

# WHEN CHRIST REPLACES GOD AT THE CENTER OF PREACHING

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## ABSTRACT

Putting Christ, rather than God at the center of preaching may lead to unintended consequences in theology, homiletics, and church life. It's enough—it's better—for biblical preachers to be theocentric. Making God central in preaching achieves the worthy aims of Christocentric preaching without the risks discussed in this essay.

## INTRODUCTION

The title of my paper is admittedly provocative. Among the colleagues for whom I write are many who advocate “Christ-centered preaching.” None of them want to see Christ “replace” God in our pulpits.

But I wonder if a Christocentric homiletic might be in danger of doing just that, with negative consequences for theology proper, the gospel, hermeneutics, sermons, and church life. The thoughtful advocates of Christ-centered preaching with whom I interact in this paper make a sophisticated case for a hermeneutical-homiletical philosophy with which I agree more than disagree. But I'm concerned that their students and readers may miss some of the subtleties of their argument and that the people in the pew who listen to sermons shaped by a less careful Christocentric homiletic may:

1. fail to honor God the Father as he deserves to be honored
2. misunderstand the gospel
3. learn an inaccurate way of interpreting Scripture
4. grow bored with sermons that all seem to say the same thing
5. practice a privatized or Jesus-only pop spirituality.

Even the nuanced Christocentric approaches of scholars like Sidney Greidanus, Bryan Chapell, Graeme Goldsworthy, and Edmund Clowney are not immune to some of these problems.

Before discussing these concerns, we need to begin by defining “Christ-centered preaching.” This is not so easy as might be supposed. Some authors use “theocentric” and “Christocentric” as virtually synonymous, even though they're not.<sup>1</sup> Some writers alternate between “redemptive-historical preaching” and “Christ-centered preaching,” even though the

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Greidanus notes that “Christocentric preaching is more than theocentric preaching” (Greidanus, 1988, p.118), and the unpacking of that word “more” is the burden of much of his scholarly effort.

former could just as well be construed as “God-centered.” At the beginning of his book on the subject, Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “Throughout the ages Christian preachers have struggled with the question of the centrality of Christ and how this affects the way we handle the text of the Bible” (Goldsworthy, p.2) Sidney Greidanus adds, “Strange as it may seem, we are not at all clear on what it means to ‘preach Christ’” (Greidanus, 1999, p.3).

But Greidanus has done as good a job as any at thinking himself clear on this issue, as may be seen is his careful definition of “preaching Christ”:

“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” (Greidanus, 1999, p.10).

By “authentically,” Greidanus signals that he does not want to shoe-horn Jesus into texts in an artificial or allegorizing fashion. By the phrase “integrate . . .” he shows that he doesn’t want to replace the original meaning of the text with a Christological interpretation but do justice to both. By including “teaching” in the mix, he expands the possibilities for preaching Christ: we’re not limited to our Lord’s passion when we preach Christologically. Greidanus is a thoughtful scholar, and his definition tries to rule out some of the sloppy and far-fetched attempts at preaching Christ all too common in church history.

Greidanus will be my primary debate partner in this paper because of the care he has put into this definition and his unpacking of it in several books. I don’t want to attack a straw man, but interact with thoughtful articulations of Christ-centered preaching.

One thing that’s not clear from Greidanus’s definition as it stands is whether *all* preaching should preach Christ, whether *every* sermon ought to be Christ-centered. Should his definition say, “preaching *only* 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”?

Frequent statements in the literature claim that *all* preaching must be Christ-centered: “Jesus Christ must be at the heart of every sermon you preach” (Adams, p.147); and “Until you have found [Christ] in your preaching portion, you are not ready to preach (ibid., p.152). “Can I preach this sermon . . . without mentioning Jesus? The simple answer . . . is a resounding ‘NO!’” (Goldsworthy, p.122) “Why would you even want to try to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?” Every sermon should “expound something of the glories of Christ” (ibid., p.115). “There is always a way to Christ and to his cross from every passage in the Old Testament” (Duncan, p.47). “One hears sermons,” Clowney laments, “in which the name of Christ is not named” (Clowney, p.74). He believes that we “who would preach the Word must preach Christ” (p.75). According to Bryan Chapell, “Paul . . . was always preaching about the person and work of Jesus. This must be the goal of expository preaching” (Chapell, p. 80). “We cannot faithfully expound any text without demonstrating its relation to [Christ]” (ibid., p.279). Christ-centered preaching seeks to disclose “. . . where *every* text stands in relation to Christ” and “to show how *each* text manifests God’s grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ” (ibid., emphasis added; see, too, p.275).

Greidanus quotes with approval M. Reu: “It is necessary that the sermon be Christocentric;” and T. Hoekstra: “A sermon without Christ is no sermon;” and James Stewart: “In every sermon Christ is to be preached” (Greidanus, 1999, p.2). Greidanus says he used to think that with some texts preachers would have to be satisfied with the broader category of *God*-centered preaching, but he now believes preaching should be explicitly Christ-centered (ibid., pp.36-37).

If it were not for this insistence that *every* sermon be Christ-centered, I’d have far less disagreement with those who advocate Christocentric preaching. I’d still argue that theocentric preaching embraces a broader and therefore more adequate theological vision. I’d still argue that Christ may be appropriately exalted in the worship service and other dimensions of church life even if the sermon on a given week does not center on him. But I agree that many sermons by the Christian preacher can and should naturally focus on Jesus Christ. The week-in, week-out pulpit work of the pastor will frequently—even when preaching the Old Testament—point to Christ. Greidanus is right that “many roads lead from the Old Testament to Christ” (1999, p.203). His description of these roads (pp.203-225) are helpful and some of his sample expositions of how he himself takes them (Greidanus, 2007) are quite effective. But insisting that *every* sermon be Christ-centered exacerbates the concerns I discuss in this paper. To those concerns I now turn.

### **CONSEQUENCES FOR THEOLOGY PROPER**

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently result in preachers and listeners failing to honor God the Father as he ought to be honored.

Fred Craddock bluntly writes:

Some in the Christian community seem content to supplant theology with Christology, but perhaps unaware of the immense price: the dislodging of Christ from salvation history, the loss of continuity with Israel’s faith, the separation of creation from redemption (opening the door to every other-worldly heresy hovering around the church), and the reduction of the first item of the Christian creed to the role of preface. (Craddock, 1996, p.75)

Think about that last phrase. “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” as mere preface? The long, wonderful story of God’s dealings with Adam and Abraham and Sarah and Moses and David and the prophets, and all the rich theology in that narrative as *preface*? Unthinkable. But to listen to all the Jesus talk and Jesus prayers and Jesus songs in some churches, you might think that Jesus’ Father, whom he came to exalt, can be taken for granted. Or that the Jesus story does not need to be set in a longer story of God’s dealings with Israel. Or that faith in Jesus has replaced faith in God. Or that when we confess Jesus as God everyone knows what we mean by “God.” Or that if our *Christology* is lofty enough and fervent enough *theology* is dispensable.

I'm sure that EHS colleagues who advocate Christ-centered preaching have no intention of shrinking our theology of and reverence for God the Father. They want preaching to be both God-glorifying and Christ-exalting. They may agree with R.B Kuiper that since “. . . Christ is God manifest in the flesh, the terms Christocentric preaching and theocentric preaching are interchangeable" (Clawson, 2008). Greidanus, who would not go quite that far, argues however that “Christ-centered preaching is to be God-centered” (Greidanus, 1999, p.178; see, too, his comments on theocentric interpretation, pp.230, 286). Clowney, too, wants preaching to be both theocentric and Christocentric (Clowney, p.75). These scholars don't want to marginalize God any more than I want to marginalize Christ. They're not sanguine about incipient Marcionism in our pews. What we differ on is a matter of emphasis. But that does not mean our difference is unimportant. I think it's fair to ask, “What did Christ himself emphasize?”

Mark says that our Lord began his public ministry “proclaiming the good news of God.” (Mark 1:14) Jesus' preaching was concerned with the reign of God (1:15), the will of God (3:34), the “things” of God (8:33), faith in God (11:22), and the love of God (12:30). His parables were mostly about the kingdom of God – God's gracious, powerful, already/not yet kingship, a kingship now “near” in the person of his Son.

Though the phrase “the good news of God” does not appear in Matthew or Luke, these evangelists, too, witness to the God-centeredness of Jesus' preaching. Matthew's summary of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is so theocentric, so Father-centric, it might be summed up in words J.I. Packer used of the climax of revelation: “You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in single phrase if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator” (Packer, 1973, p.182). True, Jesus preached with unprecedented personal authority (Matt. 7:28-29). True, he sometimes spoke with staggering confidence in his unique personhood and calling—anyone who could say “All things have been committed to me” (Matt. 11:27) should have “been committed” unless he was who he claimed to be. But his whole statement was “All things have been committed to me by my Father.” As Son, he was uniquely qualified to reveal spiritual truth in his preaching, but it was the Father he sought to reveal (still Matt. 11:27).

Luke's Jesus taught that those who are rightly related to him are those and only those who listen to God and obey him (Luke 8:21; 11:27-28). He commissioned his followers to preach the kingdom of God (9:2, 60; 10:9), and did so himself. The kingdom of God was unquestionably the dominant theme of his proclamation (Matt 4:17; Lk 4:43).<sup>2</sup>

The kingdom of God is not a prominent theme in John (appearing only in 3:3,5 and twice in 18:36), but the fourth gospel is if anything more theocentric than the synoptics. Everything Jesus says and does he says and does to glorify the Father (5:19; 10:37; 12:28, 49-50; 14:13). He comes from the Father (1:14), returns to the Father (20:17), reveals the Father (1:18), obeys the Father (5:36), and speaks only what the Father tells him (8:38). John's Christology

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<sup>2</sup> It's also in Luke's gospel that we find two of the dominical sayings most supportive of Christ-centered preaching, Luke 24:27,44. But in these post-resurrection scenes, as in John 5:39, Jesus does not say that every line of every verse of every pericope is about him; he says that the Scriptures and every part of the Scriptures (law, prophets, and writings) testifies of him.

is arguably the “highest” of the four gospels, but no one is clearer than John that the Son is subject to the Father and lives to make him known. If this is the burden of our Lord himself and the evangelists who told his story, should it not be ours as well?

When it comes to the rest of the New Testament, Bultmann thought “the proclaimer became the proclaimed,” which Craddock paraphrases, “This is to say Jesus came preaching God but the early church preached Jesus Christ” (Craddock, 75). But in Acts and the epistles, it is still God who creates, calls, redeems, sanctifies, guides, gives, commands, empowers, and promises. It is God who sent Christ and God who will send Christ again at the end of history. Robert Brawley pays close attention to the verbs in Luke-Acts and concludes that God is the main actor; the narrative is thoroughly theocentric (Brawley, p.29).

James preached a God-centered message, in fact, it was so God-centered, and with so little that’s explicitly about Christ and justification, Luther was displeased with it. Peter’s epistle to “God’s elect” (1 Pet. 1:1) is all about God choosing (1:2) regenerating (1:3), and shielding (1:5) God’s people (2:10). Peter’s theocentric language continues throughout the epistle. The last book of the Bible is probably “the revelation of Jesus Christ” in the sense that God gave it *to* Christ to show his servants (Rev.1:1); the content of Revelation is manifestly about God from start to finish.

Even Paul, whose life was so thoroughly revolutionized when he was apprehended by Christ, nonetheless casts a broader theological vision than Jesus only. He sees redemptive history moving from the creation of the world when God’s eternal power and divine nature were clearly seen (Rom. 1:20) toward a consummation in which the Son hands over the kingdom to his Father, and the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:24, 28). The drama of the Bible, for Paul, begins and ends with God.

True, Paul resolved to know nothing among the Corinthians but “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), but this message, he says in the preceding sentence, was a “testimony about God” (verse 1). And *why* did Christ willingly endure crucifixion in obedience to his Father’s plan (Gal. 1:3-4)? Peter put it this way: “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous *that he might bring us to God*” (1 Peter 3:18). John Piper forcefully unpacks this verse, showing that justification and forgiveness and peace and all the rest that comes to those who trust God’s appointed Savior are wonderful gospel *benefits*, but that God himself is the gospel. “*God is the gospel.*” What makes the gospel good news is that in Christ God has removed all obstacles to our glorifying and enjoying him forever (Piper, 2005).

The God-centeredness of prophets and apostles and Jesus himself is reason enough to be God-centered in preaching. Why should we think it insufficient or sub-Christian to say, like the prophets, “Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9), or like the apostles to be “set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1), or like Jesus to proclaim “the good news of God” (Mark 1:14)? What could be more Christ-exalting than to imitate Christ’s own thoroughgoing God-centeredness?

Paul Scott Wilson urges preachers to make God the subject of the “sermon-in-a-sentence” and to make sure that the verb in this sentence is an activity of God (Wilson, 1995, p.150): “God sheds light,” “God knows what you’re going through,” and so on. Does this mean that God *the Father* is the only one who can act in these sermon sentences? No. Elsewhere Wilson urges preachers to ask of every passage, “What is God (in one of the person of the Trinity) doing in this biblical text?” (Wilson, 2001, p.69) So *some* sermons will be Christ-centered: “Christ is the end of the law,” “Jesus never fails,” “Christ commands us to make disciples,” and so on. If the second person of the Trinity is the main actor in the text, then he’ll appear as the subject of the sermon’s focus sentence and that sermon will be Christocentric. Other sermons will highlight the role of the third person of the Trinity: “The Spirit makes diverse groups one,” “The Spirit empowers every believer for service,” and so on. Some sermons will not specify one person of the Trinity. Wilson’s prescription for theological exegesis allows for many Christocentric sermons in the context of a theocentric pulpit ministry.

A woman who visited our church several years ago said on her way out, “It was nice to hear a sermon about God.” I thought at first that she meant she was fed up with all the man-centered preaching out there nowadays, but she explained, “Everywhere I go I hear preachers talking about Jesus, but not too many talk about God.” That should not be. Christian theology is not “consumed without remainder in Christology” (Craddock, 1996, p.75).

### **CONSEQUENCES FOR THE GOSPEL**

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently result in preachers and listeners distorting the gospel.

Although Christian ministers are called “preachers of the gospel,” we do, in fact, preach more than the gospel, unless “gospel” is defined so broadly as to include anything and everything biblical. Going by Paul’s concise definition of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:1-5 – Christ died, Christ was raised – most of us would acknowledge that our pulpit work is not restricted to these two gospel events. We preach about money and marriage, parenting and politics, gossip and gluttony, sex and sloth and a host of other subjects. All these subjects are, of course, preached after Good Friday and Easter; we do not – or should not – preach “be good, do good” sermons, oblivious to the redemptive initiative of God-in-Christ that precedes all our being and doing. But the themes of preaching are larger than crucifixion and resurrection. The same apostle who wrote “We preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23), could also say “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27).

What did this “whole counsel of God” include? What did Paul cover during his two years in Ephesus? “Anything that would be helpful to you,” he said (Acts 20:20). Presumably, Paul’s ministry with this congregation included creation themes as well as redemption themes, wisdom literature as well as Messianic prophecy, *didache* and *paraklesis* as well as *kerygma*.

But even if all Christian preaching is gospel preaching, that is, even if “gospel” is an apt label for the content of every truly Christian sermon, whatever its text or topic, the gospel we preach is the gospel of *God* (Mark 1:14; Rom.1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:8-9; 1 Peter

4:17). God is its source and subject. God is our Savior (1 Tim.1:1, 2:3, 4:10; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Titus 1:3, 2:10, 3:4; Jude 25). It is God's grace that brings salvation (Titus 2:11). How confident are we that people in the pew understand this?

This vital truth may be lost when preaching inadvertently sets Father and Son over against one another in the gospel story. Though no pastor would ever knowingly encourage such a perverted notion, some people imagine a drama of salvation in which Jesus and God are on opposite sides. The Father – harsh, demanding, and wrathful – is intent on judging us. But Jesus – kind, compassionate, and merciful – comes to the rescue and offers himself as a sacrifice in our stead. Who could blame anyone who thinks that *this* is the gospel for loving Jesus but shrinking from God?

I want to stress the word “inadvertently” in the opening sentence of this section: “Christocentric preaching may *inadvertently* result in preachers and listeners distorting the gospel.” Distortion of the gospel is such a serious matter, I want to be very clear that I do not think responsible advocates of Christ-centered preaching do this. I am, however, concerned that some of their disciples – some less careful preachers – and their congregants may not pick up on the nuances of their Christocentric homiletic. Exalting Christ as the center of gospel preaching may inadvertently diminish the Father's role and the Father's glory. Explicitly exalting God as the center of gospel preaching should minimize the distortion in listeners' minds.

But perhaps we should be God-centered when preaching the gospel from the Old Testament and Christ-centered when preaching from the New? Maybe if we're trying to respect the progress of revelation in our pulpit work we'll agree that in the Old Testament and the gospels God is central in the story of redemption. But turning to the rest of the New Testament, it may appear that the message about God has been replaced with a message about Christ (Mounce, 1960, p.52). Compared with Jesus, the apostles seldom use his kingdom of God language; they talk about eternal life, the cross, resurrection, and life “in” Christ. P.T. Forsyth put it this way: “The Gospel of Christ replaced the Gospel of the Kingdom, because by his death he became the kingdom” (Mounce, p.52). But is this really the case?

Space does not permit a discussion of the reasons for the change from kingdom terminology to the more varied (and more Gentile-friendly?) gospel vocabulary we find in the epistles. But two things should be noted: no apostle imagined that he was preaching a different gospel than the one Jesus preached. The rubrics may have differed, and of course the cross and the empty tomb colored everything, but the core content was the same. And in any case, the shift in terminology is relative, not absolute. The kingdom of God has not been forgotten in Acts and the epistles! At the end of Paul's career – at least as far as Luke takes us – he is still preaching the kingdom (Acts 28:31).

In the very next verse in our canon, Romans 1:1, Paul states that his gospel is the gospel of God (Romans 1:1). Though it's also called the gospel of his Son (1:9) and the gospel of Christ (15:19), the gospel “is not a message which broke *de novo* upon the world with the appearing of Christ and the ministry of the apostles” (Murray, 1959, p.3); it is the gospel God had promised beforehand in the Scriptures (1:2; cf. Titus 1:2). Unfortunately, some Christians

who have heard a lot of Jesus talk without a context in theology, may experience something like movie-goers coming late into a film, having missed essential information (Craddock, 1996, p.74).

The gospel in Romans is the power of God for salvation (1:16). In it a righteousness from God is made known, to which the law and prophets had testified (3:21). God presents Christ as an atoning sacrifice (3:25), God credits righteousness (4:24), God demonstrates his love (5:8), God foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies (8:29-30). People who set Father and Son against each other in the drama of salvation do not understand Paul's gospel, wherein God, no less than Christ, is *for* us, not sparing his Son, but delivering him up for us all (8:31-32). "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!" (11:33,36)

So this letter to the Romans, where the church has found its clearest exposition of the gospel, is manifestly about God. "*God* is the most important word in this epistle" (Morris, 1988, p.40). In view of the God-saturated content of Romans, it seems pointless to ask whether the genitive in 1:1 means "about" God or "from" God. It's both (Craddock, p.73; Murray, p.3; and Goldsworthy, p.82).

What we see in Romans we see elsewhere in the epistles. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). God made the sinless Christ to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor.5:21). Christian conversion is turning to God (Gal. 4:8-9; 1 Thess. 1:8-9). God elects and adopts (Ephesians 1); God makes the gospel take root and grow in the human heart (1 Cor.3:6); God regenerates (Col.2:13); God works in us to will and to do his good pleasure (Phil.2:13). Again and again we're told that the gospel is good news of God's love: "When the kindness and love of God appeared, he saved us . . . because of his mercy" (Titus 5:5). The community of love and grace that results from the gospel is called the church of God (1 Cor. 1:2, 10:32, 11:22, 15:9; 2 Cor.1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim.3:5). James Dunn is surely right: "The Christian gospel has to do first and last and foremost with God (Greidanus, 1999, p.180).

Presumably, most Christ-centered preachers know this. But do those who listen to them preach know this? Greidanus clearly sets the Jesus story in the one story the Bible tells about God, going so far as to say, "Christocentric preaching is theocentric preaching" (Greidanus, 1992, p.628). He warns against "Christomonism," in which ". . . for the people in the pew the essential gospel, the revelation and redemptive act of God in Christ has been all but lost. To 'accept Christ as my personal Saviour' apparently has little or nothing to do with God" (citing Edmund Steimle; Greidanus, 1999, p.178). No doubt Greidanus avoids such a distortion of the biblical gospel in his preaching. But he recognizes it as a real possibility. The distinction between Christomonism, which he criticizes, and Christocentrism, which he advocates, or between Christocentric preaching, which he advocates, and "Jesuscentric preaching," which he does not (Greidanus, 1988, p.118) is pretty subtle, and I do not have much confidence in the average listener's ability (or even some homiletics students' ability) to recognize such subtle differences.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nor am I convinced that replacing "Christocentric" with "Christotelic," a term advocated by Peter Enns in a *Westminster Theological Journal* article, gains us much (*WTJ*, 65 [2003], p.277..



Every preacher has had plenty of experience being misunderstood, even when we're not being subtle. If there's any chance my listeners might get the wrong idea that Jesus is the hero of a story in which God plays the heavy, or that the Father created a problem that the Son had to solve, or that we can come into the movie two thirds of the way through without missing something essential, then I want to bend over backwards to make it clear that the gospel is the gospel of God. I'll make God the main actor. I'll make him the subject of many of the gospel sermon's sentences. 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! Amen (Eph. 3:21).

### CONSEQUENCES FOR HERMENEUTICS

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently teach listeners to interpret the Bible incorrectly.

Lay people learn hermeneutics from their pastors' preaching. Whether we like it or not, they learn how to interpret Scripture from how we handle Scripture in the pulpit. So what do we teach listeners about hermeneutics when Jesus makes a surprise appearance in a sermon from Proverbs? When it turns out Song of Solomon is not really about God's gift of married sex but about Christ's love for his church? When redemption trumps creation as the theological underpinning of every sermon? When Old Testament texts (and some in the New for that matter) are not handled with integrity because the preacher follows Spurgeon's dictum, "make a bee-line to the cross" every Sunday? Christocentric preaching may inadvertently train people to look past what's plainly there in the text and to look instead for a reference to Christ that may or may not be there.

Greidanus, for one, would argue that we don't look for Christ "instead of" what's there in the text, but both/and – a referent close to the original audience *and* a focus on Christ, authentically integrated (Greidanus, 1999, p.228). And certainly there are many texts where this is easy to do: typological texts, texts that offer grace we experience most fully in Christ, texts that express hopes that will only be fully and finally realized in Christ, promises, prophecies, Messianic Psalms, foreshadowing, analogies. Greidanus proposes seven possible "roads" from an Old Testament text to Christ (1999, pp.203-225), each of which could work well with some texts.

But I'm afraid that all too often the plain meaning and burden of a text is nudged aside to make room for a Christocentric reading. A few examples:

- M.R. DeHann takes Adam's sleeping while God makes him a wife as an allegory of Christ's "sleeping" in the tomb to get a bride for himself (Greidanus, 2007, pp.9-10).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Greidanus cites other examples of sincere but flawed efforts to preach Christ. So it's possible (and Greidanus models it as well as anyone) to advocate Christ-centered preaching and to avoid some of the more egregious abuses of that hermeneutic. But, as I will say more than once in this paper, the unnecessary perceived need to preach Christ in every sermon from every text will almost inevitable lead to the kinds of faulty sermons Greidanus eschews. And I think he, too, sometimes slips into forced connections between texts and Christ.

- Edmund Clowney takes the story of David dancing before the ark as prefiguring the ascension of Christ (Clowney, p.81)
- One exposition of Psalm 72 (which is a prayer for good government) says nothing whatsoever about the poem's aspirations for Israel's kings, or how this text might relate to our own time or speak to our hope that leaders will govern in righteousness and justice. The psalm is taken to refer solely to Messiah's reign. Granted, the ideals of Psalm 72 have never been perfectly realized by any human government, so a forward look to Christ's perfect government might be a natural move for concluding a sermon on this text. But to make it all and only about Christ is to misconstrue the text.<sup>5</sup>

Spurgeon's sermons provide dozens of additional examples. Much as I enjoy reading Spurgeon – and as a preacher I have plenty to learn from him – I would not want my people to learn hermeneutics from his sermons! He'll do anything to get to Christ (Greidanus, 1999, pp.153-54) and often fails to do justice to the literal sense of a text, using it as a springboard for a sermon on Christ and salvation (ibid., p.160).

Greidanus is a much more careful exegete than some (including Spurgeon) who share his commitment to Christocentric hermeneutics. But even some of his interpretive moves, propelled by a desire to preach Christ in every text, are questionable. In *Preaching Christ from Genesis* he:

- suggests as a possible road from the tower of Babel story to Christ, the analogy of Christ building his church (2007, pp. 127-128).
- finds in the acquisition of a burial plot for Sarah an analogy to Christ's preparing a place for us (p.219).
- proposes a redemptive-historical path from the story of Rebecca's willingness to leave her family to be Isaac's bride to Mary's submission to God's will in the nativity narrative (p.234).

These homiletical connections seem strained. Most of Greidanus's moves from Genesis to Christ are fine. And perhaps in a number of his less persuasive suggestions he's just "thinking out loud" about possibilities (some of which he himself does not take in the expositions that follow). But a preacher following his lead down some of these paths to Christ would, I'm afraid, model a strained way of interpreting biblical narratives. Granting the difficulty of applying many Old Testament narratives to twenty-first century Christians, and granting that the gap must be bridged theologically, I agree with Abraham Kuruvilla in his review of *Preaching Christ from Genesis* that Christology is not a sufficient base from which to work on every text. "May not one discern a level of theology that is more specific for, and closer to, the textual details? And could not one make the move to application from *that* theological locus, rather than aiming for a broad and general Christocentric theological approach that does not appear to be driven by the specifics of the text?" (Kuruvilla, p.138)

Sometimes Christ-centered preachers include a reference to Christ that's not forced, but isn't strictly necessary either. Clowney, for example, sketches an exposition of the David and

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin thought that those who saw only a reference to Christ's kingdom in Psalm 72 did violence to the language of the text (Greidanus, 1999, p.138).

Goliath story that includes a brief move toward Christ that doesn't seem forced or artificial. But neither does it add all that much to the sermon (Clowney, p.82-84). Clowney's précis keeps the focus on God instead of on David's bravery or our ability to slay giants. God is seen to be at work in this text, replacing faithless Saul with a man after his own heart who will show the watching world that there is a God in Israel. It seems to me that this is a rich, theologically faithful sermon-in-the-making, and that nothing essential is lost if we do not take the further step Clowney takes of making David prophetic of his Greater Son. I disagree that "It is impossible not to see Christ in this passage" (p.83).

Augustine felt compelled to interpret Scripture figuratively and allegorically because he was convinced every passage is about Christ (Wilson, 2001, p.130). And for centuries Christian preachers followed his allegorizing lead. But then the Reformation came, rediscovering (we might say it came *because* of the rediscovery) the plain sense of Scripture. Though Goldsworthy may be partly right that Christ-centered interpretation was a feature of the Reformation period (p.85), it's interesting that John Calvin was satisfied to preach *God* from the Bible, and thought that some who preached Christ from every text, while meaning well, could do so only by doing violence to the plain language of the Bible (Greidanus, 1999, pp.137-138). Calvin did not think that even Job's confession, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" required reference to Christ; it was the living God with whom Job had to do, and it was this God who would redeem him and, in some way Job could only dimly guess, raise him. Some Lutherans criticized Calvin's insistence on the plain meaning of the text. One even called him "Calvin the Judaizer" because when he preached from the Old Testament he sometimes seemed to be saying no more than a devout Jew would say on the same text (Greidanus, 1999, p.139).

Calvin's critics anticipated Jay Adams: "If you preach a sermon that would be acceptable to the member of a Jewish synagogue . . . there is something radically wrong with it" (Adams, 1982, p.147). I've read a number of Calvin's sermons on the Psalms and there is nothing "radically wrong" with them, even though he feels no obligation to center on Christ if the psalm under consideration is not plainly Christological. Calvin is so thoroughly God-entranced and so pastorally insightful, these expositions still nourish the soul of the Christian who cares to read them.

People have a right to expect that a sermon will say what the Bible says, and no evangelical preacher would disagree. But if we import Christology into texts, do we not unintentionally communicate that texts are pretexts for talking about something else? Even if this something else is Christ – the noblest subject conceivable – have we not compromised our commitment to listeners that we will say what the text before us says?

### **CONSEQUENCES FOR PREACHING**

This entire essay is about the "consequences for preaching" when Christ replaces God at the center of preaching. What I mean in this section, more specifically, is that Christocentric preaching may inadvertently bore listeners because every sermon seems to say the same thing.

I grew up in a church that issued an evangelistic invitation at the end of every sermon, every Sunday morning and every Sunday evening. Even as a youngster I sensed that something was wrong with this practice. The abrupt shift from whatever it was the preacher had been talking about to talking about the cross was not rescued by saying, “I’ve been addressing Christians in this sermon, but if you’re not a Christian, you probably won’t understand much of it; you need to know Christ first. So here’s what I want you to do while the choir sings, ‘Just as I Am’ . . . .” Every sermon ended up saying the same thing.

Should our pulpit ministry be evangelistic? Absolutely. Should our preaching lead people to the cross? Of course. Does this mean that every sermon should be evangelistic in the sense that Christ’s substitutionary death and the call to repentant faith must be heralded no matter what the text or topic? No. A sermon on Psalm 150, an exuberant burst of praise, does not require a “fallen condition focus” and a turn to Christ as the sinner’s only hope. Preaching on the Proverbs 31 woman, or gender roles in the Garden of Eden, or the subtle providence of God in the story of Ruth, and then “making a bee-line to the cross” has a false feel to it.

Chapell faults a sermon he heard for tacking on an evangelistic invitation rather than developing the redemptive message out of the text (Chapell, p.281). But maybe there wasn’t an explicitly redemptive message in that text and the problem is that Christ-centered preaching insists that there *must* be. I’m not sure why there must be, why redemption has to be the theme of every sermon or why we must “. . . place every text within a redemptive context” (Chapell, p.284), or why God’s redemptive purpose must be the one aspect of his character that shapes every sermon.

Chapell writes, “Because everything that was written is the self-revelation of the God whose mercy endures forever (Ps.136) and in whom there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17), all Scripture possesses an aspect of redemptive hope” (Chapell, p.285). The inference is that every sermon on every text must therefore expound this redemptive hope. But one could just as cogently argue that “Because everything that was written is the self-revelation of the God who is angry with sinners every day (Ps.7) and in whom there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17), all Scripture possesses an aspect of wrath,” and infer that every sermon should therefore expound judgment. Or that because God’s kingdom endures forever, every text possesses a kingdom focus and so the kingdom should be expounded in every sermon. Redemption is obviously a prominent unifying theme in Scripture, but so is the establishment of the kingdom of God, and so are sovereignty, and holiness, and the self-revelation of the infinite-personal God through his Word. Why should redemption be the privileged theme that governs every sermon? If any one thing about God ought to be *the* theological underpinning of our preaching, it is God’s passion for his glory. Jonathan Edwards (“The End for Which God Created the World”) convincingly demonstrates from Scripture that everything else – including the redemption of Israel and the church – is penultimate.

Of course, Christ-centered preaching need not be cross-centered preaching.<sup>6</sup> As noted above, Greidanus includes the whole of Jesus’ earthly ministry, including his teaching, as well as the

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<sup>6</sup> Though for Chapell, at least, the two may be synonymous. Commenting on Paul’s commitment to know nothing “except Jesus Christ and him crucified,” Chapell takes the cross as synecdoche standing for all of God’s redemptive work in Christ (p.278).

pre-existence of the Logos in his vision of what it means to preach Christ. The preacher is not “required to land with an acrobatic leap at Golgotha in order to make the text and the sermon Christocentric” (Greidanus, 1970, p.145). But my main point is not significantly affected by this distinction: a philosophy of preaching in which every sermon must make an explicit move toward Christ—whether that means his cross or not—is likely to produce a lot of sermons that sound the same.

This has often been a criticism of redemptive-historical preaching—preaching in which the grand sweep of biblical narrative and its climax in Christ governs the sermon.<sup>7</sup> The redemptive-historical preacher does not preach texts, he preaches the gospel from texts. Every sermon tells the story of what God in Christ is doing—doing *redemptively*—in history. “Ten thousand thousand are their texts, but all their sermons one!” The quip might better fit clumsy preachers than those who can skillfully move from almost any subject to Christ; but even a seasoned preacher like Greidanus, whom Chapell calls “the dean of redemptive preaching and its finest scholar” (Chapell, p.13), cannot entirely avoid sounding much the same from one Christ-centered sermon to the next. In his review of *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, Kuruvilla notes how many of Greidanus’s sermon goals are virtually identical, and notes that a preacher following Greidanus’s lead “. . . is in danger of being trapped in tedious repetition” (Kuruvilla, p.139). I concur with the reviewer that the theology of the Genesis pericopes (and any biblical text) needs to be identified with more adequate specificity.<sup>8</sup> There’s more to theology than Christology.

Why not let each text speak its own distinctive word, and let Christology and soteriology find their place—a preeminent place, to be sure!—in the week-in and week-out pulpit work of many months and years? Or in the other elements of the worship service of which the sermon is a part? Insisting that every text, even a text on, say, environmental stewardship or just war, be Christ-centered “. . . puts the preacher in quite a homiletical stretch, and an unnecessary one. God as creator is the firm and natural ground for such appeals, relieving the sermon of non sequiturs and awkward throat clearings” (Craddock, p.79).

Bryan Chapell quotes with approval Spurgeon’s advice to a beginning preacher:

Don’t you know, young man, that from every town and every village and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London? . . . So from every text in Scripture there is a road toward the great metropolis, Christ. And my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, now what is the road to Christ? . . . I have never found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if ever I do find one . . . I will go over hedge and ditch

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<sup>7</sup> “Redemptive-historical preaching” and “Christ-centered preaching” seem at times to be virtually synonymous. Greidanus speaks of the “redemptive-historical Christocentric method” (2007, p.xii). Chapell speaks of “redemptive essentials (i.e., Christ-centeredness)” (p.275; see, too, pp.288, 307, 310-311) and says that preachers must identify a “fallen condition focus” (what’s wrong, that Christ came to make right) in every passage of Scripture; then the sermon will “show how each text manifests God’s grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ” (p.279).

<sup>8</sup> I also concur with Kuruvilla that despite reservations about Greidanus’s hermeneutical method, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* is a gold mine for preachers.

but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it (Chapell, 288).<sup>9</sup>

Let me tweak Spurgeon's metaphor and then critique his use of it. Rather than saying that every text of Scripture *has* a road to Christ, I'd say that every text *is* somewhere on the road to Christ. But why should a preacher feel he has to make the same trip all the way to the end of the road every Sunday? Is it not enough to go a mile or two? Why not take time to observe the delights by every hedge and ditch? Delights placed there by God himself! These may be missed if the preacher is always saying, "Don't look too closely, we have a destination (the cross) and a deadline (we have to get there before noon today)."

Any number of Spurgeon's sermons could illustrate what I mean. In one, he gives his text as Proverbs 27:10 ("Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father") and announces his intention to give no lectures on friendship, however valuable that might be, but to talk instead about the "Friend who is the chief and highest of all friends" (Greidanus, 1996, p.156, note 180). Certainly people need to know the Friend of sinners. But they also need to know what Proverbs can teach about human friendship. How is our friend Jesus honored if we pay no attention to what his Father is trying to teach us on the subject?<sup>10</sup>

Redemptive-historical theologians warn against mining Bible texts for "lessons" and "examples." While I'm not as wary of ethical or "exemplar" preaching as some who carry the banner for redemptive-historical preaching, there is a danger of marginalizing God by talking too much about the human characters in his story. So I will assent, for the sake of argument, to the pleas of Greidanus, Chapell, Clowney and others that sermons be *mainly* about the character and mighty acts of God disclosed in the great narrative of the Bible—the character and mighty acts of *God*.

There's an old story about a pastor giving a children's sermon. "I'm thinking of one of our forest friends," he says, "Does anyone want to guess who it might be?" No one ventures a guess, so he continues, "This friend is small and gray and has a bushy tail. Now do you know who I mean?" No answer. "This forest friend is shy and scampers up a tree when you get too close." Still no guesses from the silent children. "This friend likes to bury nuts in the ground. Surely you know who I'm talking about now!" Finally one kid pipes up, "I know you want us to say 'Jesus,' but it sounds like a squirrel to me."

Somehow this kid had gotten the idea that every sermon has to be about Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Greidanus, too, cites this passage in *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (pp.153-154). Assessing some shortcomings of the "Prince of Preachers," he notes Spurgeon's intention to hop over hedges and ditches to get to Christ but concludes that "Frequently Spurgeon fails to see the right road to his Master and, instead, travels through the swamp of typologizing and allegorizing" (p.161).

<sup>10</sup> Greidanus admits that wisdom literature presents a significant challenge to those who would preach Christ from every passage (2007, p.11, note 26). I think it's an unnecessary challenge. Christological and redemptive themes are not nor need be prominent in preaching this part of the Bible.

<sup>11</sup> Goldsworthy tells a similar story and acknowledges that advocates of Christ-centered preaching have to work at making sure listeners don't go "Ho hum, here comes the Jesus bit" (p.xi).

## CONSEQUENCES FOR CHURCH LIFE

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently encourage listeners to practice a privatized or Jesus-only pop spirituality.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier in this essay I cited Fred Craddock's concern that, among other things that result when Christ replaces God at the center of preaching, creation is separated from redemption "... opening the door to every other-worldly heresy hovering around the church . . ." (Craddock, p.75). What Craddock means can be illustrated by a recent article in *Creation Care*. David P. Gushee laments the failure of many Christians to think theologically about the environment because their working theology is "privatistic, other-worldly, and soteriological" (Gushee, p.46). The gospel they embrace has "little or nothing to do with this world" (ibid.). Their leaders can debate the *ordo salutis* into the wee hours, but can't think theologically about stewardship of the created world. Gushee links this narrow theological vision to the kind of advice he and many other preachers got in seminary, to "preach the gospel in every message through whatever text or issue happens to be before us," a gospel "in which the drama of personal salvation is all that really matters" (ibid.).

I wonder what other subjects preachers are avoiding because a clear Christological or soteriological connection can't be discerned. Political economy? The sanctity of life? Bio-medical ethics? A God-exalting view of vocation (beyond being a "witness for Christ" in the workplace)? Church life may be pietistic and privatistic indeed unless preachers form a Christian world view and inform Christian action in the culture with a comprehensive theological vision, one I believe is better cast by theocentrism than by Christocentrism. "To say that Christian preaching is or should be a proclamation about God is to say something central to who we are, what we are about, and how we regard the world in which we live out our faith, the world God created and loves" (Craddock, p.76).

Visiting a church while on vacation this summer, I asked an usher what version of the Bible most people in that congregation used. She smiled, "Oh, it doesn't matter, we're all about *Jesus* here." While I appreciated her attempt to make a guest feel at ease (she could see I had a Bible, but couldn't know what version it was), and though, perhaps, I shouldn't make too much of her singling out the second person of the Trinity for special mention, I am concerned about the Jesus-only spirituality of much contemporary church life.

Too many Christians claim to be in love with Jesus even though they scarcely know his Father. Too many groove on "Jesus-is-my-boyfriend music." Too many have shrunk the canon to its "red letter" parts. Too many, asked to give a reason for the hope within them, can only manage "I don't think that much about theology, I just love Jesus." Piety, prayer, worship all begin and end with "Jesus, only Jesus." We're all about Jesus here.

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<sup>12</sup> It may be a contributing cause of these ills. It's certainly not the sole or main cause.

Once again, I acknowledge that responsible advocates of Christ-centered preaching will agree with these concerns, and once again, I cite Greidanus as an example. He knows that the New Testament writers “had no thought to present Christ as an alternative to God, as an object sufficient in himself of Christian worship . . . worship which stops at him and does not pass through him to God, the all in all, at the end of the day falls short of Christian worship” (Greidanus, 1999, p.180, quoting James Dunn). But once again I question whether what’s clear to Greidanus is clear to listeners. Too many, I’m afraid, may *hear* “Christ,” by which Greidanus means the eternal Logos, the glorious second person of the Trinity, the agent of God in creation who mediates to us knowledge of the Triune God and delights in glorifying the Father, but *think* “Jesus,” by which they mean the kinder and gentler deity on whom they prefer to focus their devotion. Americans in particular, with our consumer mentality, feel entitled to pick and choose our beliefs; in our theological marketplace, Jesus looks like a new and improved user-friendly version of God.

## CONCLUSION

There’s much with which I agree in Christ-centered preaching. But all the good it intends to achieve for the church I believe can be better achieved by God-centered preaching.

I’m glad that Greidanus, Goldsworthy, Chapell, and Clowney frequently and fervently affirm God-centeredness in preaching. But where they ask us to go beyond theocentric preaching to Christocentric preaching, I’d make the later a subset of the former, letting some sermons be Christ-centered in the context of a God-centered pulpit ministry.

I agree with Clowney that “Because Christ is the eternal Logos, God the Son, in every revelation of God *he* also is revealed” (Clowney, p.76). But I would not draw an inaccurate inference moving in the opposite direction, that *only* when Christ is revealed is God revealed. Of course we know God through Christ, but we know who Christ is from the God story that moves toward him. “After all, faith in God shaped thinking about the life and passion of Jesus just as the life and passion of Jesus shaped faith in God” (Craddock, p.74).

I agree with Greidanus that it’s necessary to preach Christ from the Old Testament (Greidanus, 1999, p.33). I disagree that it’s necessary to preach Christ from ever periscope in the Old Testament. I think his instincts prior to writing *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* were sound: “I thought and taught that with some texts preachers may have to be satisfied with the broader category of *God-centered preaching*” (ibid., p.36). I like Greidanus’s “roads” from the text to Christ, and think they will often prove to be helpful homiletical strategies. But not always. I don’t think they have to be employed for every text.

I agree with Ligon Duncan that preachers should “. . . combat your tendency to choose a canon within the canon by purposing to preach ‘the whole counsel of God’—Moses as well as Mark, Jonah as well as John, Psalms as well as Paul, Proverbs as well as Peter, Leviticus as well as Luke, Habakkuk as well as Hebrews, Ruth as well as Revelation” (Duncan, pp.43-44). But I would add, Let’s be sure that when we’re preaching Jonah we really preach Jonah and



not John; when we preach Ruth, let's preach Ruth, not Revelation. In Christ-centered preaching there's a temptation to let the New Testament take over and not let the Old Testament be really heard.

I agree with the homileticians with whom I've engaged in this essay and with practitioners like Tim Keller that preaching ought not be man-centered or moralistic. I agree with Chapell that "A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian . . ." (Chapell, p. 274). But the theology that will sustain better preaching is broader than Christology. I agree that we should preach grace from the Old Testament (Duncan 56). But we're not Marcionites; it's "grace, grace, *God's* grace, freely bestowed on all who believe."<sup>13</sup> (I note that in the sermon précis Duncan offers as an example of what he means, God is seen as gracious even though the preacher does not explicitly mention Christ.<sup>14</sup> And this is fine.)

I applaud Goldsworthy's concern that a sermon on fatherhood based on Ephesians 6:4 not be wrenched from a context of gospel and grace (p.20), but I would ask why can't that context be explored over several weeks of preaching instead of abbreviating the ethical thrust of this and many other passages so that the gospel context is re-established in every sermon.

I would change Jay Adams's statement, "If you preach a sermon that would be acceptable to the member of a Jewish synagogue . . . there is something radically wrong with it" (Adams, 1982, p.147) to "If you preach *only* sermons that would go over in a synagogue, and never get around to Christ and Calvary, disguising the presence of our Lord Jesus even when he is manifestly in your text, then there is something radically wrong with your preaching."

I agree with those who are tired of the insipid, chatty preaching all too common in our time. But the cure, I think, is theocentrism, not Christocentrism. John Piper pleads for God-besotted "expository exultation" as a cure for thin, man-centered preaching. The serious preaching he longs to see exalts not only redemption in Christ, but (and he says this repeatedly) "God's greatness and majesty and holiness" (Piper, 2007, p.105).

I agree with Calvin over against Luther, that the sovereign glory of God is a broader theological perspective than justification. Luther, looking for the latter, saw Christ everywhere in the Bible. Calvin saw God everywhere (Greidanus, 1999, p.127).

I agree with Goldsworthy up to the last word in this sentence: "I can think of no more challenging question for the preacher's self-evaluation than to ask whether the sermon was a faithful exposition of the way the text testifies to Christ" (p.21). I'd end the sentence with "God," and commend this revised searching question to my homiletics students. I'd also alter his claim, "The Bible is a book about Christ" (p.19) to "The Bible is a book about the God whom we come to know most fully in Christ."

I appreciate Chapell's clarification in the second edition of his textbook that the preaching he advocates is Christ-centered not because it makes clever mention of Jesus, but because it

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<sup>13</sup> There are about fifty verses in the New Testament that speak of "God's grace" or "the grace of God."

<sup>14</sup> See, too, sermon outlines, main points, and subpoints proposed by Chapell, where it's God, not just Christ, who loves, justifies, and blesses (Chapell, pp. 131, 137, 153, 157).

“discloses an aspect of God’s redeeming nature” (Chapell, p.15). But I wonder why “God” isn’t sufficient in that sentence, needing to be supplemented in every sermon by “Christ.” And I’m not convinced that God’s *redeeming* nature is the only aspect of his character worthy of a sermon. Is it really true that Pharisaism inevitably results when *redemptive* themes are not harvested from every text? (Chapell, p. 286)

I’m glad (and surprised) that Chapell says, “Exposition is Christ-centered when it discloses God’s essential nature as our Provider, Deliverer, and Sustainer whether or not Jesus is mentioned by name” (Chapell, p.303). I’m glad because the seminary where I teach uses Chapell’s book as a foundational text, and even I can honestly endorse Christ-centered preaching if it’s defined by this sentence! I’m surprised because the sentence seems to take back a fair amount of what Chapell has said for three hundred pages about God’s nature as *Redeemer* being essential to preaching and about the necessity of making a connection between every passage and the climax of redemptive history *in Christ*.<sup>15</sup> My paraphrastic interpretation of the quote is: Christ is honored by theocentric preaching.

I fear that putting Christ, rather than God at the center of preaching may lead to unintended consequences in theology, homiletics, and church life. It’s enough—it’s better—for biblical preachers to be theocentric. Greidanus says, “Christ-centered preaching is not opposed to God-centered preaching. If done well, Christ-centered preaching exposes the very heart of God” (Greidanus, 2003, p.4). But given the risks that Christocentric preaching entails—especially if *not* well done—and given Christ’s own preoccupation with exalting his Father, and given the Bible’s emphasis on the gospel as the gospel of God, it seems to me that it makes good sense to keep God at the center of preaching.

I agree—up to a point—with Greidanus that preachers should “. . .look for a road from the periphery to the center of the Bible and redemptive history—a road from their text to Jesus Christ (Greidanus, 2003, p.4). I second the motion that preaching should be theological and not just textual, that sermons should move toward “the center.” But I would change the name at the end of Greidanus’s sentence to “God.” God is at the center of the Bible. He is its main character. God is at the center of redemptive history. His incarnate Son “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Gal. 1:4-5).

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<sup>15</sup> In the preface to his second edition Chapell clarifies that Christ-centered preaching is a synecdoche for “the entire matrix of God’s redemptive work, which finds its culminating expression in Christ’s person and work” (Chapell, p.15). This clarification, like Greidanus’s careful definition of “preaching Christ,” is an improvement on the less nuanced expectation that every sermon will include “the Jesus bit.” But Chapell’s clarification still seems to make redemption the privileged theological theme in all preaching and its climax in Christ a necessary move in every sermon.

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