

the essence of
BIBLICAL 
PREACHING

DR. BRENT BELFORD



CENTRAL BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SESSION 1

CHRIST-CENTERED & GOSPEL-CENTERED PREACHING

AN EVALUATION

1. Christ-Centered Preaching

A. Proponents

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B. Definition

Christ-centered preaching is preaching that puts Jesus at

_____.

C. Description

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Regarding Jesus in every sermon-

Greidanus writes, "A sermon without Christ is no sermon."¹

Regarding Jesus in every text-

Mohler proclaims, "Every single text of Scripture points to Christ.... From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him."²

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¹ Sydney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 2.

² Albert Mohler, *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, 96.

- _____
- _____

D. Strengths

- *First, Christ is the object of preaching in many places in the New Testament.* Christ is the object of κηρύσσω three times (cf. Acts 8:5, 1 Cor 1:23; 15:12). Five other texts Jesus is the object (cf. Acts 9:20, 19:13; 2 Cor 4:5, 11:6; and 1 Tim 3:16).
- *Second, Christ-centered preaching seeks to exalt Jesus.* This model of preaching produces a “heightened awareness of Christology” in preaching and worship.³ We should look for every legitimate opportunity to exalt Jesus when we preach!
- *Third, Christ-centered preaching highlights the unity of the Bible.* The revival or emergence of Christ-centered preaching is somewhat attributable to the rising popularity of biblical theology among evangelicals.
- *Fourth, Christ-centered preaching emphasizes the gospel.* Since the gospel of Jesus is the only way for people to be saved and since it is the only way to gain true peace and fulfillment, proclaiming Jesus is desirable.

E. Weaknesses/Dangers

- *First, proponents of Christ-centered preaching often introduce imported emphases into a biblical text.*
- *Second, imported emphases mute the emphasis made by the biblical author.*

Christopher Wright warns of the dangers of doing this. He writes, “If you approach a text in the Old Testament with the assumption that ‘This must be about Jesus,’ you easily overlook all that the original

³ Jason Keith Allen, “The Christ-Centered Homiletics of Edmund Clowney and Sidney Greidanus in Contrast with the Human Author-Centered Hermeneutics of Walter Kaiser,” Ph. D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2011), 133.

author was actually trying to say. In fact, you end up putting a gag on the mouth of the original author, in order to make him say what you think his text must be about since it must be 'all about Jesus.' And that is a very bad thing to do to the Bible!"⁴

- *Third, proponents of Christ-centered preaching occasionally force Christ-centeredness.*
- *Fourth, requiring all sermons to be Christ-centered produces a lack of variety in preaching.*
- *Fifth, requiring preaching to be exclusively Christ-centered is not based on sufficient scriptural warrant.*
- *Sixth, Christ-centered preaching sometimes distorts or diffuses important theological truths.*

Three doctrinal beliefs might be distorted:

- *The Trinity*
- *The nature of the _____*
- *A _____ view of _____*

2. Gospel-Centered Preaching

A. Proponents

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⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All its Worth*, 54.

B. Definition

Gospel-centered preaching is preaching that requires every sermon to declare that _____.

C. Description

- *First, Gospel-centered preaching rests on a Gospel-centered hermeneutic.*
- *Second, Gospel-centered preaching shares many fundamental tenets with Christ-centered preaching.*
- *Third, however, some Christocentric preachers declare that preaching Jesus might not be enough without specifically referencing his death and resurrection.*

Tim Keller states, “It’s possible to preach the New Testament—even passages in the Gospels about Jesus—without preaching the gospel.”⁵

D. Strengths

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E. Weaknesses/Dangers

- *First, Gospel-centered preaching shares the weaknesses of Christ-centered preaching.*
- *Second, Gospel-centered preaching can undermine _____.*

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, 63.

- *Third, Gospel-centered preaching superimposes a predetermined outcome on every text of the Bible.*

SESSION 2

THEOCENTRIC & PNEUMATOLOGICAL PREACHING

AN EVALUATION

1. Theocentric Preaching

A. Proponents

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B. Definition

Theocentric preaching is preaching that keeps God at the heart of every sermon.

C. Description

- *First, some proponents of God-centered preaching find their _____.*
- *Second, proponents of God-centered preaching emphasize what scripture says about the “glory” of God (e.g., 1 Cor 10:31, Phil 2:9–11).*

D. Strengths

- *First, theocentric preaching uniquely emphasizes the Father’s role in the gospel.*
- *Second, theocentric preaching draws attention to the Father’s role in Biblical theology.*

Langley writes, “I want to insist that God is the main character of the story. His is the eternal decree, his is the love that drew salvation’s plan, his is the initiative in sending the Son, his is the power that raised Christ from the dead and put all things under his feet. ‘To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever (Eph 3:21 NIV).”⁶ He says it more concisely here, “Everything else—election, judgment, redemption—is penultimate; the glory of God is ultimate.”⁷ This type of thinking can be found in the *Baptist Faith and Message* as well. It describes the central figure of the Bible as Christ, but it also declares that its central goal is “God supreme in a redeemed universe.”⁸

Third, God-centered preaching follows Jesus’s preaching model.

E. Weaknesses/Dangers

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⁶ Kenneth J. Langley, “Response to Bryan Chapell,” in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*, 35.

⁷ Langley, “Theocentric View,” in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 89.

⁸ Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, 22.

2. Pneumatological Preaching

A. Proponents

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B. Definition

Pneumatological preaching emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role in preaching. Various positions of Pneumatological preaching include Spirit-centered and Spirit-empowered preaching.

C. Description

- *First, proponents of Pneumatological preaching suggest that the Spirit is often neglected in contemporary views of preaching.*
- *Second, some proponents of Spirit-centered preaching say that this form of preaching requires Christ-centeredness as its prerequisite.*

D. Strengths

- *First, Pneumatological preaching reminds us to expect God to work*
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- *Second, Pneumatological preaching recognizes the Spirit's involvement with Scripture.*

John Piper says, "The chief and ultimate aims of preaching are impossible apart from the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. Without his supernatural work, neither the preacher nor the people can see or savor the beauty and worth of God."⁹

- *Third, Pneumatological preaching acknowledges the significant work that the Spirit performs in preaching.*

E. Weaknesses/Dangers

- *First, just because the Spirit is involved with preaching does not mean that we should center or focus all sermons on Him.*
- *Second, Spirit-centered preaching can be guilty of forcing the Spirit into Biblical texts not meant to emphasize His ministry.*
- *Third, proponents of Pneumatological preaching sometimes lack clarity regarding the definition and use of important terms (e.g., filling, anointing, unction, etc.).*

⁹ John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*, 105.

SESSION 3

TEXT-DRIVEN, DOXOLOGICAL PREACHING A SUGGESTION

Perhaps, a somewhat different approach is called for. In our final moments together, I suggest that text-driven, doxological preaching is the best approach.

1. Preaching that is Text-Driven

A. Proponents

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B. Definition

Text-driven preaching is preaching that follows and emphasizes the contours of the Biblical passage.

C. Description

- *First, the outlines of text-driven sermons follow the contours of the Biblical passage.* R. Scott Pace writes, “The form of the passage should serve as the blueprint for our sermon construction. In other words, the structure of the sermon should mirror the literary structure of the passage.”¹⁰ Gallaty and Smith agree, “Ideally, a text-driven sermon’s shape is based on the substance, structure, and spirit of the text.”¹¹ Later, they write, “For the rest of [our lives], how to structure a sermon will always be a secondary question. The primary question is always, how is the text structured?”¹²
- *Second, the aim of text-driven sermons coheres to the author’s original aim.*
- *Third, the presentation of text-driven sermons is sensitive to the genre and tone of the text being preached.*

¹⁰ R. Scott Pace, *Preaching by the Book*, 11, 56.

¹¹ Robby Gallaty and Steven W. Smith, *Preaching for the Rest of Us: Essentials for Text-Driven Preaching*, 28.

¹² Gallaty and Smith, *Preaching for the Rest of Us*, 30.

- *Fourth, text-driven sermons require the preacher’s fundamental commitment to a text-driven life and ministry.* In other words, text-driven sermons aren’t produced by accident. Gallaty and Smith write, “The preacher commits to stay in the chair until the Word is clear, and as a result, the Word changes him.... At that point the pastor is leading the church from the study, from his willingness to stay in the seat until he knows what the text means.”¹³

D. Strengths

- *First, text-driven sermons fill the preacher with both seriousness and confidence.*
- *Second, text-driven preaching demonstrates the preacher’s belief in the ability of God’s unfailing Word.*
- *Third, text-driven preaching frees preachers from the pressure to manufacture sermons built on personal charisma or slick presentations.*

E. Weaknesses/Dangers

Preachers who poorly preach text-driven sermons might demonstrate the following issues:

- *First, proponents of text-driven preaching occasionally produce sermons that are more like running commentaries on verses of scripture than sermons intended to build the church.*
- *Second, proponents of text-driven preaching may put undue emphasis on subsidiary points made by the biblical author.*
- *Third, proponents of text-driven preaching sometimes moralize Old Testament texts by making direct application to new covenant believers without mentioning the gospel or the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.*

¹³ Gallaty and Smith, *Preaching for the Rest of Us*, xiv.

2. Preaching that is Trinitarian & Doxological

Regarding the goal and object of our preaching-

- Preaching is _____ God and _____ God.
- Emphasizing only a Christological, or a Theological, or a Pneumatological view is too narrow.
- My trinitarian suggestion is _____ than Christological, Theological, or Pneumatological views by themselves.

Preaching is for God and about God!

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