearer is not given the thesis up front followed by its defense. Rather the listener is taken on a journey through the story of the text through conflict, tension, and eventual resolution. This is often more gripping and memorable.

In its best sense, narrative preaching means that it's following the tradition of good Reformed biblical theology. I know that biblical theology, like narrative preaching, comes out of more liberal quarters that I would not want to endorse in any way. But there is a stream of biblical theology that is high on inerrancy and is strongly Reformed. Good examples of this would include Geerhardus Vos, Graeme Goldsworthy, Edmund Clowney, and Bryan Chapell. A preacher wants to inform his people of how the Bible is put together and to do it in a way that is Christ-centered.

If we preach every sermon in a way that explains our text in terms of where it fits into the story of creation, curse, covenant, Christ, church, and consummation; if we preach the Bible as the metanarrative story that moves from creation to new creation, then who is the hero of that story? This is an obvious question, but let me submit that in preaching it is often missed. In preaching, Jesus must be the hero, not only of the whole story, but of every single chapter, verse, and word of all the other stories that are part of the big story. We must preach Jesus as the hero and Savior. I know this sounds simple, but so often preaching is reduced to moralism, and we're told to toughen up and be like him. Jesus becomes nothing more than a good example that, by determination, will, and white-knuckling, we can be like. That is not gospel preaching.

Notice some of the things Jesus said to Bible teachers: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). Some of the Pharisees to whom he was speaking had probably memorized the Pentateuch. Yet he told these guys that they didn't know their Bibles! You can memorize whole books of the Bible, but if you're not about Jesus, you're not biblical.

I teach this to my little kids. After Jesus rises from the dead in Luke's gospel, there are two Bible studies in which he explained how everything in the Old Testament was about him.

- Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:27).
- He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

Let me submit this to you, preacher: your sermons are supposed to be about Jesus. When you preach about victory, do you preach about Jesus' victory or the congregation's? One of our Acts 29 church planters recently visited a very large church and sat through the sermon. He wanted to give it the benefit of the doubt. But in a 25-minute sermon, the preacher never once said the name of Jesus, and never once gave anything that was close to the gospel. And at the end, the preacher said, "If you would like to go to heaven and have a better life, come forward now." He didn't tell them about sin, Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection. He just asked them to come forward and then told them that they are all Christians. That is not biblical preaching.

Have you found a way to connect every sermon to Jesus? Are you presenting him as Savior? Biblical preaching is teaching people that Jesus is the hero, and that they don't have to be.

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## A Biblical Case for Expository Preaching

By Mike Bullmore

What is expository preaching? A sermon is expository if its content and intent are *controlled* by the content and intent of a particular passage of Scripture. The preacher says what the passage says, and he intends for his sermon to accomplish in his listeners exactly what God is seeking to accomplish through the chosen passage of his Word.

Preacher, imagine God sitting in the congregation as you preach. What will be the expression on his face? Will it say, "That's not at all what I was getting at with that passage." Or will it say, "Yes, that's exactly what I intended."

The biblical case for expository preaching starts with the connection between the gift the ascended Christ has given to the church in pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11) and the biblical injunction for pastors-teachers to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). Those who preach should preach their Bibles.

Perhaps the best place to begin demonstrating the legitimacy of identifying preaching and preaching the word is the book of Acts. In Acts, the phrase "the word of God" is regular shorthand for the substance of the apostolic preaching. In Acts 6:2, for example, the apostles say, "It is not right that we should give up the preaching of the word of God" (see also Acts 12:24; 13:5, 46; 17:13; 18:11.) The phrase also frequently appears as "the word of the Lord" (8:25, 13:44; 15:35-36; et. al.) and not infrequently it is shortened to "the word" (cf. 4:29; 8:4; 11:19). In the book of Acts, there is a clear and consistent identification between the apostolic preaching and the phrase "the word of God."

While the substance of the apostolic preaching was the good news of reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus, that message was delivered and explained almost invariably by means of an exposition of Old Testament Scripture. So preaching in New Testament times involved the preaching of "the word of God," and an essential component of such preaching was the exposition of the Old Testament. This in turn leads us to the conclusion that the Old Testament Scriptures must be included in our conception of "the word" to be preached, a conclusion confirmed by both the direct (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16; Rom 3:2) and indirect claims (e.g., Rom 15:4) of the New Testament.

So this "word" is the word about Jesus, as anticipated in the Old Testament and now explained in the apostolic preaching. This is the word that is "spoken" (Acts 4:29), "proclaimed" (13:5), and to be "received" (17:11) as "the word of God." This same identification is maintained throughout Paul's letters. Without hesitation, he calls the message he proclaims "the word of God" (2 Cor 2:17, 4:2; 1 Thes 2:13) or simply "the word" (Gal 6:6).

Even in the context of Paul's charge to Timothy to "preach the word" there is confirmation of this identification between preaching and preaching the word of God. Timothy would have known immediately what "word" Paul meant. As Timothy's biography highlights, it surely included both the "sacred writings" and the apostolic message—"what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it" (2 Tim 3:10-17).

The conclusion we are to draw from all of this is that the "word" we are to preach is the body of truth consisting of the Old Testament Scriptures and the apostolic teaching regarding Christ—i.e. the New Testament. Thus, identifying the "word" with our Bibles is appropriate. *This is what those commissioned as "pastor-teachers" are to teach.* Our job is to proclaim "the word" which God has spoken, preserved in Scripture, and entrusted to us. The spiritual life of God's people depends on this word (Deut. 8:3). That is why a young pastor is charged to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). If this charge makes any claim on us today, and it does, then the source of our preaching is to be entirely coextensive with our Bibles.

What will this look like? In our sermon preparation, it will look like taking defined passages of God's Word and studying them carefully so that we "rightly handle the word of truth." In the pulpit, it will look like the picture we see in Nehemiah 8:8: "They read from the book . . . clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." God has both purposed and promised to use this kind of preaching to accomplish one of his great aims—the gathering and building up of his people.

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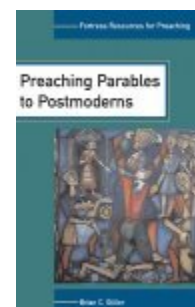
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## Review: Preaching Parables to Postmoderns, By Brian C. Stiller

*Reviewed by Carl Trueman*



### **Preaching Parables to Postmoderns**

Fortress Press, 2005, 200 pp., \$19.00

In this book, Brian Stiller, president of Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, offers guidance on preaching the parables in the contemporary world. He regards parables as particularly useful in this context because, rather than teaching in a direct, didactic fashion, parables offer narrative-like views of the world which challenge the listener in more subtle, yet more disturbing ways. Parables involve less a transmission of information and more a transformation of the reader or the hearer.

The book is an interesting mix. To focus on the good first: the careful reader will find many insights into the biblical text. In chapter 3, for example, Stiller offers his own views on ten parables, offering particular help on how the preacher should analyze them in sermon preparation. He examines the text, draws out the various twists and turns in the parable's plot, reflects on how the parable might give a church access to "postmodern" ears (of which more later), and then offers exegetical and homiletical outlines as well as reflections on homiletical applications. Then, in chapter 4, he provides four sample sermons as examples for the reader.

These chapters certainly make the book a helpful addition to a pastor's library. Yet I have some hesitation concerning Stiller's continual need to emphasize that he is writing for postmoderns, a need which shows up in the title and throughout the book.

The treatment of postmoderns has a second-hand flavor. There is nothing wrong with that in itself; the problem is that Stiller repeats some typical shibboleths about postmoderns which need to be challenged. Thus he premises his discussion on seven characteristics of the postmodern era, all of which are highly questionable:

1. Postmoderns reject reason as the only avenue to truth. *Well, yes, but has anyone ever really argued that reason is the only avenue to truth. Poetry, for example, is not the preserve of postmoderns, nor was it rejected by the Enlightenment (Goethe being a great example).*
2. Postmoderns reject truth as objective. *Agreed, but there is a distinction between "objective" and "neutral" which needs to be made. A Christian can—indeed, must—concede we're not neutral toward the truth—we can only speak from our perspective—but an objective truth exists nonetheless. Stiller's argument at this point would have been more cogent had he at least acknowledged this distinction and, with it, the fact that many moderns knew their knowledge was not "neutral" (cf. Kant, Marx, Freud, to name but three). One can reject the postmodern attack on objective knowledge without being required to subscribe to a naive belief in the neutrality of knowledge.*
3. Rejecting authority as "will to power" leads to seeing history as a distortion, written by those who wield power. *This may sound facetious, but having worked as a professional historian for some fifteen years, I cannot begin to describe how marginal history is to the real centers of power!*
4. Postmoderns reject the notion of metanarrative. *But here's the rub: Christianity is metanarrative. To fail to set the parables within the metanarrative of the Christian story may be the reader's choice, as Stiller says; but, if Christianity has any transcendent validity, one cannot avoid the conclusion that this is a wrong choice.*
5. Postmodernism rejects the Enlightenment's view of the autonomy of the individual for more communitarian approaches. *Again, a valid point as far as it goes, but the Enlightenment developed numerous concepts that were key to much of its philosophical content, that were far from individualistic in nature, and which clearly stand in continuity with this allegedly more recent communitarianism—for example, the concepts (and language) of race, class, and nationality. This basic point must surely qualify dramatically any simple generalizations about Enlightenment individualism.*
6. Postmodernity emphasizes the culturally conditioned nature of the world and views language as a prison. *Stiller never makes it clear how this "linguistic prison" view really connects to what he is trying to do with the parables.*

7. Postmodernity rejects the optimism of the modern era. *Highly questionable. Many of the great modernists (Conrad, Eliot, Huxley) were profoundly pessimistic. Modernism's optimism (and that generally a middle class phenomenon; not too many child laborers or chimney sweeps in the Industrial Revolution, I suspect, were very optimistic) is too often overplayed as a means of making the contemporary era seem exceptional and discontinuous with the immediate past.*

Other comments on postmoderns are also strange. We are told that ethics are particularly important to postmoderns (45), and that that postmoderns are preoccupied with human rights (55). I doubt that ethics and human rights can be grounded in the kind of postmodernism described by Stiller. Both require believing in some kind of metanarrative, some universal concept of "human nature." To the extent that postmoderns are preoccupied with these things, to that extent they remain children of modernity.

In the end, I was perplexed by the book. There was plenty of thought-provoking material on the biblical text and the task of preaching, but there was also a rather contrived view of postmodernism that seemed to have little connection to the book's practical advice. Maybe I'm cynical, but I wonder if publishers are to blame, putting pressure on authors to add the "p" word to their titles in order to shift more copies?

*Carl Trueman is the professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, and the author of The Wages of Spin, Luther's Legacy, The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology, and other titles.*

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## Where Does Your Congregation Turn For Help?

*By Deepak Reju*

My wife and I were on a marriage retreat with twelve couples. The men and the women were painfully but honestly working through the failures in their marriage. The small group leaders for the retreat were then instructed to help the couples think about how the gospel applies to their marital weaknesses. Afterwards, I sat down and debriefed with the small group leaders and this is what I got:

"It was the slowest part of the weekend."

"People just didn't know what to say."

And worst of all, "I don't think people know how to apply the gospel to their lives."

In this article on discipleship, we look at the urgent need for Christians to teach others how to live gospel-centered lives. This month's issue of 9News is dedicated to preaching, which is foundational for Christian discipleship.

The first step in discipleship occurs when the preacher applies the Bible to the life of his congregation. As believers hear the Word and grow in their understanding of the gospel, they increase in their love for Christ.

A second step in discipleship occurs when Christians, equipped with the Word, move out of their comfort zones and engage others in sanctifying relationships. As believers meet together, they sharpen one another and help each other to see the glory of Christ.

Pastors and church members too often fail to fulfill these tasks, and consequently we rarely see adequate spiritual growth in our churches.

### **THE PASTOR'S FAILURE: NEGLECTING BIBLICAL APPLICATION**

Ask any Christian what his pastor taught on Sunday morning and at best you'll hear a quick overview of the passage and an illustration or two. Ask him how that message makes a difference in his life and generally you'll hear something vague: "It was helpful." "It was encouraging." Or maybe even, "It makes me glad to be a Christian."

None of these responses are bad. In fact, hopefully they are true. But what happens when "Joe" or "Suzie" Christian walks out of church on Sunday morning and back into a fallen world? Let's take a few practical examples:

- Jonathan walks into his office on Monday and mistakenly discovers that his boss is secretly engaging in unethical business practices.
- Peter is told that he's showing the initial signs of Parkinson's.
- Susan's 5-year-old son breaks into temper tantrums every five minutes and he consistently ignores his mother's instructions.
- David's wife tells him that she no longer loves him and wants a divorce.
- Jill's boyfriend tries to talk her into having sex, even though he professes to be a Christian.

Do these people know how the gospel is relevant in their particular situations? If they are like most Christians, they don't. And so they turn elsewhere.

- Jonathan calls his three best friends and asks for their advice.
- Peter gets on the Internet and reads everything he can about Parkinson's.
- Susan remembers something she read in a magazine and tries to help her son's self-esteem.
- David and his wife turn to a counselor who recommends communication techniques from the latest marital research.
- Jill turns to Oprah Winfrey. What will the goddess of American television say?

Why do Christians turn in directions like these? Why do people walk out of churches not knowing how the Bible makes a difference in their homes, friendships, and workplaces?

On the one hand, church members are bombarded with options just like everyone else. Television commercials, street billboards, Internet advertisements, and magazine ads overwhelm us with alternatives: "Ten tips to a better sex life," "manage your money better," "reduced stress and happiness with these vitamins," "making your life more efficient," "lonely? Sign up now for a love that lasts."

On the other hand, might pastors be at fault? Probably. Ask any Reformed pastor how much sermon preparation time he devotes to exegeting the text compared to thinking about biblical application. Application too often falls by the wayside. It is trite and tacked onto the sermon. Yet at what cost?

Other evangelical pastors repeatedly face the opposite problem—their sermon application is weak because they don't root it in the biblical text. Too many pastors read leadership principles into Nehemiah long before they've actually spent time wrestling with the biblical text.

Andreas Kostenberger has asserted that biblical application is "the most critical, albeit the hardest, part of the interpretative process."<sup>[1]</sup> Exactly because it is so difficult pastors fail to preach sermons with text-driven, robust application. Again, I ask, at what cost?

*People who don't know how to apply the gospel to the nitty-gritty details of their lives will never grow in their love for Christ.*

There you have it. That's your wake-up call, pastor. If you neglect to teach your people biblical application you have failed to shepherd the flock adequately.

### **THE CHURCH MEMBER'S FAILURE: NEGLECTING RELATIONAL SANCTIFICATION**

While I'm passing out the blame, let me also include church members. As Christians, we rightly desire to be fervent evangelists. But once we get people in the front door of the church we too often feel like our job is done. We are rarely concerned with the long-term spiritual welfare of other believers in our churches.

I want to suggest that one of the most important things that church members can do with their time is what I would call "relational sanctification." Here is something a friend of mine (Greg) wrote recently:

I have come to rely on the relationships I have in my church. I need them, and I miss them when I am not able to avail myself of them on a regular basis. Vacation kills me. They're fun, to be sure, but by the end of a week or two, I am painfully aware that something is missing in my life—and it is the relationships at my church. Those people keep me accountable, they help me to think, they help me to lead, they help me love my wife and child. In short, they make me a better person. I think that is how God intended it to work. His people crash up against one another, and through the heat and pressure of those interactions, he shapes us and molds us to look like Christ....I do not think there are many churches out there that are experiencing that kind of relational sanctification. Most churches, I fear, simply come together for a worship service once or twice a week, and then anything more than that would simply be a waste of time. I want to teach a church how to fellowship with one another, and then through that fellowship, how to encourage one another to live lives that will be glorifying to Christ—through bearing one another's burdens and sorrows, through sharing one another's joys, and through rebuking and admonishing one another when the need arises.

I love it how Greg says that vacation "kills him." You don't hear that often, even from Christians. Yet Greg misses the church—the people, the relationships.

My favorite sentence in this paragraph is right in the middle: "His people crash up against one another, and through the heat and pressure of those interactions, he shapes and molds us to look like Christ." That is exactly right! God intends for us to live out our faith together—sharpening one another, serving one another, exhorting one another, rebuking one another, loving one another, and so forth.

People often don't want to do the painstaking work of making disciples because it is costly. It takes time we don't have to give. Relationships are also invasive. To make a disciple you have to be vulnerable yourself and you have to enquire into the life of another person. All this means dealing with the messy details of life—suffering, emotional ups and downs, fights, doubts, financial woes, parenting woes, and so on.

"I've got enough problems of my own," you might say. "Why do I want to get myself dirty with someone else's problems?"

*Christians who fail to pour their lives into others shouldn't be surprised to see other believers rarely grow in their love for Christ.*

There you have it. If you (as a church member) neglect to invest in others in your church you have failed to follow adequately Christ's exhortation to go, make disciples, and teach them to obey everything he commanded.

## THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know what I'm about to say next. Christian discipleship is about *teaching others to apply gospel truths to every aspect of their lives*. Pastors should do this in their sermons, and members should do this in their relationships with one another.

Discipleship is rooted first and foremost in the sufficiency of Scripture. To say that something is sufficient is to say that it has everything it needs to do what it intends to do. The Bible claims for itself that it will never return void and that it will accomplish all that it sets out to do. "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

Moreover, the Bible is sufficient

- as our guide to salvation and a life of godliness;
- in that its scope is comprehensive—providing everything needed to define and speak to the wide variety of life's problems;
- in guiding and defining what we believe, how we think, what we say, and how we behave.

The Bible is comprehensive in that it provides us with a Christ-centered worldview that equips fallen men and women to see everything in the world from God's perspective. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin described this worldview using the analogy of spectacles:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.

The Christian life is filled with physical suffering, emotional ups and downs, spiritually "dry" periods, and many other struggles. With each struggle, Christians face a choice—will I look to the world for help, or will I let the Bible speak into my life? *Every time a Christian turns to something other than the Bible for help, he fails to trust in the sufficiency of Scripture*. He shows that he believes the Bible is not comprehensive enough to meet the nitty-gritty details of his particular situation. When he desires to go beyond what Scripture says he shows that he "remains dissatisfied with what God has given. It is to claim, at least implicitly, that God was not clear enough, or that he needs our help in leading his people in righteousness."<sup>[2]</sup>

Again, hear John Calvin:

If this thought prevails with us, that the word of the Lord is the sole way that can lead us in our search for all that is lawful to hold concerning him, and is the sole light to illumine our vision of all that we should see of him, it will readily keep and restrain us from all rashness. For we shall know that the moment we exceed the bounds of the Word, our course is outside the pathway and in darkness, and that there must repeatedly wander, slip and stumble.<sup>[3]</sup>

If Scripture is adequate for the Christian life, there is no need to "exceed the bounds of the Word." To do so is to a Christian's own peril. Since God's Word is sufficient, then we must teach believers to run to Scripture as their primary source of strength and comfort. We must help believers to bind themselves to the Word of God.

## A WALK THROUGH DAILY LIFE

Christian discipleship helps people to come face-to-face with Christ in the pages of Scripture. As people grow in their love for Christ they come to see how the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—transforms the way they should live.

So, what about "Joe" and "Suzie" Christian? How might their solutions differ if they actually turned to Scripture first? What if they lived as if the gospel was relevant to every aspect of their lives?

- Jonathan's boss was engaging in unethical business practices. Jonathan realizes that every heart will be revealed on the last day before a God who is just and righteous (Rom 2:16). He no longer fears his boss, but fears God instead, freeing him to do what is right (Prov 1:7).
- Peter was diagnosed with the first stages of Parkinson's, but he knows his ultimate treasure doesn't belong to this world. Suffering helps Peter to not rely on himself or the world, but on God alone (2 Cor 1:8-9). He also knows that suffering matures Christians into a godly people that the Lord is molding for himself (James 1:2-4).
- Susan's son doesn't listen to her. She realizes that her son must learn to live in obedience to God (Eph 6:1-3). She must teach him to live under godly authority (Heb 12:5-6) and must discipline him in order to save his soul from death (Prov 23:14).
- David's wife wants to end their difficult marriage. David realizes that his pride has ruined his wife's ability to follow his leadership (Prov 16:18). He confesses his sin to God (Ps 51:4) and seeks forgiveness from his wife. David's wife can forgive only because God has forgiven her through the death of his Son (Col 3:13). Jill's boyfriend wants to have premarital sex.
- Jill finds her confidence in God, not in any relationship (Prov 3:25-26). Her desire to live like Christ calls her to a life of holiness and purity (Lev 11:45) that gives her no choice but to break up with a hypocritical boyfriend.

Look at how beautiful the Christian life becomes when people make choices that are radically shaped by the Word of God. Now admit it, pastor: you wish your people lived this way. I hope you're not discouraged because they don't yet live this way. They can, because nothing is impossible with God!

Ask God right now to help you to be a more faithful expositor of his Word. Ask him to teach you how to preach "robust" biblical application that is grounded in the biblical text.

Ask God to raise up members from your church who will find great joy in making disciples. Pray that they will never be satisfied with spiritual apathy in others. Pray that they would be willing to do the costly work of investing in others.

Your task is clear: Go, make disciples, and teach them to obey. And if you do, I hope you will find a harvest of righteousness that will grow beyond your wildest dreams.

1. Andreas Kostenberger, *Application: The Hardest Part in Interpretation*, October 27, 2006, [www.biblicalfoundations.org](http://www.biblicalfoundations.org)
2. Joe Thorn, *Thoughts on Sufficiency*, Aug. 8, 2006, [www.joethorn.net](http://www.joethorn.net)
3. Again, I indebted to Joe Thorn's *Thoughts on Sufficiency*, which points out this useful Calvin quote.

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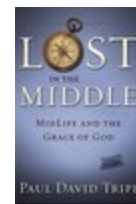
## Preaching Up: Applying the Word of God to Midlife and Beyond

By Israel Haas

An interaction with Paul David Tripp, *Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God*, Shepherd Press, 2004, 348 pp, \$15.95

&

Deborah Howard, *Sunsets: Reflections For Life's Final Journey*, Crossway, 2005, 333 pp, \$17.99



Maybe you are like me. I am 29 years old, yet every Sunday I preach to people decades older than me. They're worlds apart from me. I live in the casual world of Generation X, preferring sandals and shorts and t-shirts – even in Sunday morning worship. But I preach to people who prefer dress pants, shiny shoes, and a tie. I breathe Google, YouTube, iPods, and MP3s. But I preach to people who need their grandchildren at the remote in order even to operate the DVD player. I'm healthy and strong – relatively speaking. But I preach to people who wonder if they will see another birthday. I'm at the beginning of my career and dream about possibilities as big as the Montana sky. But I preach to people who have been there, done that, and now look back.

I want to bridge a gap. I want to connect the Bible to their world. I want to get into their lives, respond to their needs, feed them in a way appropriate to their life situation, admonish and encourage them with patient, loving force. How, though, can I do this as a 29-year-old "kid"?

Thank God for Paul David Tripp and Deborah Howard. Their insightful books carry me as in a time machine into what are to me the foreign worlds of midlife and beyond. What I discovered there was strangely familiar.

### MIDLIFE AND THE GRACE OF GOD

Paul David Tripp knows about the challenges of midlife. The reality that "I am not young anymore" has already hit him in the face and changed him forever. With illuminating vulnerability, Tripp opens up his life as an example in how to navigate the middle age years. Flowing from his experience as a veteran pastor, counselor, and speaker, Tripp's God-centered, Bible-saturated, culturally-aware reflection on his own experience gives credibility and power to his diagnosis of and solution for midlife issues. First, he anchors his readers in the reality of God's great story of redemption displayed in the pages of Scripture. Then, with plenty of real-life examples, he walks them through midlife crisis: what it is, why it happens, and how to respond to its challenges.

### LIFE'S FINAL JOURNEY

Traveling through time with Deborah Howard to life's final days was equally illuminating. Howard is a hospice nurse, so death is an everyday reality for her. She is also a biblically-grounded, thoughtful, unapologetically Reformed Christian. In a captivatingly conversational style, Howard shows in great detail from Scripture that God is sovereign over creation, salvation, and suffering. Discussion of the eternal state fills the final section of her book, dispelling misconceptions about the afterlife and painting a picture of where death leads for the believer and unbeliever. Vivid case studies emphasize the importance of embracing these realities and describe the process by which a person comes to experience eternal life and the transforming truth of God's sovereignty in all things. She also draws on her medical training to help the reader become familiar with the physical symptoms of dying, legal considerations surrounding death, and the world of hospice care.

### PREACHING UP THE AGE LADDER

But what does this all have to do with preaching? At the end of the day, after I've read the books, I still have sermons to prepare. How can I as a 29 year old apply God's Word in a way that ministers to those in my congregation who are in the middle and end of their life?

Maybe the answer is not as difficult as I once thought. When I entered the unique worlds of midlife and beyond, I was struck not as much by the differences as by the similarities of people's experiences across the age spectrum. The six themes that Tripp and Howard directed toward middle-aged and senior adults apply to everyone at any stage of life. That's why I'm convinced that I need to keep preaching about those themes week after week. (By the way, book-by-book expository preaching will likely touch upon one of those themes each Sunday, since every text in the Bible arguably addresses one of them. Just a thought.)

First, I need to keep preaching about the sovereignty of God. As Tripp explains, only when a believer embraces God's sovereignty over the tiniest details of life will he walk in the rest and joy that God intends for him to experience. Howard concurs. Even though she is surrounded by tragic suffering and death every day, she emphasizes one truth more than any other: God controls everything in the universe, even "whether the traffic light turns green or red as I approach an intersection."<sup>[1]</sup>

Second, I need to keep preaching about suffering. Aging intensifies the suffering we feel and see, whether the pain of regret, aching joints, or the loss of loved ones. Reminding each other of God's refining purpose in suffering is therefore critical. Both Tripp and Howard devote large amounts of space to this issue. Brothers, we *must* preach the blessings of suffering to our people – for the sake of their souls. Suffering is a terrible evil which we must detest and fight, but which we must also embrace as one of God's most powerful tools in shaping us into the image of Christ.

Third, I need to keep preaching about idolatry. Although most Americans don't consciously bow down to idols, the heinous sin of idolatry still abounds – often under the guise of spirituality. Midlife, Tripp notes, tears away the façade that hides the golden calf in our hearts. As a young preacher, I can apply the Word to those in higher age brackets by shining the light of God's law onto their idols: health, youth, riches, appearance, possessions, relationships, children, status, neighborhood, career, food, applause, houses, cars, adventures, vacations, and the delusion of control. Because aging exposes the inability of these idols to deliver on their promises and reveals the continuing presence of indwelling sin even in the long-time believer, preaching about idolatry to people in midlife and beyond can pack an especially transformative punch.

Fourth, as a young preacher ministering to those older than me, I need to keep preaching about death. Most mortals try to ignore thoughts of death. Instead, we distract ourselves from reality with "delusions of invincibility," as Tripp puts it.<sup>[2]</sup> Jonathan Edwards recognized this destructive tendency and as a result famously resolved to "think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death." Deborah Howard would certainly consider death a fruitful topic of meditation. She writes, "It is of vital importance that we prepare spiritually *before* we get sick, *before* we are in a car wreck or an explosion that takes our life, *before* we pass through that door that leads to eternity—either an eternity in hell or in heaven."<sup>[3]</sup>

I need, however, to preach not only about the *moment* of death, but also about the *process* of dying. Both ignorance about the physical symptoms of dying and the overrealized eschatology of the health and wealth gospel have made dying difficult for some Christians to accept. Instead of embracing the dying process, they cling to earthly life with idolatrous force. Mark Dever puts his finger on this problem in a recent blog: "Our reluctance to sing about the grave in church on Sunday only reveals how much our hopes have been entrusted to this life—and we do not wish to conceive of them being lost. Our treasures have been put too much in this world."<sup>[4]</sup>

Fifth, I need to keep preaching about the hope of heaven. Howard reminds us that as Christians we should be consumed with thoughts of and yearnings for heaven.<sup>[5]</sup> When we are preoccupied with heavenly things the dissatisfaction, discouragement, regret, and disorientation of our later years yield to joy. Furthermore, looking forward to our eternal inheritance will keep us walking on the pathway that leads to life.

Finally, I need to keep preaching about the new identity found in Christ. Tripp's counsel shows that preaching about a believer's identity in Christ isn't just for baby Christians. He observes that midlife crisis often stems from "identity amnesia" or worse "identity replacement."<sup>[6]</sup> A middle-aged mother, for instance, becomes depressed and disoriented because her teen children rebel against the mold in which she tried to shape them. Or a businessman in his upper forties lives for the success he's achieved in the marketplace, staying so busy that he neglects his family and spiritual life. We who are in Christ easily forget that our identity does not come from our job, place of residence, title, gender, age, family, or appearance. It's not just new Christians who need frequent reminders that they are new creations, that they no longer live, and that Christ lives in them.<sup>[7]</sup> Finding one's identity in Christ will relieve the pain of regret, cut the root of pride, dry up the miry pit of despondency, clear up midlife confusion, and produce fruit that will last for eternity.

So, I'm 29 years old. Can I apply the Scriptures effectively to the lives of people twice my age who live in a world without YouTube and iPods and dreams as big as the Montana sky? Yes. The worlds aren't so different after all. Whether 29 or 49 or 89, the root problems are the same and so is the solution. Die to self. Die to your dreams. Die to the lies of your culture. Die to the illusion of your control. Die to the pernicious idolatry of success, appearance, and applause. Live to God. Live for his glory. Live in the light of his Word. Live by the power of his Spirit. Live submissively under his control and according to his will. Live for the delight of his eternal presence. Brothers, that'll preach –to anyone of any age!

1. Howard, *Sunsets*, 72.

2. Tripp, *Lost*, 81-82.

3. Howard, *Sunsets*, 182.

4. Mark Dever, <http://blog.t4g.org/>, "[Completely Unavoidable Optimism](#)," posted on Feb. 22, 2007, accessed Mar 01, 2007.

5. Howard, *Sunsets*, 183.

6. Tripp, *Lost*, 268.

7. 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 2:20.

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## Preach to the Non-Christian, Christian, and Church Member

By Aaron Menikoff

To whom do preachers preach? I recently pulled several books about preaching off the shelf and discovered that this question is rarely addressed. Preachers seem far more concerned with tweaking their style.

Still, a few pastors are giving attention to the audience, and they tend to focus on two segments of the population: the unchurched and postmoderns. Gordon-Conwell president James Emery White, pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, said at one time that he explicitly targets unbelievers. He put it this way in a 1999 interview:

Mecklenburg is a seeker-targeted church that was started [to] . . . focus on reaching unchurched people. By seeker targeted I obviously mean that the entry points of the church are designed for unchurched people. In some way, shape, or form we can tap into when they are in search mode, or we try to help them become active seekers. Because not everyone who is unchurched is a seeker.[2]

Since the sermon is one of these "entry points," White has modeled himself after men like Bill Hybels, Bob Russell, and Rick Warren, who have separated themselves from other preachers in their ability to speak to the unchurched.[2]

Another group of writers emphasize the importance of preaching to the postmodern mindset. Former pastor Brian McLaren has said that reflecting on the postmodern aversion to showmanship and detailed analysis together with its inclination to authenticity and narrative began to affect his preaching in 2001. Now, narrative and authenticity are central to his preaching.[3]

These two examples make some of us nervous. When a preacher goes too far in adapting to his audience, the message itself becomes compromised, as has been the case in both seeker-sensitive and Emergent churches. Still, preachers preach to real people, people that are unchurched, postmodern, and everything else we might think of. The challenge is to give some thought to all the types of people sitting in the congregation. This article humbly attempts to do just that.

I suggest pastors preach with three types of people in mind.

### PREACH TO THE UNCONVERTED

It's *always* good to recognize non-Christians in a Sunday morning sermon, even if your church is small and non-Christians aren't present. My church is not large, but I still assume that some of the people sitting in the pews will not know Christ. Some of them are nominal Christians who may have professed Christ and been in churches for years, but still need the new birth to bring real life. Others are professing non-Christians whom our members have invited. Still others have walked in off the street in response to a church card, a bulletin, the website, or the building itself. In other words, non-Christians will come.

Then what?

#### ***Make the Gospel Clear***

It is the preacher's responsibility to make the gospel clear as he unfolds the Word of God. Paul wrote,

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Rom. 10:9-10).

We are, after all, ministers of the gospel. The gospel does not have to sound the same in every sermon. But however it's explained, the pastor should ask of the passage, "How does it point to the gospel?" Even unbelievers can recognize the difference between a gospel-centered sermon and a sermon with the gospel tacked on at the end.

My church is near a seminary, and we have a lot of men training to be pastors who often ask the question, "Does the gospel need to be in every sermon?" The answer is "yes" for at least two reasons. First, because the gospel makes sense of every text of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Second, because the unconverted need to know what it means to "confess with

your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead." (Christians need to hear it over and over, too, in order to grow in the faith!) Even if the unbeliever has heard the gospel dozens of times, God brought him or her before me as the preacher—today. So I want the gospel to challenge once again his or her understanding of the world, sin, and salvation.

Making the gospel clear is one of the most important things I can do as a pastor.

### ***Preach Expositionally***

Pastors who are sensitive to the presence of non-Christians will serve them best by preaching expositionally. Non-Christians want to know why we believe what we believe. Since our doctrine and life is founded on the Word of God, we serve the unchurched best by directing them honestly, faithfully, and clearly to Scripture, just as we do with Christians.

A movement of writers and church leaders today says that the postmodern mind—churched and unchurched—responds best to "narrative preaching." They argue that people want stories. Fine, I like stories. Preaching expositionally should provide the unchurched with the storyline of the Bible, which in turn provides a storyline for God's work with humanity, which in turn provides a storyline for their own lives. Pastors should not only work through all of Scripture when they preach expositionally, they should do so with the mindset of giving their listeners "God's big picture." This is seeker-friendly preaching![4]

The same movement says that the postmodern mind values authenticity. Fine, I also like authenticity. It's a perfect excuse to preach expositionally. Let's focus less on the packaging and more on the message: What did Jesus say? What did Isaiah prophesy? What did Paul write? And what do the answers to these questions have to do with us today? That's what the unconverted who show up in our churches want—unvarnished biblical truth. Whether they finally agree with that truth is between them and God; but what we preach is not up for grabs.[5]

### ***Reach Out to the Unconverted***

There are a number of things we can do to make our sermons evangelistic. Identifying the big and little numbers as chapter and verse divisions is helpful for the unchurched. So is telling them to make use of the Bible's table of contents. What a comforting word for the unconverted visitor when everyone around him seems to quickly find Obadiah!

Provocative sermon introductions also help build a bridge for the unbeliever by explaining the relevance of the text that is about to be exposed. For example, last Easter Sunday I preached on Luke 5:33-39, where the Pharisees are struck that Jesus' disciples are not fasting. Jesus responds by observing that the wedding guests do not fast when the bridegroom is present, and then he tells the parable about pouring new wine into old wineskins. I've entitled the sermon, "Are Christians Happier?" This introduction was an opportunity to explain that true, lasting, life-changing joy is being in the presence of the risen bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Were Christians helped by the introduction? I hope so, but I saw those two or three minutes as a special opportunity to reach out to the unconverted who may need some extra guidance figuring out why we are gathered around God's Word.

All these "little" practices have a cumulative effect on the congregation as well. When believers recognize that the pulpit is friendly to the unconverted, they are more likely to bring their non-Christian friends. It's a misnomer to think that being gospel-centered means one cannot be seeker-sensitive.

## **PREACH TO THE CONVERTED**

As important as preaching to the unconverted is, the preacher's primary task on the Lord's Day is to target Christians. He is to build up the local church; and the church is to listen, ready and willing to submit to Christ as the head of the church. This is our primary "audience." Thus, in my own sermon preparation, I primarily have the converted in mind.

How then should the preacher address the Christian?

### ***Reprove and Correct Christians***

We know from John that sin persists in the life of the believer: "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). There is a bit of a sting in this verse, as if John knew that believers are tempted to minimize their sin, elevate their sanctification, and deny the Lord. Furthermore, Paul wrote, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Thus, when a shepherd is preaching to Christians, the truth of God's Word will necessarily both reprove and correct.

No pastor wants to be known for cutting Christians down. Yet faithfulness to Scripture does require a man to give reproof in its season. This is one reason why the call to preach should not be accepted lightly. To be faithful to this task requires us to ask of each text that we preach, "How does this passage reprove or challenge the Christian?" Is it challenging prayerlessness, gossip, idolatry? The answer may be drawn from a pastor's local congregation or from what's applicable to all Christians. Either way, preaching without reproof and correction cannot be fully biblical preaching.

### ***Sustain and Encourage Christians***

Thankfully, preaching to the converted means more than reproof and correction. It means working to sustain and encourage believers with the Word of God. The believer is utterly dependent upon the Word. As Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; Deut 8:3). This means that when the Christian comes to the sermon he is coming to be nourished by words of life.

Of course the believer can be fed by the Word of God during other times of the week, but preaching plays a central role in his sustenance. Consider Titus 1:1-3 where Paul describes how eternal life is manifest in God's Word through preaching. Christians are nourished and sustained by sermons. A question to ask every text is, "How does this sustain, uphold, or encourage the Christian?"

Few things encourage me more in my own preaching ministry than this: the church is gathered because they *need* the life given by the preached word, not because they need me! This is simply the task that they have charged me to deliver, the spiritual meal they have commissioned me to prepare. What a privilege to be used by God to sustain, nourish, build up, and edify his people with his Word!

### ***Sanctify and Strengthen Christians***

The Son prayed that the Father's children would be sanctified and be made more like Christ. Jesus knew that his followers would endure all sorts of suffering and scorn because they received his word (John 17:14), but he didn't pray that they would be removed from the world. Rather, he prayed that they would be sanctified. How would Christians be made more holy? Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). God's message would sanctify God's children. Christians are made holy by apprehending and applying the Good News and all Scripture to their lives (cf. 2 Tim 3:17). A holy word makes for a holy people.

Of course, sanctification is mainly God's work. He is the one who works in the life of the believer (Phil 2:13; Heb 13:20-21) and who ensures that Christians have all they need to bring him glory and honor. This is exactly what occurs as he draws the saints to gather and to hear the truths of his Word. Not surprisingly, they are stirred up "to love and good works" (Heb 10:24).

Preachers have the glorious opportunities to be used in the lives of sinners to strengthen them for the task of actually walking the Christian life. In Psalm 1, the blessed man who delights in God's law is likened to a tree planted by streams of water, a tree that is fruitful and strong. The analogy is not hard to understand. The Christian is fruitful and strong when fed and delighting in the law of the Lord. Sermons have a role to play in leading the Christian to meditate on God's law. Even though the preacher cannot make blessed men (thankfully it is up to God and His Spirit to do that!), he is given the great privilege of feeding the Word of God to God's people. The preacher can be like those streams of water, faithfully delivering the Word of God and strengthening that tree week after week, month after month, year after year.

Unlike the accountant who sees the books' balance at the end of the month, or the CEO who watches as the company turns around, who knows if the preacher will ever see the fruit that's born, the lives that are changed, the hearts that are touched! The pastor's best work cannot be measured this side of heaven. Such fruit cannot be collected into baskets. Nonetheless, the fruit is there. The preached Word of God, by his grace, sanctifies and strengthens the sinner and prepares him for his own works of grace.

### ***Challenge and Grow Christians***

Disciples need to grow in their understanding and interpretation of Scripture. They tend to be far too careless in their ingestion of sermons, far too unlike those Bereans of Acts 17 who examined what they heard to see if it was true. Solid expositional preaching will challenge the disciple by giving him something to think about and examine. Criticizing shallow preaching, James W. Alexander once said,

In these sermons we find many valuable scriptural truths, many original and touching illustrations, much sound argument, pungent exhortation, and great unction. In themselves considered, and viewed as pulpit orations, they seem open to scarcely a single objection; yet as expositions of the Scripture, they are literally nothing. They clear up no difficulties in the argument of

the inspired writers; they give no wide prospects of the field in which their matter lies; they might be repeated for a lifetime without tending to the slightest degree to educate a congregation in habits of sound interpretation.[6]

Sermons that challenge and grow Christians do not have to be heady or hard to understand (such preaching would be unfaithful and pointless anyway!). Still, the sermons that challenge and grow Christians are sermons preached by men who have poured over the text. A pastor who gives his time to sermon preparation almost does not have to ask of the text, "How does this passage challenge or grow the Christian?"—so geared is God's Word to accomplishing God's purpose for it (Is 54:10-11). His effort will bear fruit as the congregation reaps the reward of his diligence.

At my church we strive to be faithful to Scripture whether we are preaching a few verses or an entire book in a few sermons, as I recently did with the book of Job. For the first time in years, college students are joining the church because the preaching challenges them to grow. An older couple recently told me that they liked coming because they were able to have spiritual discussions about the sermon at lunch. I don't think anybody would say that we do a terrific job of communicating with the world, and nobody would say my preaching is exciting. There is much room for growth. But by God's grace we are opening up God's Word--and that *is* exciting and life changing!

Christians are looking for preaching that is faithful to Scripture, which means preaching that includes reproof and correction, sustenance and encouragement, sanctification and strength, challenge and growth.

Now that we have covered preaching to non-Christians and Christians, this might seem like a natural place to stop. But preachers need to be sensitive to one more category: church members.

### **PREACH TO CHURCH MEMBERS AS A CORPORATE BODY**

For most churches, the largest segment of the congregation includes the men and women who have committed themselves to that place, that ministry, and one another. Should that matter as you preach? I think so.

Paul described the congregation of saints in Colossae as "holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God" (Col 2:19). These were not simply disciples, they were disciples rooted in the Colossian church and growing with a growth that is from God. In Colossians 3:15-16, Paul continued, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Notice that Paul addressed this local church as one body and reminded them that they would be united by the Word of Christ. This would take place as they gathered together to sing Scripture and hear Scripture preached.

Paul does not here address Christians as individual Christians but as members of a particular church. Their gathering brought unity not because they were geographically closer, but because the Word of Christ came to dwell in them as they shared the same teaching and the same admonishment. They came under the same authority because they recognized Christ as their head.

The same is true in a local church today, and one of the means unity is brought to members is through the preaching of the Word of God. John Calvin made this point when describing the office of the preacher. The preacher is one who brings unity to the body. Commenting on the church's one hope, Lord, faith, and baptism in Ephesians 4, Calvin wrote,

In these words Paul shows that the ministry of the men which God uses in ordering the Church is a vital bond to unite believers in one body . . . The way he [God] works is this: he distributes his gifts to the Church through his ministers and so shows himself to be present there, by exerting the energy of his Spirit, and that he prevents it from becoming pointless and fruitless. In this way the saints are renewed and the body of Christ is edified. In this way we grow up in all things to him who is the Head and join with one another. In this way we are all brought into the unity of Christ, and so long as prophecy flourishes we welcome his servants and do not despise his doctrine. Whoever tries to get rid of this pattern of Church order or scorns it as of little importance, is plotting to ruin the Church.[7]

Why make so much of church members as a corporate body when so many churches are growing by making much of non-members? Because the Bible makes much of those individuals who are part of the local church, as we can see from the New Testament epistles. Christianity was lived out in the context of people from different backgrounds sharing the gospel—that was the church. This had radical implications. As Paul would write, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1Cor 12:26). This is roll-up-your-sleeves, get-into-one-another's-lives community.

Biblical preaching should regularly address Christians not only as individuals, but as individual who have committed to one another as a particular local body. Ask of each text: "How does this passage apply to our life as a community of faith?" It may

seem odd to address only the members of the church, but what a compelling vision of the church for both the unchurched and for those Christians who choose to flirt with the church instead of actually committing to it! The pastor shows his appreciation for those Christians who have joined the church and, more importantly, his love for the Word of God that united members of his church when he addresses them directly corporately in the preaching.

## CONCLUSION

As I meditate on the question, "To whom does the preacher preach," I resonate with the words of Peter Adam, vicar of St. Jude's, Carlton in Australia, who wrote, "If we are servants of God and of Christ, and servants of his Word, then the call of the preacher is also to be a servant of God's people." [8] Yes, I think the preacher should be sensitive to the unchurched. But if we target the unchurched alone, the message may be lost or so diluted that God's people become malnourished. This is not a pretty sight. It is important to preach to the unchurched, but it is more important to focus primarily on Christians and to remember the value of speaking regularly to those believers who have committed to the local church.

1. "Preaching to the Unchurched: An Interview with James Emery White" in *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Communicators*, ed. Michael Duduit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 227.
2. *Ibid.*, 230.
3. "Preaching to Postmoderns: An Interview with Brian McLaren" in *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Communicators*, ed. Michael Duduit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 126-27.
4. To help exposit this storyline, expositional preachers will find these little books helpful: *The Symphony of Scripture: Making Sense of the Bible's Many Themes* (1990) by Mark Strom; *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (2002) by Vaughan Roberts; and *gospel and Kingdom* now available in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (2000). These primers on biblical theology can help one communicate the unity of Scripture when preaching through the Bible.
5. See Mark Dever's chapter on expositional preaching in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Crossway, 2004).
6. J.W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, Date), 239.
7. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Toney Lane and Hilary Osborne (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 245.
8. Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 130.

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## Preach to the Ignorant, the Doubtful, and Sinners

By Mark Dever

I often hear the question, "how do you *apply* the text in an expositional sermon?"

Behind this question may be many questionable assumptions. The questioner may be remembering "expositional" sermons he has heard (or maybe preached) that were no different from some Bible lectures at seminary—well-structured and accurate but demonstrating little godly urgency or pastoral wisdom. These expositional sermons may have had little if any application. On the other hand, the questioner may simply not know how to recognize application when he hears it.

William Perkins, the great sixteenth-century puritan theologian in Cambridge, instructed preachers to imagine the various kinds of hearers and to think through applications for each—hardened sinners, questioning doubters, weary saints, young enthusiasts, and so on.

Perkins' advice is very helpful, but hopefully we do that already. I want to approach the topic of application slightly differently: not only are there different kinds of hearers, there are also different kinds of application. As we take a passage of God's Word and explain it clearly, compellingly, even urgently, there are at least three different kinds of application which reflect three different kinds of problems encountered in the Christian pilgrimage. First, we struggle under the blight of ignorance. Second, we wrestle with doubt, often more than we at first realize. Third, we still struggle with sin—whether through direct disobedient acts or through sinful negligence. As preachers, we long to see changes in all three ways, both in ourselves and in our hearers every time we preach God's Word. And all three problems give rise to a different kind of legitimate application.

### IGNORANCE

Ignorance is a fundamental problem in a fallen world. We have alienated God from us. We have cut ourselves off from direct fellowship with our Creator. It is not surprising, then, that *informing* people of the truth about God is itself a powerful type of application—and one that we desperately need.

This is not an excuse for cold or passionless sermons. I can be every bit as excited (and more) by indicative statements as I can be by imperative commands. The commands of the gospel to repent and believe mean nothing apart from the indicative statements concerning God, ourselves, and Christ. Information is vital. We are called to teach the truth and to proclaim a great message about God. We want people who hear our messages to move from being ignorant to being knowledgeable about the truth. Such heartfelt informing is application.

### DOUBT

Doubt is different from ignorance. In doubt, we take ideas or truths familiar to us and we question them. This kind of questioning is not rare among Christians. In fact, doubt may be one of the most important issues to be thoughtfully explored and thoroughly challenged in our preaching. Addressing doubt is not something a preacher takes up with non-believers for a little pre-conversion apologetics. Some people who sit listening to sermons week after week may well know all the facts that the preacher mentions about Christ, or God, or Onesimus; but they may well have struggled with whether or not they really believe those facts are true. Sometimes people may not even be aware of their doubts, much less be able to articulate them as doubts.

But when we begin to consider Scripture searchingly, we find lingering in the shadows questions, uncertainties, and hesitations, all of which make us sadly aware of that gravitational pull of doubt off there in the distance drawing us away from the faithful pilgrim's path. To such people—perhaps to such parts of our own hearts—we want to argue for and to urge the truthfulness of God's Word and the urgency of believing it. We are called to urge on hearers the truthfulness of God's Word. We want people who hear our messages to change from doubt to full-hearted belief in the truth. Such urgent, searching preaching of the truth is application.

### SIN

Sin, too, is a problem in this fallen world. Ignorance and doubt may be themselves specific sins, the result of specific sins, or neither. But sin is certainly more than neglect or doubt.

Be assured that people listening to your sermons will have struggled with disobeying God in the week just passed, and they will almost certainly struggle with disobeying him in the week that they are just beginning. The sins will be various. Some will be a disobedience of action; others will be a disobedience of inaction. But whether of commission or omission, sins are disobedience to God.

Part of preaching is to challenge God's people to a holiness of life that will reflect the holiness of God himself. So part of applying the passage of Scripture is to draw out the implications of that passage for our actions this week. We as preachers are called to exhort God's people to obedience to his Word. We want our hearers to change from sinful disobedience to joyful, glad obedience to God according to his will as revealed in his Word. Such exhortation to obedience is certainly application.

## THE GOSPEL

The main message that we need to apply every time we preach is the gospel. Some people do not yet know the good news of Jesus Christ. And some of them may have even been sitting under your preaching for a time—distracted or asleep or day-dreaming or otherwise not paying attention. They need to be informed of the gospel. They need to be told.

Others may have heard, understood, and perhaps even accepted the truth, but now find themselves struggling with doubting the very matters you are addressing (or assuming) in your message. Such people need to be urged to believe the truth of the good news of Christ.

And, also, people may have heard and understood, but remain slow to repent of their sins. They may even accept the truth of the gospel message, but not want to give up their sins and trust in Christ. For such hearers, the most powerful application you can make is to exhort them to hate their sins and flee to Christ. In all our sermons, we should seek to apply the gospel by informing, urging, and exhorting.

One common challenge we preachers face in applying God's Word in our sermons is that individuals who experience problems in one pronounced area will think that you are not applying Scripture in your preaching because you are not addressing their particular problem. Are they right? Not necessarily. While your preaching might improve if you start addressing every category more often or more thoroughly, it is not wrong for you to preach to those who need to be informed or who need to be exhorted to forsake sin, even if the person talking to you isn't so aware of that need.

One final note. Proverbs 23:12 says, "Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge." In English translations, it seems that the words translated "apply" in the Bible almost always (maybe always?) have reference not to the preacher's work (as homiletics teaches us) nor even to the Holy Spirit's (as systematics rightly teaches us) but to the work of the one who hears the Word. We are called to apply the word to our own hearts, and to apply ourselves to that work.

That, perhaps, is the single most important application we could make next Sunday for the benefit of all of God's people.

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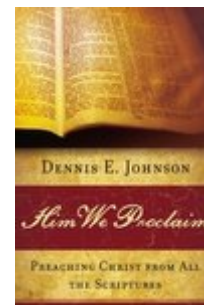
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## Review: Him We Proclaim

By Dennis E. Johnson

Reviewed by Aaron Menikoff



*Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*  
P&R, 2007, 464 pp, \$24.99

A few weeks ago I read an essay by Carl Trueman in *The Wages of Spin* where he argued that many preachers employ biblical theology with disastrous results:

One of the problems I have with a relentless diet of biblical-theological sermons from less talented (i.e., most of us) preachers is their boring mediocrity: contrived contortions of passages which are engaged in to produce the answer 'Jesus' every week. It doesn't matter what the text is; the sermon is always the same.[1]

Ouch! It reminded me how hard preaching can be, especially preaching from the Old Testament. But to help us become better preachers of the whole Bible, Dennis E. Johnson, academic dean and professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, has just written an excellent book on the subject aptly titled, *Him We Proclaim*.

### WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK UNIQUE?

There are a myriad of books on preaching, but Johnson believes that the Bible is finally the best guidebook for preaching the Bible. More specifically, the New Testament apostles teach us how to preach:

This book makes the case for imitating the interpretive and communicative methods employed by the apostles to proclaim Christ to the first-century Greco-Roman world as we minister in the twenty-first century world (3).

In an age where so many communicators are interested in style, dress, and tone, Johnson challenges preachers to consider what the apostles thought of preaching. They regarded it as a supernatural endeavor designed to change men through communication of the written Word of God (Col. 1:24-2:7).

Johnson also points the reader to an example of apostolic preaching, arguing on the basis of internal evidence that the letter to the Hebrews is actually a sermon—the author described it as a "word of exhortation" (13:22). Hebrews is of unusual help to the preacher because, whereas most of the sermons in Acts were preached to a non-Christian audience, Hebrews was written to believers. Not only that, it combines Old Testament interpretation and Christian application: "our one New Testament example of apostolic preaching addressed to an established congregation illustrates the integration of Christ-centered biblical interpretation with hearer-contoured communication and application" (248).

The New Testament authors were preachers whose treatment of the Old Testament is worthy of emulation. To those who object that the apostles were inspired while preachers today are not, Johnson replies,

Precisely *because* we lack the extraordinary and mysterious operations of the Holy Spirit that produced the New Testament documents, should we not be guided by the hermeneutic method exemplified in their Christological and redemptive-historical interpretations when we approach the Old Testament texts that they did not explicitly address, rather than turning to useful but, ultimately, a sub-apostolic methodology? (178).

### WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK INTERESTING?

Pastors will find many things in this book thought-provoking. For example, Johnson surveys the current trends in preaching. Pastors tend to preach to convert, preach to edify, or preach to instruct. Johnson suggests a fourth category, a hybrid of sorts, with a not-so-catchy name: "Evangelistic, Edificatory Redemptive Historical Preaching." He references Tim Keller as the contemporary exemplar of this type of preaching.

Another notable section is Johnson's survey of the history of biblical interpretation and his discussion of why some pastors and theologians are put off by redemptive historical preaching. While the brevity of this history forces him to gloss over historical nuances (for example, there was more diversity among interpreters in the Middle Ages than Johnson notes) he makes a very

provocative point: the Enlightenment led many interpreters to treat the Bible as any other book, and this still affects some conservative theologians today:

Scholars influenced by Enlightenment naturalism are bound to be suspicious of approaches to biblical interpretation that seek to relate every text to Christ and his work, if the latter dares to allege that a Christological fulfillment of an Old Testament passage was in any sense intended by the text's human author (since the possibility of a divine Author must be left out of the picture) (152).[2]

Those wanting to understand why biblical theology is not accepted by all will be especially interested in the chapter, "Challenges to Apostolic Preaching."

### WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK HELPFUL?

To help make better preachers, Johnson gives preachers tools for approaching their sermon texts with a right understanding of redemption history. Worth the price of the book, the chapter entitled "Theological Foundations of Apostolic Preaching" presents five ways in which New Testament authors demonstrate the Old Testament's fulfillment in Christ:

- **Typos texts** – These are texts where the Greek word *typos* (or type) is actually used. For example, Romans 5:14 describes Adam as a "type" of the one to come.
- **Old Testament quotations applied to Christ** – For example, Matthew 2:15 directly applies Hosea 11:1 to Christ—"Out of Egypt I called my son."
- **Unmistakable allusions to Old Testament events, applied to Christ** – For example, references to Jesus' body as the "temple" (John 2) or Jesus as "manna" (John 6) are unmistakable allusions to Old Testament events.
- **Subtle and debatable allusions to Old Testament events, persons, and institutions** – Consider a possible connection between the Mount of Transfiguration and the Lord's indwelling of the tabernacle in Exodus 40:25 based on the *overshadowing* cloud in both events. The allusion, as Johnson notes, has to do with the Gospel writers' decision to use the same word for "overshadow" found in the Septuagint account of God's indwelling of the Tabernacle.
- **General Old Testament patterns fulfilled in Christ and his work** – Though there is no direct link between an Old Testament and New Testament text, a connection can still be drawn based upon "a pattern (*typos*) embedded in redemptive history" (272). For example, Psalm 88 is not quoted or alluded to in the New Testament. However, as a psalm of lament—like Psalm 22—it is reasonable to conclude that it can be interpreted along those same lines, as *also* alluding to Christ. As Johnson puts it, "we have good reason to believe that the New Testament interpretation of Psalm 22 teaches us to read the *whole genre of lament psalms* as revelatory of the anguish and abandonment of the ultimately Innocent Sufferer" (273).

It's far too easy, as Trueman has noticed, for preachers to simply assert that a text points to Christ. The question is, "how?" The answer requires a theological foundation, and that is what Johnson gives.

We must consider the relationship of our particular text to other portions of Scripture . . . Preachers who recognize the divine authorship of Scripture and divine sovereignty over history realize that these relationships cannot be random, accidental, or arbitrary; rather, they must reflect the manifold wisdom of God as they disclose the marvelously diverse and unified plan of God for history (309).

*Him We Proclaim* ends in the most helpful way possible, with Johnson applying his principles to eleven texts in the Old and New Testament. For any preacher who has ever stared at a text and wondered, "What in the world am I going to do with this?" these chapters are gold. This is not because Johnson offers some magic bullet; no, there is no special trick or formula. It is simply helpful to see how he walks through a passage, accounts for a text's historical context, accounts for where it falls in the context of the Bible as a whole, and then translates all these factors into a sermon outline.

### WHY IS THIS BOOK NECESSARY?

There are other books like *Him We Proclaim* in print today. Here's how Johnson's book compares to two of them:

1) Sidney Greidanus' *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* is very similar to Johnson's. Both aim at a recovery of redemptive historical preaching, both look to the New Testament for principles on preaching Christ from the Old, and both offer practical suggestions to the preacher. Nonetheless, pastors and theologians unconvinced about the importance of redemptive-historical preaching will find that Johnson is more of an apologist than Greidanus. Furthermore, Johnson assumes less, as his chapter devoted to an outline of redemptive-history attests. Furthermore, while Greidanus's history of biblical interpretation is more detailed, most will not mind Johnson's more cursory

treatment. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Johnson does not limit his work to preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Thus he includes an entire chapter on preaching from the New.

2) Graeme Goldsworthy's *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, like *Him We Proclaim*, aims to connect biblical theology and preaching, to drive home the point that every sermon must preach Christ crucified, and to give the pastor practical tips on the redemptive-historical context of the different genres of Scripture. However, Johnson is slower to show the reader his conclusions. He works very hard to make his thought process transparent as he works through the different genres of Scripture in the final two chapters. Preachers may be anxious to flip ahead and see, "How does he preach Christ?" But this, of course, would miss the point entirely.

The utility of *Him We Proclaim* is Johnson's commitment to help a generation of preachers figure out for themselves how to preach Christ and, Lord willing, avoid the trap that Carl Trueman described where, "[i]t doesn't matter what the text is; the sermon is always the same."

1. Carl Trueman, *The Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historic and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 171-172.

2. Generally-conservative scholars like the German Johann Ernesti and the American Moses Stuart both affirmed divine and human authorship and yet allowed the Enlightenment's rationalistic principles of interpretation to govern their reading of the Bible. Nonetheless, it is no small thing to argue that evangelical scholars today are influenced by "Enlightenment naturalism" and I think Johnson needs more evidence for that connection to be convincing.

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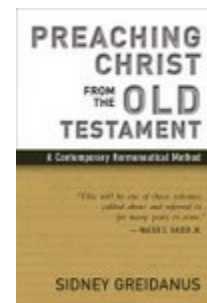
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## Review: Preaching Christ from the Old Testament By Sidney Greidanus

Reviewed by Aaron Menikoff



*Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*  
Eerdmans, 1999, 373 pp, \$25.00

Sidney Greidanus's *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* has been in print since 1999. Greidanus wrote it because, at the time, no contemporary books took a seminary student or church pastor through the basics of Christocentric, Old Testament preaching. Since 1999, biblical theology has stormed into many evangelical circles and been popularized for the church's good by a number of authors. Still, *Preaching Christ* is worth a second (or a first) look, if only because pastors committed to preaching expositionally must move beyond understanding the main themes of the Bible to addressing how particular texts point to Christ with great specificity.

In essence, Greidanus argues that, since the Old Testament witnesses to Christ, faithful preachers must preach sermons from the Old Testament with Christ as the focus. He defines "preaching Christ" as "preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament" (10). Greidanus then spends over 300 pages unpacking this idea.

He not only defends the necessity of preaching Christ from the Old Testament, but of preaching the Old Testament in general. Appealing to the unity of Scripture, Greidanus argues that the Old Testament gives the church a fuller understanding of Jesus Christ.

A large portion of the book is devoted to a historical overview of Old Testament preaching, with special attention given to the dangers of allegorizing. Greidanus is critical but not dismissive of interpreters who have come before him, carefully assessing the contributions of preachers going back as far as Origen, but devoting extended space to Calvin, Luther, Spurgeon, and William Vischer, a twentieth-century theologian banned from teaching by the Nazis. Reading this history, it is comforting to know that preachers have been wrestling with these ideas for centuries. Pastors today have the opportunity to learn from their insights as well as their mistakes.

The meat of the book is the methodology Greidanus proposes for actually preaching Christ from the Old Testament. He argues that there are many "roads" that lead from the Old Testament to Christ, and it is incumbent upon preachers to learn the map. Some of the roads include

- redemptive-historical progression (certain events find their fulfillment in Christ);
- promise-fulfillment (specific Old Testament promises are fulfilled by Christ);
- typology (past acts or figures foreshadow or prefigure gospel events and figures);
- analogy (roughly speaking, God was for Israel what Christ is for the New Testament church);
- longitudinal themes (Old Testament themes reinterpreted in light of Christ); and
- contrast (differences between the Old and New Testaments brought by Christ).

In addition to these roads, the "redemptive-historical christocentric" method Greidanus proposes calls the preacher to look for New Testament references that link to Old Testament texts. In this way, the New Testament itself serves as a guide for preaching Christ from the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, any book on preaching that is going to posit principles should show those principles in action, which Greidanus does with an in depth application of his method to Genesis 22. To a lesser degree, he also applies it to five other texts: Genesis 6:9-8:22; Exodus 15:22-27; Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 19; and Joshua 2 and 6.

Preaching is challenging, but preaching faithfully from the Old Testament is especially daunting. With this in mind, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* is an excellent resource that has yet to be replaced. Dennis Johnson's *Him We Proclaim* comes closest, but given Greidanus's laser-like focus on the Old Testament, and given the lack of books on preaching from the Old Testament, his book remains a very useful tool for pastors trying to make sense of redemptive-historical preaching.

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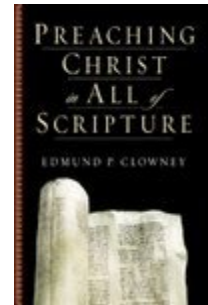
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## Review: Preaching Christ in All of Scripture

By Edmund Clowney

Reviewed by Paul Alexander



*Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*  
Crossway Books, 2003, 192 pp, \$17.99

Knowing how an Old Testament text points to Christ is not always so easy. Even the most conscientious pastors can struggle to do this without taking allegorical liberties. We could all use a little help. Enter a twentieth century *qohélet* (teacher), Edmund Clowney.

Clowney's *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* is a much-needed contribution to the practical literature geared toward developing our preaching skills. Amid all the gimmicks, *Preaching Christ* is a refreshing change of pace. Clowney begins with a couple chapters describing his methodology, and then models his method in the sample sermons that follow.

### THE METHOD

Clowney's starting point is Christ's words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (39; Luke 24:25-27, 44-45). All Scripture is about Jesus, even the wisdom books (Col 2:2). Chapter one therefore aims to help the reader find Christ in the Old Testament. Christ is both Lord and Servant of the covenant in the Old Testament (11-20). Clowney agrees with those scholars who argue that "the Apostle Paul read 'Christ' wherever *kurios* appears in the Septuagint" (p.13). As such, Christ is not just symbolically present but historically, actually present in the Old Testament narratives.

Yet Christ is symbolically present in every period of salvation history because each period finds its fulfillment in him. Ceremonial symbolism (e.g., clean vs. unclean), official symbolism (priest, king), and historical symbolism (e.g., Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac) all function as hinges that open the door to Christ. Memorials of significance (e.g., the Passover) find their ultimate meaning in the person and work of Jesus. We also discover that "God's deliverances of Israel anticipate his ultimate deliverance in the accomplishment of all his promises" (30). So when we read about God rescuing Israel, we may legitimately look forward to the story of Christ saving his people from the spiritual powers of sin and evil (2 Cor 10:4-5; Col 2:15). Clowney rules out moralism, because "it unconsciously assumes that we can go back to the Father apart from the Son" (33). While this categorical prohibition of moralism may not quite do justice to the way Paul uses Israel's moral experience as an example for us (1 Cor 10:1-13), Clowney's point is well taken. We need the caution today perhaps more than ever. Clowney's guiding principle is this:

No revealed truth drops by the wayside in the course of God's redemption and revelation. All truths come to their realization in relation to Christ. If, therefore, we can construct a line of symbolism from the event or ceremony to a revealed truth, that truth will lead us to Christ (32).

The second chapter teaches the reader how to prepare sermons that present Christ. After contending that Jesus himself speaks to his people in the preaching event, Clowney describes the standard explanation/application division as misleading, because "too often, this results in a series of sermonettes loosely connected to the theme" (49). Presenting Christ "dissolves this problem, for now we present Jesus both in what he says and does to reveal himself, and in what he says and does to direct us" (49).

Clowney then encourages preachers to structure their sermons so that they present Christ from within the story of redemption. While prizing doctrinal preaching, Clowney avers that "all presentation of Jesus has a narrative dimension" (50).

Before turning to sermons that model his method, Clowney exhorts preachers to present Christ by seeking the unction of Christ's presence, by practicing his presence, and by preaching in the presence of the Lord. He writes, "We do not seek a surge of power in ministering the Word of God. We seek his presence in the act of preaching, as we hold forth the person of Jesus Christ" (58).

## MODELLING THE METHOD

The book's remaining pages are filled with sermons that model Clowney's method. These sermons don't so much employ three points and a hymn to present Christ, they present him as the climax of a passage's narrative flow. As a result, Clowney's sermons exhibit little of what we might call homiletical finesse in their structure—alliterated points, parallel statements, and the like. His preaching style is more narrative than didactic, which might make some a little squeamish at first. It may also be difficult for us to imitate the style of his sample sermons.

But his method is faithful to the text, and it is always rewarding to watch a master craftsman as he plies his trade.

## EVALUATION

This book is worth having on your shelf for the primary reason that it will encourage you to preach Christ himself from the Old Testament. It's a short read—179 pages—and the style is accessible.

Grab a pastor friend or an aspiring young preacher in your area, and read through it together. The first two chapters on method will alone repay your investment twice over. They'll give you some helpful categories for finding Christ in the Old Testament without forcing the text to say something it doesn't say. If you're not careful, it may even change the way you read the Old Testament—wonderfully.

The sample sermons may seem to meander as Clowney tromps through the Scriptures, and you may sometimes struggle to see how he jumps from the OT text to Jesus. But watching Clowney till the soil will make any preacher want to dig further into the Scripture in order to make biblical connections that you hadn't ever seen.

*Preaching Christ* may also deepen your definition of what expositional preaching is. It's not simply expounding the moral point of a passage. Still less is it a running commentary on a text informed by historical background and lexical analysis. Real exposition expounds the Word of the Lord, but it does so in a way that expounds the Lord of the Word, Jesus Christ, just as he reveals himself in every part of the Word (Matt 5:17; Luke 24:25-26; John 5:39, 46; Acts 26:22-23; 28:23; 1Cor 1:20).

Preachers are called to *expound* Christ in a way that *exalts* Christ, no matter what biblical text we're preaching on Sunday. Clowney can show you how to expound Christ from the Old Testament in a way that will help both you and your congregation exalt him more faithfully together in the preaching and hearing of his word.

*Paul Alexander serves as the Pastor of Fox Valley Bible Church in St. Charles, IL, where he lives with his wife, Laurie, and their daughter, Olivia Grace.*

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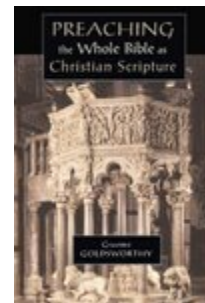
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## Review: Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture By Graeme Goldsworthy

*Reviewed by Paul Alexander*



*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*  
Eerdmans, 2000, 272 pp, \$25

"How in the world do I get to Jesus from *here*?" Sound familiar? It does to me. I've heard it from myself twice in the last month.

If you've ever preached a hard text from the Old Testament, or even a tricky one from the New, you know what I'm talking about. You might be awash in lexical and grammatical analysis and surrounded by the best evangelical commentaries you can find. But the text still feels locked, and you're fumbling around for the key. Brother, we've all been there. Welcome to the fraternity of the well-intentioned but confused.

For all those who know what I'm talking about, Graeme Goldsworthy's book may be a sermon-saver. He'll help keep preachers from preaching moralism from the Old Testament or legalistic browbeating from the New. More positively, Goldsworthy teaches a hermeneutic that should help preachers discover Jesus Christ on every page of Scripture—even on the pages in which his name does not show up.

Goldsworthy's aim is "to provide a handbook for preachers that will help them apply a consistently Christ-centered approach to their sermons" (ix). Part 1 lays out his method. Part 2 applies that method to every kind of biblical literature.

### **METHOD**

Goldsworthy contends that "the center and reference point for the meaning of all Scripture is the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God" (16). That means that we preachers are not simply preachers of the Bible. We are preachers of the gospel—preachers of Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:1-5). Jesus says the whole Bible is about him (Luke 24:24-26, 44-47; John 5:39). Paul agrees (Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 1:20). Armed with such assurances, Goldsworthy affirms that "Jesus is the interpretive key to the Bible" (25), and challenges preachers to ask ourselves every week, "How does this passage of Scripture, and consequently my sermon, testify to Christ" (21)? What a searching and harrowing question.

Goldsworthy's method is biblical theology, which is theology that is "understood from the perspective of the biblical writers" and is sensitive to the biblical writer's location in the history of God's saving plan (26). Instead of the snap shot that we get from systematic theology, biblical theology gives us a moving picture (27). It may trace a single theme as it develops through Scripture, or it may trace the entire overarching plot line of salvation in biblical history. Behind this kind of theologizing is the assumption that the sixty-six books of the Bible tell a single story that climaxes in the person and work of Jesus, and it applies only to those who are in spiritual union with him.

Goldsworthy argues that a preacher can get to Jesus in a number of different ways: by moving from type to antitype, from promise to fulfillment, or through salvation history all the way to its eschatological goal. But the meat of his method, especially as it relates to preaching Christ from the OT, is what he calls macro-typology. It's not just isolated OT texts that point to Christ. The whole framework of revelation points to Jesus:

The epoch of Israel's history from Abraham to David is, as a whole, a type of the fulfillment it finds in Christ. Between that historic epoch (type) and Christ (antitype) comes the whole prophetic recapitulation that confirms this typological structure. We have here the structural basis for the preacher's application of OT texts, from anywhere in the OT, to the contemporary Christian. I repeat, however, the antitype is not first and foremost the Christian, but Christ (112-113).

Practically speaking, what this means is that "the application of the meaning of any text must proceed theologically via the application it has to Christ" (113). We can't get away with "be courageous like David was courageous – and by the way, don't commit adultery like David did!" because it skips over the antitype to whom David as a type points—Christ.

In other words, we must never move immediately from ancient text to modern hearer. We must always go from the text to Christ to whom the text testifies, and only then to the hearer. This order is as true experientially as it is theologically and hermeneutically. Relating to God outside of Jesus Christ is to relate to him as Judge, not as Savior. Why would we want to apply any text of God's Word without first moving through the text's fulfillment in Jesus' saving person and work? "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?" asks the Psalmist. "He who has clean hands and a pure heart" is the answer (Ps. 24:3-4). That's not me. My heart isn't pure. But Christ's is, and because I am united to him by faith I can boldly ascend to the Lord's throne (Heb. 4:16)!

Goldsworthy's point is simply that every text of Scripture teaches that, as Christians, we have everything we need in Christ. Everything that belongs to him now belongs to us (1 Cor. 3:21-23). As preachers then apply the Bible to Christians, they are simply exposing the riches of what Christ has already won for them, and on that basis encouraging Christians "to become who they already are" by virtue of their spiritual union with Christ.

In Goldsworthy's words, "The Scriptures testify to Jesus. If this be the case, then the Scriptures only testify to us insofar as we are in him" (116). Goodbye, moralism. Hello, Christ-centered sermon.

## APPLYING THE METHOD

The second half of the book applies this method consecutively to each kind of literature in the Old Testament and the New. Each of these last few chapters treats the genre in its biblical-theological context, gives multiple examples from specific texts, considers literary and historical matters, and concludes with tips for planning sermons from that type of literature.

Goldsworthy ends with a chapter on how to construct a sermon series that traces a biblical-theological theme, or one that traces the movement of salvation history.

## EVALUATION

Preacher, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* is a must read. It is theologically rich, intellectually stimulating, spiritually engaging, and practically helpful. But even more, it is absolutely exhilarating in its panoramic display of the Christ-centeredness of all Scripture. Read this book, and you'll not only want to re-read it, you'll want to re-read your Bible.

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