

Topical Focus #3: Biblical Homiletics

Introduction

For preaching to be based on a Biblical Hermeneutics, and to lead to what should be the grand objective of everything, namely, the true and full-orbed Worship of God in the Splendor of Holiness various concerns ought to be addressed (For further details on worship, see **Topical Focus #20: Worship**). These concerns are reflected in the following composite definition of preaching that is designed to cover most, if not all bases.

Preaching is:

- (1) The authoritative, purposeful, and timely communication of God's truth as deposited in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
- (2) Based upon a thorough contextual and textual study, and in the form of a carefully structured message
- (3) Through the personality of human instruments, commissioned by God the Father, as a gift of Christ, anointed by the Spirit, molded by the Word and committed to prayer
- (4) As the Gospel of and the keys to the Kingdom with discriminating, applicatory and healing power aiming at definitive regeneration, justification and sanctification, as well as their threefold progressive "outflow" in daily repentance and faith, daily forgiveness, and daily renewal
- (5) Through the minds, wills, and emotions, to the hearts and into the lives of any and all audiences, sinners and saints, men and women, old and young, and presented in a well articulated, imaginative and persuasive fashion
- (6) In dependence upon, for the sake of and to the praise of the Triune God, and therefore
- (7) With a Trinitarian focus, centered upon the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as required by the purpose and content of the text.

This definition with its seven-fold spotlight upon Scripture, Preparation, Preacher, Proclamation, Audience, God-centeredness, and last but not least upon the Trinity in the preaching of the Biblical text, will now be unpacked, be it in a selected number of broad strokes only.

Panel 1: Spotlight on Scripture

The minister of the Gospel is under a solemn obligation to preach the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments (2 Tim. 4:2), to preach all of the Scripture (Acts 20:27), and to preach the Scripture exclusively (Gal. 1:8). For only Scripture is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16)! Its every word is needed to produce and sustain life (Deut. 8:3). Further, no other word is on a par with it, or can claim to be without error in whatever it asserts (John 10:35). To that end he must be fully committed to it, fully trust it, fully cherish it, fully savor it, and fully surrender to it. If, and only if, the preacher is a channel of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of Scripture, whether his emphasis is evangelistic or edificational, whether his method is expository, textual or topical, he will be able to speak with authenticity and authority. For what he transmits in that case is not just an all too human message, but a word from God (1 Thess. 2:13). If he does not exposit and apply his chosen preaching unit, but uses it as a launching pad for “his” ideas that are extraneous to this unit, whether good, bad or indifferent, he will forfeit his (official) status as God’s mouth piece. If he does not meticulously outline the preaching unit and does not meticulously convey the components of the text to his audience, but picks out his own “plumbs” and preaches them, however truthful they may be, he will forfeit his (delegated) authority.

The minister of the Gospel is under the equally solemn obligation to handle the Scriptures accurately (2 Tim. 2:15), and to handle all of Scripture accurately (2 Pet. 3:16). The careful interpretation of Scripture and the presentation of its proper meaning are necessary for the truth to come to grips with the hearer (Acts 8:31). Even seemingly insignificant details can harbor a world of difference (Gal. 3:16). The most fundamental prerequisite for handling Scripture or any part of it accurately is to interpret it in the light of its own purpose. At times this is explicitly stated in the passage that is chosen as a preaching unit. At other times it must be inferred from the available clues found in that passage. But only this ensures that the aim of the preacher in his preaching is identical with the purpose of God in the text. This must be so in order for the message of the preacher to be truly a word of God for the audience, rather than a word of man.

The minister of the Gospel has a similarly solemn obligation to bring out the significance of the Scriptures (Heb. 4:12) and to bring out the significance of all of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). For the preaching of the Word of God can hardly be complete, unless and until its truth is shown to have applicatory force, and at times even a cutting edge (2 Tim. 4:2). The aim ought to be that the truth of Scripture, and indeed all of its truth, is genuinely understood intellectually, experientially and practically (Neh. 8:8). In a word, it must be presented as timely, however timeless it may be. For a preacher to succeed in this he must in the context of the purpose of the preaching unit glean universal principles and patterns from the text. Then the exposition will become (identical with) the application, the old will show itself to be amazingly young, the ancient will attest that it is

very up to date, the venerable will prove to be ever fresh, and the timeless will appear to be quite timely.

In short, the minister of the Gospel must honor the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments for what it is, the inerrant, trustworthy, and authoritative Word of God, ought to interpret and present its meaning according to the explicit or implicit purpose of the preaching unit, and should bring out its significance eloquently and apply its truth cogently.

By way of concluding observation, it is not without good reason that Paul cautions Timothy and in Timothy all ministers of the Gospel, to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). There may be times for a special emphasis upon God the Father, or God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. There may be circumstances that require special attention for regeneration, or justification, or sanctification. There may be conditions that call for a special focus upon evangelism, or missions. There may be situations that invite special preoccupation with the covenant, the sacraments, church government, spiritual gifts, or the end times. There may be a need for special instruction in the areas of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, promise and law, marriage and divorce, etc., etc. It may even be realistically admitted that at different times different preachers are gripped by different facets of the truth, which they should not hesitate to preach in full and with force.

But the Church will do well to heed the summons of the apostle Paul carefully. It must “preach the Word.” If it does so, preferably, if not predominantly, in an expository fashion, it will safeguard itself against obscuring, impinging upon, subtracting from, or adding to, the whole counsel of God by an unbecoming, one-sided, fascination for one or more favorite biblical themes or an even more unbecoming, twisted, enthrallment for one or more unbiblical or anti-biblical theories, and so shield itself against inflicting inevitable spiritual loss.

Panel 2: Spotlight on Preparation

To understand the fundamental significance and indispensable character of preaching is to understand the importance of proper preparation. For a message to be biblical in content and purpose it must reflect the content and purpose of the preaching unit. To arrive at such a message a thorough contextual study of such unit is an indispensable necessity.

A contextual study inquires into the historical, cultural, and geographical setting of a text and seeks to determine whether this is reflected in the various particulars this text sets forth. It also researches its literary setting and seeks to establish the genre, author, date, audience, theme, division and aim of the larger unit of which the text is only a part. Contextual studies often fail to add much to the understanding of the text, but at times shed a remarkable light upon it. This makes them worthwhile! (In my section **d. Biblical Hermeneutics** this material is covered at greater length under the two headings of 1. The

Historical-Cultural-Geographical Phase, and 2. The Lingual-Generic Phase.)

After the contextual studies have been completed, the meaning of the text must be established. This may be done with the assistance of dictionaries, grammars, and other helps. At least two rules of thumb, however, ought to be kept in mind. For one, since the text is always directed to a specific audience, no meaning may be ascribed to any text that could not have been recognized by the original audience. For another, since the text is always truth applied to an audience in its specific situation, no meaning may be imposed upon the text beyond this truth as it is applied. In a word, the interpreter faces two inherent limits that he may not transgress. He may not wrest an answer to a question or a solution to a problem from a text when this text is not designed to answer that question or solve that problem in addressing its original audience in its own peculiar circumstances. Neither may he force a legitimate specific textual answer or solution on an audience, unless it is in an analogous situation or faces analogous circumstances (In my section **d. Biblical Hermeneutics** this material is covered more extensively under heading 3. The Grammatical-Lexicographical Phase, and in the context of the Three Principles of Interpretation: The Analogy of Biblical Interpretation, The Analogy of Faith, and the Analogy of Previous Scripture.)

Once the meaning of the text is established, the bedrock for relevant preaching is in place. The genius of such preaching is to glean the legitimate universal principles and patterns of God's dealings with man and of man's response to God from the text. To arrive at these principles and patterns a careful outline of the text that accommodates all the elements of the text in its literary context is indispensable. By way of illustration, a recent audience was correctly reminded that one cannot do justice to Paul's Romans unless it is recognized that he both starts (Rom. 1:1-5) and ends (Rom. 16:25-27) with the composite theme of the Gospel that aims at the obedience of faith so as to bring glory to God's name. This is further underscored by the fact that Paul in the course of his letter calls himself a minister of Jesus serving the Gospel of God with a view to sanctification by the Spirit, which is the obedience of faith (Rom. 15:16, 18). In short, the whole letter starts with this theme, is carried by it, and aims at it. Consequently, every message from Romans must take this into account, keep it in mind, and constantly remind its audience of it, if it wishes to be faithful to Romans in its sum, substance and purpose. Clearly, Paul's presentation is much more than a matter of "pure theology" to tickle the intellect. It is practical to the core, and aims to leave a deposit of holiness in everyday life. In fact, every chapter in Romans, whether it deals with justification, regeneration, sanctification, election, or the practicalities of life, is designed to reach this destination. God's Word is never given to "plumb essence," but to "pursue ethics" (Deut. 29:29). Of course, all this makes it rather clear that it requires careful, meticulous, and painstaking study of God's Word in its over-all composition and its individual parts to do full justice to it. The theme and the main divisions will yield the more general and structural universal principles, the subdivisions the more particular and concrete universal principles. (In my section **d. Biblical Hermeneutics** all this is covered in greater detail under the headings 4. The Textual-Contextual Phase, and 5. The Covenantal-Applicatory Phase.) This procedure

will ensure that the message originates in and emerges from the total text as its source, and is not superimposed upon it as a launching pad. Only when the message is recognized as the message of the text does it properly carry divine authority. Otherwise it displays at best the enthusiasm of the messenger. This may be entertaining. It may even be fully biblical. But it cannot make the message compelling.

The outline of the preaching unit, formulated in terms of universal principles, should determine the structure of the body of the message. It must represent and unpack the theme and divisions of the text. At no time may the audience hear anything else but, "Thus says the Lord." It is advisable for a preacher to state the theme and divisions of his message explicitly and at the outset, whether in the form of propositions, assertions, questions, etc. If he decides against this, the minimum requirement is that the audience clearly understands what the text wishes him to get across and is able to follow the flow of the message.

When the body of the message is ready to be presented, an introduction and a conclusion should be added. The introduction must be just that, an introduction, short and to the biblical point. However constructed, it must arrest attention, awaken interest in the subject matter and produce an eagerness in the audience to listen to the message. Indeed, it may even create a tension in the hearers that will not be released until the climax is reached and the presentation is completed. The conclusion should follow the climax. Again it should be short and to the point of the message. Whether it consists of a summary, a series of questions, a plea, or a challenge, its aim should be to drive the message home, through the mind, will, and emotions, into the hearts and lives of the hearers. This, however, was not the way an assembly concluded in the early Church. An order of service could (should?) consist of three major parts. After (1) worshipping up a storm to reach the heart through the emotions, and (2) preaching up a storm to reach the heart through the mind, they would be (3) praying up a storm to reach the heart through the will (See for a similar recommendation Jonathan Edwards, *A Call to United, Extraordinary Prayer*, 143-144). The prayer time would not come in the middle, but at the end of the assembly. This was predicated upon two biblical principles. First, in this scenario they would pray the content of the Word, presented in the message, into a life of obedient fruit bearing (John 15:7; 1 Tim. 4:5). Too often a prayer time in the middle of the service deteriorates into a display of man-centeredness, such as "an organ recital," "a travel manifest," or "an unemployment office." Second, they would give evidence that the statement of James had become flesh and blood for them. "You do not have because you do not ask" (Jam. 4:2). In short, an assembly should sing the Word, preach the Word, and pray the Word, in this God-centered order!

Panel 3: Spotlight on the Preacher

In a very fundamental sense God's message as well as God's method is God's man. The messenger must be the embodiment of the message. He must be truth personified. It is not just that the preacher must be God's mouthpiece, his Master's voice, however

much that should be the case. This is what the previous section was all about. When he speaks, he must be able to say with confidence that Christ speaks (Rom. 10:14). But there is more. As the Father is truth, Christ is truth and the Spirit is truth, so the preacher as the Father's representative, Christ's ambassador and the Spirit's instrument must in a real sense be truth himself. How else could Paul have spoken with approval of the Thessalonians as "imitators of him" (1 Thess. 1:6)?

For any preacher to be truth personified and to present himself with confidence as a model for the believers, he must have proper credentials in terms of the origin of his ministry and the preparation for his task as well as of his walk with God and execution of his duties.

God must have called and commissioned him (Heb. 5:4), and Christ must have presented him to the Church as his personal gift (Eph. 4:11). God's call to ministry can never be separated from his call to Christ. In fact, the latter is the bedrock for the former. The call to Christ is, first of all, experienced in the heart rending and transforming reality of rebirth, accompanied by repentance and faith, evidenced by a thirst for God, and resulting in an appropriation of Christ. Then in the refreshing reality of God's justifying verdict that yields forgiveness of sins, which is sealed by the indwelling of the Spirit. And finally, in the enriching reality of sanctification through the energizing presence of the Spirit! From all this arises an inner desire to serve in the pastoral and preaching office, to extend the Gospel to others, and so to see sinners saved and saints edified.

Already at this stage there is a curious intertwinement of the call of God to and the preparation of man for the ministry. The call takes the avenue of the preparation to evidence itself. In fact, the clarity of the call is commensurate to the progress in the preparation. Still, progressive sanctification and a desire to enter the ministry, however indispensable, are only the first steps in the preparatory process. By themselves they are far from definitive proof of a divine call and in a sense only the launching pad for the main and much more focused stage in the preparation. The focus of this stage is twofold, in line with both a divine and human aspect.

The human aspect is expressed in 2 Timothy 2:2, where a period of intensive training is ordered for future leadership. This is a straightforward directive. Historically it has often been quoted as the basis for Theological Seminary education. The curriculum of such an institution usually calls for an instructional period from three to four years. This is intensive, as it should be. But it is not sufficient, unless hand in hand with the acquisition of the knowledge of the Word there is maturation in being molded by that Word. The process of sanctification, in the broadest sense of the word, must be a priority (1 Tim. 4:15-16). Further, anyone who wishes to be molded by the Word, that is, to make progress in practical godliness, must not only be filled with the Word that directs, but also with the Spirit who empowers (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18). The former without the latter will leave emptiness in its wake; the latter without the former will have blindness as its net effect. It makes little difference whether one knows the way to reach a destination, but lacks the wherewithal to get there, or possesses the wherewithal to get somewhere,

but does not know which destination one wishes to reach. Finally, this molding process by the Word and the Spirit must occur not only by thinking things through in a classroom situation, but also by taking action. A Seminary education that confines itself to classroom instruction can produce a *taught* leadership, but never, I repeat, never, a *trained* leadership. For that it must follow the model of Jesus, which may well have to turn into a paradigm shift. When Luke informs Theophilus (Acts 1:1) that his first book dealt with “all that Jesus began to do and teach,” he reveals the contours of his training ministry, “do and teach” (I owe this reference to Dr. Harry Reeder, pastor of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL). One cannot learn to swim in a desert. Neither Jesus, nor Paul, occupied a plush office in a metropolitan city from which they directed their ministry with a salary in six figures. They did not take refuge in the protected harbor of their classroom instruction either. No, they took their trainees into the rough and tumble world of their day and at times they sent them out by themselves, not knowing under which roof they would sleep next, and when they would eat next. They were after a battle-hardened army, whether officers or soldiers. Even in this scenario it ironically seemed to take them a coon’s age to produce an unfinished (!) product. In short, no extensive boot camps, no trained folks! No physician comes as ill-prepared to treat physical bodies, as most ministers of the Gospel come to treat immortal souls. No ministers receive the 24-7 training as physicians do during years in residence. Seminaries that do not take this shortcoming seriously, and fail (refuse) to remedy this situation in one way or another, are bound to end up, to use a rather trite but true phrase, as cemeteries, even if they have a reputation that they are alive. The history of the Church is strewn with such institutions! It is no surprise that historically all Christian institutions of higher learning that were started by Churches-on-fire invariably ended up as “watery graves” that doused the fire and killed their “mother” (I return to this below).

The divine side is somewhat more intricate. It is closely linked with the area of spiritual gifts. The presence of the Spirit is not just evidenced by a lifestyle that has the marks of holiness indelibly stamped upon it. According to Peter, within the fabric of the Body of Christ the Spirit also furnishes every believer with a special gift, either in the area of “speaking” (the oracles of God) or in the area of “acting” (ministry) (1 Pet. 4:10-11). These are further identified by Paul as “prophecy” (indicating the recipient as God’s mouth piece) and “ministry” (characterizing the recipient as doing his footwork), and subsequently subdivided into “teaching” and “exhorting” in the speaking area, as well as “sharing,” “caring,” and “showing mercy” in the acting area (Rom. 12:3-8). What emerges here is the connecting link, the bridge, between the call to Christ as the foundation and the call to the ministry as the crowning piece.

The Christian who aspires to the pastoral/teaching ministry with its focus upon the Word should display a gift in the speaking area before he ever may consider, or may be considered for, that ministry. Incidentally, the call to be a Christian and the identification of one’s gift are intimately interwoven. Teaching and exhorting are activities in which all Christians should be involved *as* Christians (Heb. 3:13; 5:12). The same is true of

sharing, caring, and showing mercy, for that matter (Lk. 3:11; Rom. 16:2; Jam. 2:13). Then, in the way of the boot camp, the pressure cooker, or the microwave of purposeful obedience to God's explicit commands through the indwelling Holy Spirit in all these areas, every Christian will eventually be able to determine experientially that the same Holy Spirit has given something special to him or her in one of these areas.

In a boot camp participants are subjected to a thorough, uninterrupted, and ever accelerating training regimen that resembles a pressure cooker or microwave oven, which aims at speedy results. This regimen ideally consists of three main phases. The first one is the teaching phase, in which a gift is analyzed, defined, and explained. The second one is the modeling phase, in which the participants are exposed to the exercise of this gift by their teacher. The third one is the implementing phase, in which participants repeatedly take the plunge themselves under the supervision of their teacher. In other words, it is impossible to learn to swim in a desert. At the same time only constant exposure to a swimming pool will yield the desired results. The training regimen is not complete until participants have recognized their gift and are totally comfortable in the exercise of it. In fact, in the area of his gift the recipient will invariably be self-propelled and unstoppable, whether in speaking (teaching or exhorting) or serving (sharing, caring or showing mercy), and evidence this by stating to the Church, and to its pastoral and diaconal leadership, "If you do not use me, you 'abuse' me, and you *will* lose me" (For further details regarding the gift issue, see **Topical Focus #16: Teaching in the NT**). At any rate, it should be rather clear that Theological Seminaries that are not committed to the threesome of (one-third) teaching, (one-third) modeling, and (one-third) supervising with a view to ratifying the spiritual gift, are woefully deficient and are bound to cripple the Church!

My, be it limited, word of mouth research indicates that no more than 10% to 15% of the members of any given congregation are self-propelled, and therefore can legitimately claim that they have identified their gift. This is a calamity of potentially disastrous proportions either in the making, or just around the corner, or already a present reality. To confine myself to the pastor-teacher office, this regrettably does not only narrow the pool of eligible men dramatically. It also forces the Church to call folks to the pastor-teacher's office who are singularly unqualified, and therefore do not really belong there. That this has been the undoing of many congregations as well as mismanaged would-be leaders is a well-known fact!

The intensive training and the identification of the spiritual gift in the speaking area in the course of such training must now be capped off by the third and final stage of the preparatory process. The Church must determine whether the candidate is, indeed, called of God and a gift of Christ. Neither God the Father nor the ascended Lord only grants salvation to individuals. They also grant officers, not just offices, to the Church (Eph. 4:11). Officers are not man-made on earth, but gift-wrapped in heaven. They must be recognized as such. The Church does so by applying the qualifications, laid down in 1

Timothy 3:1ff, as benchmark. These qualifications, hardly surprising, fully honor the intertwinement of call, preparedness and gift. In the present scenario, does the candidate have a fervent desire for the pastoral/teaching office? Does he have a track record of practical godliness, acknowledged by believers and unbelievers? In the light of his track record in his own family, can he function as a model in and for the Church as the family of God? Has he given evidence of possessing a teaching-exhorting gift that will enable him to edify the believers as well as promote and/or defend the Gospel before unbelievers? Let me reiterate that the identification of such gift is of the highest priority. After all, a twofold concatenation obtains. Negatively, no gift, no office! Positively, gift, qualification, office!

In short, if the answer to the four just mentioned questions is in the affirmative, and properly so, the way to his ordination is open. This ordination, then, will constitute a commission of God through the Church, or of the Church on behalf of God, once again blending the Divine and human together while acknowledging the primacy of the Divine. When an ordination comes about in this way, it can be expected that a resulting preaching ministry will be pursued in prayerful dependence upon Divine grace and be executed with the anointing of the Spirit. Such dependence naturally flows forth from the recognition of the primacy of the Divine. The pastor/teacher owes his origin to God's call and Christ's gift. Such anointing naturally flows forth from the recognition of the indispensable operation of the Spirit. The Spirit who sanctifies and the Spirit who endows with a special gift, in the first steps and the main stage of the preparatory process respectively, is also the Spirit who grants unction to the preacher in the proclamation of the Gospel. This is a curious reality that just like so many other spiritual realities transcends conceptualization. It must be experienced to be understood. Its presence produces a liberty and a power that transforms the proclamation into "rivers of living water" (John 7:37-39). These will both "make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4) and prevail over "the gates of hell" (Mt. 16:18).

It stands to reason that all this is very pertinent for the interpretation, understanding, and application of James 3:1ff that seems to throw cold water upon literally anyone who seeks to enter the teaching office. That this calls for our careful attention stands to reason!

Panel 4: Spotlight on Proclamation

The preaching of the Gospel is the first and foremost means of grace. Of the several parables that disclose features of the Kingdom which were unknown in the OT era (Mt. 13:1-52), the one that heads the list brings this out with great force. In order to implement the Kingdom there is no other alternative than to sow the seed of the Word. This is further on display on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff. and specifically 42) and set forth by Paul as a universal principle (2 Tim. 4:1-2). People will not believe unless they hear the preached Word (Rom. 10:14).

The power of the spoken Word is clearly enormous. It guarantees that the Church of Christ has a great future. After all, this Word is specifically designated by Christ himself as the keys to the Kingdom. This ensures that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. With the weapon of the proclamation of the Word it is invincibly on the march. The picture is bright, indeed. But does it seem realistic? The facts look rather grim. They hardly seem to bear out a triumphant impact of the Church. Worldwide it does not keep up with the birthrate. Nationwide it barely appears to hold its own. And locally the Church is often in retreat! How does one square the promise of the Savior with the facts, the ideal with the real?

The reason for this should not be sought in the promise, as if that is too grand and too idealistic. The Church is always ill advised to tinker with God's promises, to question them or scale them down. It would seal its doom, for they are its lifeline and its power. If the problem, then, is not to be sought in the promise of our Lord, it must be in the preaching of his Word. This, indeed, appears to be the case. Customarily preachers readily acknowledge that the keys to the Kingdom are to be identified as the multifaceted Word of God. But they rarely recognize that this multifaceted Word should be proclaimed as the Keys to the Kingdom. Too often they solely address the mind and are satisfied with agreement, a mental nod, on the part of the audience. Of course, the mind matters. The next section will enlarge upon this. But proper preaching goes deeper. It reaches out to the heart and insists on repentance and/or submission. Here the contours of the kind of preaching comes into view that opens and closes the Kingdom (Mt. 16:19), that forgives and retains sin (John 20:23), the kind that is both prescribed and modeled in the Bible itself, and conquers the very gates of hell. This kind of preaching is discriminatory and applicatory, and so proves to have healing power. By virtue of this power it is the only kind that truly satisfies.

Discriminating preaching is evangelistic in nature. It eyes wretched sinners. In addressing them or in expositing an evangelistic preaching unit, the preacher may not leave the hearers in the dark as to their standing before God. In confronting Nicodemus with his need for a new heart in John 3:5, the Samaritan woman with her need for a new record in John 4:18 and professing Jews with their need for a new life in John 8:31, Jesus makes it crystal clear that as they are they cannot lay claim to the Kingdom of God. For all practical purposes he calls Nicodemus a blind rebel (John 3:3, 5), the Woman at the Well, a hell-bound adulteress (John 4:16-18), and "professing" Jews children of the devil (John 8:30-31, 44). When Peter on the day of Pentecost exposit the truth of Joel 2:28-32, his audience has no doubt as to where they stand either. They are called murderers. The preaching of both Jesus and Peter has a cutting edge that is unmistakable. This is Revival preaching at its awesome best. The hearers are not the jury that must give a mental and oral verdict. They are the accused who need to bow before God in repentance, and cast themselves upon mercy alone. Such preaching invariably results either in broken hearts and awesome conversions, as in Acts 2 (Specifically Acts 2:41), or in hardened hearts and mortal combat, as in Acts 6-7 (Specifically Acts 7:54ff). In a word, in discriminating preaching the preacher goes after the rebel heart of man and under discriminatory

preaching wretched and lost sinners know that they are hell-bound, preferably even before the preacher has completed his message (Acts 2:37), whatever their ultimate response may be in the short or in the long run.

Applicatory preaching is always edificational/sanctifying in nature. It eyes wretched saints. In expositing edificational/sanctifying preaching units or in addressing believers, the preacher will not leave his audience in the dark as to their status before God. When Jesus had finished his exposition of the law in the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples knew what kind of lifestyle would disqualify a man from membership (Mt. 7:24-27). When James addressed his hearers in the area of practical godliness, he did not simply define it in terms of its origin, nature, implementation, and range. He also left no doubt that it was neither optional nor negotiable. Professing believers who saw their disobedient lifestyle or ungodly conduct exposed had little choice. They would either have to clean up their act, or conclude that they were not genuine believers. Again, the cutting edge is noticeable. Hearers are never the judge or the jury that make the final determination, but always the accused whenever and wherever they are found wanting. In a word, in applicatory preaching the preacher sensitizes the hearts of the audience as to their lifestyles and under applicatory preaching wretched and deficient saints recognize, when and where they are deficient and must deal with it if they truly love God and if they wish their profession to remain credible to others and to themselves.

This kind of preaching, like no other, has truly healing power. It sets the stage for the application of the three benefits of the gospel in the areas of regeneration, justification, and sanctification, both in the life of the believer and the unbeliever. In discriminating preaching the unbeliever is ultimately confronted with his rebel heart (Nicodemus), his guilty record (The Samaritan woman), and his unholy life (“Professing” Jews). This sets the stage for the preacher to call the sinner to repentance unto the forgiveness of sins and an obedient life through the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38), and for the sinner to call on the Lord for a new heart, a new righteousness and a new holiness, based upon God's threefold promise to that effect (Ezek. 36:37, 25-27; Acts 2:39). The upshot will be the liberating reality of a heart that is freely devoted to God, the refreshing reality of a record that is fully cleansed before God, and the enriching reality of a life that blossoms up before God. Similarly in applicatory preaching the believer is faced with shortcomings in his conduct. This paves the way for the preacher to call saints to repentance unto the forgiveness of sins and practical godliness and for the saints to call in repentance to the Father for forgiveness and practical holiness. This will produce a renewed freedom, refreshment, and enrichment, in short, a Revival culture!

All this is to say that discriminating preaching under God effects the once and for all realities of regeneration (John 3:5), justification (Rom.5:1), and sanctification (Heb. 10:10, 14), while applicatory preaching effects the continuing realities of daily repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-10), daily forgiveness (1 John 1:8, 9), and daily renewal (2 Cor. 7:11). Everyone, who possesses the once and for all realities, will show this in the continuing realities, thus resting in God without pride and presumption, and everyone,

who experiences the continuing realities, may be assured of the possession of the once and for all realities, thus working out his salvation without doubt and despair. Clearly, the healing waters that flow forth from discriminating preaching continue to flow forth through applicatory preaching. Both types of preaching are woven of the same cloth. As we shall see further below, they both arise from the heart, the mission control center, of the preacher and address the heart, the mission control center, of the listener. The first type issues a summons to surrender to wretched sinners. The second type issues a summons to continuing surrender to wretched saints.

That both types, equally proclaiming the Word of God as the Gospel of, and the Keys to, the Kingdom, are deeply satisfying hardly needs to be repeated. The first one furnishes entrance into the presence of God through definitive regeneration, peace in the love of God through definitive justification, and fellowship under the smile of God through definitive sanctification. The second one furnishes growing entrenchment in the presence of God through daily repentance and faith, growing awareness of the love of God through daily forgiveness, and growing assurance of the smile of God through daily obedience.

Incidentally, it has been suggested to dismiss an assembly immediately after the sermon, and never to conclude a service with a song, whether a psalm or a hymn. This would jeopardize, and therefore be detrimental to, the impact of the message. However much I appreciate the sentiment behind this suggestion, it still indicates a massive misunderstanding, if not confusion. Scripture indicates that “we do not have because we do not ask” (Jam. 4:2). This implies that there will be no impact, no fruit, no result, ever and at all, song or not, unless the audience responds by seeking to pray the Word into tangible existence (See John 15:7 and 1 Tim. 4:5 for the correlation of Word and prayer). One can only imagine what a sermon on, say, “The Tithes,” would do, if the congregation at its conclusion would start pleading for fifteen minutes, or for any amount of time, for heartfelt obedience in the matter! It would more than likely stagger the imagination to think what the result would be of a year of sermons under such scenario.

At any rate, as has been mentioned already, the biblically ideal worship service would be one which starts out with reaching the heart through the emotions by worshipfully singing up a storm, continues with reaching the heart through the mind by powerfully preaching up a storm, and concludes with reaching the heart through the will by unceasingly praying up a storm. This order of service was apparently practiced by Justin Martyr in the early Church, and has the additional advantage that the congregational prayer will be God-centered, precisely because it prays the Word! Too often pastoral prayers prior to the message end up man-centered in content as well as outlook! This order of service also would facilitate the implementation of the biblical and uncompromising guideline that a veteran preacher embraced in the later years of his ministry and presented as a maxim that Scripture imposes upon everyone who seeks to proclaim the truth of Scripture. Since Scripture is the Word *of God* and therefore has *Divine authority*, no preacher should deliver a subsequent message until he is persuaded

that the previous one has met with heartfelt and purposeful obedience on the part of the audience.

Panel 5: Spotlight on the Audience

Preachers invariably face a great diversity of listeners in their audience. They can expect to encounter saints and sinners, men and women, old and young who come from a variety of backgrounds, live in a variety of circumstances, find themselves in a variety of situations, cope with a variety of problems, look forward to a variety of futures, etc., etc. It is the genius of preaching that the preacher can touch any and all audiences, however diverse, simultaneously with the Word of God. In order to succeed he must reach out to their hearts as the primary aim through their minds as the necessary means with a view to their holiness of life as the ultimate objective. This is fully in line with the Scripture's distinction of a three-fold understanding: of the mind (Ps. 73:16-17; Dan. 9:2), the heart (1 Ki. 3:9; Is. 6:10), and the life (Job 28:8; Prov. 15:21).

Although the heart is the preacher's primary aim, the mind matters. The truth of the Word of God will not reach the heart except through the mind, however much it is intertwined with the will and the emotions. This is why Scripture is replete with references to the significance, indeed necessity, of the teaching activity. All Christians should be teachers (Heb. 5:12). Many Christians have received a special teaching gift (Rom. 12:7). An elder in the Church is called a pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11).

Teaching is the channel through which the truth of God enters into, and makes an impact upon, the lives of people. It can be defined as the conveying of the truth that *is*, and of the truth that *ought to be*. The truth-that-is, the focus of systematic theology, covers the doctrines of Scripture, such as, the Trinity, predestination, creation, providence, Christ, the Holy Spirit, man, regeneration, justification, sanctification, the Church, the consummation, etc., etc. The truth-that-ought to be, the focus of ethics, deals with the substance of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Fruit of the Spirit, and the many directives for a godly and righteous life that are found in Scripture. The truth-that-is and the truth-that-ought-to-be are closely related. In fact, the former is the foundation for the latter. By way of illustration, only the fact that a fetus is a human being (Ps. 139:15) (The truth that is) justifies the struggle to outlaw abortion (The truth that ought to be). But because of this fact such struggle is also mandated.

This illustration does more than indicate the relationship between “systematic theology” and “ethics.” It also drives home that the stakes in teaching are high. Improper teaching turns the Church into a rudderless ship, exposed to every wind of doctrine that is bound to shipwreck it (Eph. 4:14). Proper teaching, on the other hand, organizes the presentation of God's truth in a way that it is conveyed in its totality (Acts 20:27) according to the intake capacity, the comprehension level and the need of the audience (Acts 20:31). Such teaching will renew the mind (Rom. 12:2). This, in turn, will result in the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, and the full transformation into

His image (Eph. 4:13). Clearly, the mind does matter.

The recognition of the immense significance of the intellect, however, should never deceive anyone into taking a stand for the primacy of the intellect. This would be a deadly mistake. It unalterably leads to the intellectualizing of the gospel, either in whole or in part. Man simply is not all mind. In fact, with the renewal of man's mind one has in a real sense only scratched the surface, until and unless the good, acceptable and perfect will of God is tasted and demonstrated as such (Rom. 12:2). This is why a teaching ministry may not only address the mind, may not solely take aim at the mind, nor make the mind its final destination. Through the mind it must take aim at the heart as the "wellspring" from which all of life proceeds (Prov. 4:23). Discriminating and applicatory preaching that will proclaim the Word as the key to the Kingdom will do just that (Acts 2:37; 7:53; 2 Cor. 12:7; Ps. 51:10). For here one touches man's deepest being. The heart in Scripture stands for man's inner core, in contrast to his outer appearance (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4). It represents man's personhood, his deepest self, as I mentioned before, his mission control center!

The counsel written over the entrance to the oracle of Delphi, "Know Yourself," is one of the most profound counsels ever given to man. But the problem is that man cannot know his deepest self by self-reflection. This noble task proves to be a sheer impossibility (Jer. 17:9). True self-knowledge only comes to a man as he looks in the mirror of divine revelation. And precisely since out of the heart all the issues of life proceed, he needs the divine revelation desperately. This is supplied in the preaching of the truth. It does and must go right to the heart precisely to insure that the life that flows forth from it is truly life. The pattern on display in chapters such as John 3 and 4, Acts 2 and 7, to mention only these, leave no doubt about the biblical model in this regard.

It is no coincidence that the term "heart" is a figure of speech. As the deepest core of man it represents a layer of him that can only be experienced and therefore transcends conceptualization. It, indeed, goes deeper than the intellect. It is the "I" that has thinking, as well as willing and feeling, as three of its functions. This, therefore, should be the primary target in all pastoral ministry, inclusive of preaching. Any type of ministry that addresses merely the mind or the will or the emotions for that matter will only remain on the surface. The core of man's being must be targeted, touched and secured for any ministry to be permanent.

To repeat, the mind is of incalculable significance. It should be saturated with all the truth of Scripture. In fact, intellectually, there should be no doubt about the meaning or significance of any passage, text, or topic of Scripture after it has been preached. This requires that the message is delivered in a well articulated and clear fashion, in words that are carefully chosen and befit both the subject matter and the audience. It must further be presented in an imaginative way, with vivid graphic imaging that illuminates its subject matter, make it come to life before its audience, and captures it. But it must also come across with persuasiveness, with a personal and practical touch that makes the audience

come to life to its subject matter, to surrender to it, to embrace it, and to act upon it!

If the preacher applies himself to accomplish this, he will not be satisfied with just an intellectual deposit as the end product! Apart from the fact that the mind is finite and cannot function as a final resting place for God's complementary truth (See **Topical Focus #2: Complementarity of Truth**), this would be tantamount to turning the mind into a place that serves the sole purpose of storing agreeable data like ice cubes in the freezer compartment of a refrigerator. No, the mind should be a channel through which the truth penetrates into the heart. It will be like a stream of water that floods it. It will prick, jolt, cut, instruct, direct, empower, and set in motion. The primary aim is not agreement of the mind, but repentance, faith, submission, surrender, and embrace of the heart. What is the result? Holiness unto the Lord! This includes every last nook and cranny in the Church, if the mention of weapons of war and of the pots and pans in mother's kitchen is any indication (Zech. 14:20-21). Here the grand objective of biblical preaching comes into view. It is the Worship of God in the Splendor of Holiness! What else could be the grand goal of the indwelling *Holy Spirit*?

Holiness, it is the essence of God's being (Is. 6:3), it is the scope of election (Eph. 1:4) of the covenant (Gen. 17:1; Ezek. 36:27), of the work of Christ (Mt. 1:21), of the operation of the Spirit (Rom. 15:16c), of repentance (Acts 26:20), of faith (Acts 26:18), of the Church (Eph. 4:11, 12) of the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13-14), etc. It is also the major subject matter (OT and NT) and objective (Ps. 119:11; 2 Tim. 3:15-17) of Scripture. Why, then, should it not be the grand objective of preaching (Rom. 15:16b, 18; Eph. 4:11-12)? It puts on display just one more aspect of that God-centeredness, that theocentricity, which is so characteristic of all of biblical faith and practice. However, theocentricity must adorn the preacher in more than the objective of his preaching ministry only. It must suffuse the preaching ministry. This is the topic of the next section.

Panel 6: Spotlight on God-centeredness

When a preacher is truly God-centered, he displays this in at least three ways. He will execute his pastoral and teaching ministry in full dependence upon God, for the sake of God and to the glory of God.

While it is unmistakable in Scripture that the person of the preacher is the indispensable agent and the activity of preaching the indispensable channel through which the grace of God reaches into the life of the hearers, it is equally unmistakable that the hearer owes his salvation fully to the sovereign grace of God (Acts 13:48b), the efficacious work of Christ (Is. 53:10) and the operation of the Spirit (John 3:5). If the dependent clause spells 100% man and the main clause 100% God, the combination of both clauses spells 100% (God) + 100% (Man) = 100% (salvation). That is to say, in the implementation of salvation the human 100% rests squarely upon the divine 100% for its effectiveness.

On the one hand, God works through man (*per hominem*: Rom. 10:14) and the Spirit works through the Word (*per verbum*: Jam. 1:18). This is so by divine appointment. It is the way in which the threefold New Covenant salvation that is promised by the Father and personified in the Son is personalized by the Spirit. There is no other avenue of salvation. Human instrumentality in person and word is, indeed, indispensable.

On the other hand, however, God works with man (*cum homine*: 2 Tim. 2:25) and the Spirit with the Word (*cum verbo*: Acts 16:14). While God works through human instrumentality to effect salvation, there is no guarantee that salvation ensues just because man exerts himself in the preaching or teaching ministry. Apparently, one can be man taught without being God-taught and Word-taught without being Spirit-taught. Unless God is the architect and the contractor, human laborers build in vain (Ps. 127:1). They are the God-ordained means to a God-ordained end, but never the (human) cause to a (Divine) effect.

Concretely, the 100% man requires that man “gives it one hundred percent” in his person and in his preaching. By the same token, the primacy of the 100% God demands from him a deep humility and a total dependence. In the face of his impotence pride vanishes quickly. Man can only regard it a privilege and be grateful, if and when God decides to use him. At the same time, when a passion for fruitfulness is kindled within him, he will turn to fervent and unceasing prayer. After all, God must make the difference if there is going to be any difference at all! In a word, presumption and pride must be replaced by humility and prayer!

But there is more. The deepest motivation for the preaching ministry must also be God-centered. The preacher in the execution of his ministry should not be driven by a desire for a sense of fulfillment, a sense of accomplishment, or any such motivation that centers upon himself. Neither should his deepest motivation simply be to see sinners to escape the gruesome reality of hell. No, the driving force should be the desire for God's electing purposes to come to reality (Rom. 9:11, 23), for the Lord Jesus to enjoy the fruit of his labor (Is. 53:10, 11), and for the Holy Spirit to see his love crowned in finished products (Rom. 15:30). This, of course, in no way denies that an effective ministry will leave a sense of thanksgiving in its wake and will result in joy over the salvation of sinners. Quite the contrary, tangibly to be used by God in a successful ministry is an indication of God's approval that every “minister” better strive for with all his heart and all his energy!

Finally, there is a goal. If that is to be God-centered as well, the preacher may not seek to build his ministry around himself or his church, so as to cherish the acclaim he gets and the reputation his church enjoys. Neither may he make evangelism, or the dominion mandate, or any other worthy and necessary goal ultimate, consciously or unconsciously. No, God must fill the horizon of his life, his endeavors, and his accomplishments. The total range of his ministry, the spiritual growth of the church, the

evangelistic outreach, the progress of the Kingdom, all must be purposefully pursued and manifestly serve the glory of the Triune God.

This is and must be the grand and ultimate objective. It is the objective of Christ (1 Cor. 15:28). It may be no less the objective of his Christians, let alone of the God-appointed, Christ given, leaders among them. “For of God and through God and unto God are all things” (Rom. 11:33)! This will now be exemplified in the last section that argues quite extensively for a theocentric, and more specifically a Trinitarian homiletic methodology. In fact, in it I argue that from the biblical perspective only a Trinitarian homiletics can do justice to Paul’s theocentric statement that God is the Origin of everything, the Agent in everything, and the Goal of everything! All this does not merely aim to help shed the proper light upon the interpretation, understanding, and application of James and similar sections of Scripture for today. No, it goes well beyond this. It seeks to determine whether James’ “Sermon,” that admittedly makes little mention of Christ, can function as a model for homiletics. This makes the upcoming section one of crucial significance. One’s homiletics (and hermeneutics) must come into serious question, when it refuses, or even hesitates, to use an inerrant “Sermon” as a model for the preaching of “Today.” It would imply that one can, if not must, improve upon James (in order to be truly biblical in one’s preaching). The stakes are clearly quite high!

Panel 7: (Extensive) Spotlight on the Trinity

It is quite common for the more recent handbooks on Homiletics to insist that, according to Luke 24:27, 44, and John 5:39, 46, Christ is the focus of the OT in general and of each passage in the OT in particular. This supposedly warrants the conclusion that any and all preaching from the OT, and by implication from the NT, should be exclusively Christocentric. Regrettably, proponents of this type of preaching all too often end up by ignoring or downgrading, whether consciously or not, the biblical emphasis upon either God the Father, or God the Holy Spirit, or both. In doing so, as I intend to show more fully below, they virtually follow in the footsteps of Martin Luther, whose type of Christocentricity was such that he gladly would have removed James from the Scriptures. This should raise a red flag or two! At any rate, Luther demonstrates that the possibility, and danger, of a curtailed, and to that extent errant, Christocentricity is real, and cannot be indulgently laughed away. What has happened in terms of a deficient, if not delinquent, Christocentricity (Luther), must be possible!

Even if there is a legitimate, and necessary Christocentric dimension to preaching, there is, and must be, a more fully biblical, that is, a Trinitarian, approach in evidence to do full justice to all of Scripture. Clearly, not to have the Son is not to have the Father (John 5:23b; 14:9; 1 John 9a). At the same time, not to have the Father is not to have the Son (John 5:23a; 8:38; 42, 55; 1 John 9b). Similarly, not to have the Son is not to have the Spirit (John 3:34). At the same time, not to have the Spirit is not to have the Son (Rom. 8:9). All this is behind my contention, which I argue below, that an all too exclusivistic Christocentricity, as evidenced in Luther and in much of today’s so-called

redemptive-historical homiletics, tends to downgrade the doctrine of the Father and the Holy Spirit. In turn, this tends to lead, rather ironically, to a reductionistic, anthropocentric, and anemic, Christocentricity as well, to whatever degree. This is why this kind of Christocentricity is always damaging to that same degree, and sooner or later proves to be potentially destructive.

In order to argue a threefold, Trinitarian, hermeneutic and homiletic, fullness, rather than a reductionistic, one-dimensional, Christocentricity persuasively, we must start with the correct view of Luke 24:27, 44 and John 5:39, 46. These are the passages universally quoted by the proponents of a redemptive-historical type of preaching, which claims that all of the OT Scripture everywhere only testifies of Christ.¹ Frankly, neither passage, by

¹ This is also the view of Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 119-120. Enns virtually suggests that Jesus soon would have run out of things to say, had he on the way to Emmaus only quoted the passages in the OT that directly referred to him (Lk. 24:27), especially in the area of the resurrection (Lk. 24:46). He is of the opinion that all of the OT, in whole as well as in part, climaxes in Christ, inclusive of his cross and resurrection. In fact, Enns takes it a step further. To him there is universal warrant for a Christological interpretation of the OT text *whether the literal meaning of the text would allow this or not*. Ultimately the OT text serves as a launching pad to get the message of Christ across, inclusive of his cross and resurrection. No longer does the OT text bring out the fullness of Christ. “An objective reading of the OT” would never end up with him (152). No, the NT superimposes this fullness upon the OT text, by “rereading in a fresh way” from the perspective of “the historical death and the resurrection” of Christ (152), and the Church may, if not must follow in its footsteps. He refers to various supposed uses of the OT by the NT as an authoritative model to this effect (132-142, 153). It is not possible at this point to interact with each of these supposed uses. But one sample will do for my present purpose. Did Matthew (Mt. 2:15) put Christological words in the mouth of an unsuspecting Hosea (Hos. 11:1), when he boldly states that God called Christ out of Egypt as a fulfillment of the Hosea passage. Enns affirms this. I deny it. The word “fulfill” does not always stand for “a prediction come true.” It may mean that a later event is an *implication* of an earlier one, much as in James 1:23 which states that the deed of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac was a necessary implication of the faith that he displayed in Genesis 15:6. The Genesis passage 15 is not a prediction. So the Genesis 22 passage is not a prediction come true. The word “fulfill” can also convey that a later event displays a *parallel* with, or constitutes an *application* of the content of an earlier one. This is in evidence in Matthew 2:15. Just as Genesis 15 Hosea 11:1 is not a prediction either. It makes a statement regarding a historical event. Matthew simply capitalizes on this event when he adds that it is repeated in a parallel manner in the case of Christ. Just as God called Israel out of Egypt during the Exodus, so he called Christ out of Egypt. He did so to put on brilliant display that Christ was the True Israel of God. No trace of superimposition whatsoever! Enns errs greatly when he seeks to detect a universal hermeneutics to this effect in the NT (159), and even more so when he invites the Church to follow in its footsteps. It is hardly surprising that from Enns’ perspective hermeneutics as well as homiletics turn into a “pilgrimage,” filled with uncertainties (161-163). Ironically, at this point the grammatical-historical component is asked to come to the rescue to avoid “flights of fancy” (159). But this is tantamount to closing the barn door after the horse has bolted. Of course, all this is not to say that the hermeneutical and homiletical enterprise is an open and shut case in each instance. Not at all! However, this undertaking is fraught with so

any stretch of the interpretive imagination, conveys this. To insist on it anyway is irresponsible exegesis. To be sure, John informs us in no uncertain terms that Scripture contains an overwhelmingly clear and opulent witness to the glorious Person and Work of Christ. “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me ... If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.” However, these two passages do neither state that the Scriptures *exclusively* bear witness of Christ, nor that Moses wrote *only* of Jesus. Similarly, Luke informs us just as emphatically that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, (Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself ... (adding) that everything written about (him) in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” According to Luke, the Savior systematically recited all the passages and sections that referred to him. However, from this we may not illogically conclude, once again, that all of Moses, all of the Prophets, and all of the Psalms *exclusively* wrote about him. This is not stated in the text, nor is this the case. Until we recognize this, the whole issue of Christocentric preaching is off the track before we even consider the matter. The fundamental question, therefore, is how to get the train back on track.

In a recent article on the necessity of preaching grace in sanctification, which in an interesting way mentions the progression since his earliest thinking, Bryan Chapell, Covenant Theological Seminary, seeks to do just that.² Let me list the progressive phases of this endeavor.

1. He perceptively differentiates between “messianic revelation (with) explicit mention of the person of Christ,” and “vast portions of both the Old and New Testaments (that) make no explicit mention of the person of Christ ... (inclusive of) the prophetic books that predict the coming of the Messiah (but) contain much material that does not have Jesus as the direct subject.” He subsequently quotes Luke 24:27 to the effect that “all the law and the prophets testify of (Christ).” As stated above, this is regrettably a mistranslation of the text. But it may not go unnoticed that this mistranslation puts all proponents of an exclusive Christocentric exposition of the OT who adopt this translation in a real bind. It virtually forces them to ask the (agonizing) follow-up question.

many potential pitfalls that it does not need Enn’s virtual kiss of death embodied in his declaration that we may go beyond or even go counter to the plain literal meaning of the text in order to extract a message from it, even if a so-called “Christotelic” parameter would prevent a total free-for-all. Let it be stated emphatically and in no uncertain terms. If the text is not taken as foundational, and as a result does not receive the intense attention it deserves and calls for, it will eventually even impinge on the content and meaning of the cross and the resurrection. That this produces a downward spiral that affects everything is and should be crystal clear. We do and will end up, as I argued already and argue below again, with an anemic Christ, anemic interpretation, anemic preaching, an anemic Church, and anemic believers. To talk about a near kiss of death is hardly an exaggeration!

² Bryan Chapell, “The Necessity of Preaching Grace for Progress in Sanctification,” in Robert A. Peterson and Sean Michael Lucas, eds., *All for Jesus* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2006), 47-60.

Assuming that *all* of the OT Scripture testifies of Christ, “how can Jesus offer the (kind of Christocentric) exposition (as he supposedly does according Luke 24:27), and by corollary require such exposition from us, if the text does not make direct reference to him?” In other words, how can anyone insist on a Christocentric exposition and proclamation of a text where Christ is not mentioned, on the basis of (a mistranslated) Luke 24:27, and how should one arrive at such exposition hermeneutically and at such proclamation homiletically, when the text admittedly is not Christocentric exegetically? This is, and indeed should be, *the* burning issue for the proponents of the exclusivistic so-called Christocentric, redemptive historical, method.

As I argue below, the question Chapell poses, can even be sharpened in the present context of James, which at best makes peripheral mention of Christ! How can an inerrant James, which according to most every commentator either resembles a sermon, consists of sermon material, or is a collection of sermon notes, and according to one commentator should function as a “seedbed for a vast array of sermons” (Tasker, Preface), be enthusiastically accepted as an inerrant model for the type of Christocentric sermons that reflect much of today’s prevailing redemptive historical, homiletic, methodology, if and when this very methodology *must* conclude that from its perspective James may not function as a model because it does not meet its criteria for a biblical Christocentric sermon? I also argue below that with the proper translation of Luke 24:27 this “(agonizing) question” simply disappears as such, and proves to be a non-question, even if the issue as to what it takes for a message from a text where Christ is not mentioned to be a Christian message remains utterly relevant. In the course of this argument it will become crystal clear as well that James is in no way, shape, or form lacking in a truly biblical Christocentricity, which means that any hermeneutic and homiletic methodology that *must* look at James, and similar sections of Scripture, with an agonizing, if not jaundiced, eye, better beat a hasty retreat in heartfelt repentance. Whether explicitly or implicitly, one simply may not refuse to embrace even one section of God’s inerrant Scripture as a biblical model when and where the setting or circumstances are analogous!

2. At any rate, in dealing with “his question” Chapell refreshingly denies the legitimacy of a type of exposition that seeks to “unveil depictions of Christ by mysterious alchemies of allegory and typology. The goal is not to make a specific reference to Jesus magically appear from every camel track of Hebrew narrative or every metaphor of Hebrew poetry (leading to allegorical errors).” With this he justly condemns an excessive redemptive-historical sort of hermeneutics that, indeed, resembles “biblical alchemy,” but regrettably circulates all too frequently. Such approach does not only turn the text into a veritable Jack-in-the-Box, but also obscures, if not destroys, its intended message!³ At

³ Apparently a specific Seminary requires its students in one of its Homiletics courses to find, if not unearth, Christ in texts, such as Deuteronomy 14:21b, “You shall not boil a young goat in the milk of the mother.” To talk about an (un)biblical and preposterous alchemy, whether of a questionable typological or allegorical sort, in this kind of context is hardly an exaggeration!

best, it may end up contemplating a NT truth that is read retroactively into an OT passage.

3. Instead, Chapell argues that the exposition should “show where every text stands in relation to the person and/or work of Christ, whose grace alone achieves our salvation.” In other words, it must “identify how the passage *predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from* the person and/or work of Christ.” For instance, prophecies predict the work of Christ, the sacrificial system prepares for it, and a relationship, such as between Hosea and Gomer, reflects the reality of his love and the need for mercy. Furthermore, it should point out redemptive *dead ends*, such as the periods of judges and kings, for the purpose of turning us from human to divine dependence, and “*bridges* that allow the covenant people to progress in their understanding of redeeming grace ... (such as) the Lord’s calling and preservation of the diminutive nation of Israel (and) the provision of the manna in the wilderness.” Some entities, such as the sacrificial system, are dead end streets on one level, and bridges on another. Finally, it should observe each text (I summarize) through a twofold micro-lense. How does the Spirit reveal not only the nature of God in the various dimensions of his redemptive activity, but also the nature of humanity in its need for redemption? This is “the fallen condition/divine solution focus,” in which the exposition in each instance displays one or more aspects of human fallenness, and subsequently points to God’s way out of the dilemma. Under such preaching human pride does, and should, vanish, and the glory of God and his grace does, and should, turn into what it should be, namely, “the apex purpose of the sermon.”⁴

4. In particular, he urges the following illuminating steps in the second part of his article, which covers “Redemptive Preaching for Sanctification.” This part, of course, is of the greatest interest for the interpretation, understanding, and preaching of James, since Practical Godliness, Holiness, Sanctification, as I argue below, is the very heart, theme, and objective of this Epistle! Chapell’s core recommendation (I summarize again) is to preach grace in terms of the biblical motivation and enablement necessary for our obedience. Without it, preaching fosters deadly pride in performance and deadly despair in failure. For one, the preaching of grace and grace only, flowing forth from, and embodied in, the Cross and the Resurrection, rather than trashing the law, and excusing sin, produces the love that motivates to obey God’s laws, and the zeal to pursue God’s purposes. For another, the preaching of grace and grace only, flowing forth from, and embodied in, the union with Christ in his Cross and Resurrection, produces forgiveness, imputed righteousness, as well as definitive and progressive sanctification. If the Gospel of grace does not aim at this foursome objective, the Gospel is not preached in full. It is a

Furthermore, the text turns by definition into a kind of Jack-in-the-Box, while its precious intended meaning, determined by the content and clues in the text, by equal definition vanishes from sight.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, “The Necessity of Preaching Grace,” 48-51; See also from the same author, *Christ-Centered Preaching; Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 282ff.

curtailed, partial, Gospel at best, potentially deadening and destructive. In short, only the motivating and enabling indicatives of grace can supply the foundation for, and the implementation of, the imperatives of holiness, and in the process cut off both pompous pride and debilitating despair. Without Jesus nothing: the antidote of pride! With Jesus everything: the antidote of despair. For all this to become a reality, God in his infinite love has favored the Church with the disciplines of grace, such as preaching, fellowship, the sacraments and prayer, to nourish it with the motivation (love) and enablement (joy) of grace in the Person and Work of Christ with a view to holiness. In order to arrive at this destination the preacher may not rest until Christ suffuses and fills the sermon, and a relational bond with him is established. Without Christ the sermon has no life-giving substance, and without the goal of relational bonding it is misdirected.⁵

There is little doubt that Chapell's proposals have markedly advanced the discussion, as to how Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms preached Jesus (John 5:39, 46), how Jesus preached himself on the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:27), and how the Church ought to preach him in his footsteps as well as of those of the OT. Still, it seems to me that they can stand some refinement, especially in the context of James, in terms of both some (minor) adjustments and (substantive) additions. A Trinitarian hermeneutics appears both to require this and make it possible. To validate this claim I start with fifteen general observations, and conclude with six sets of comments about the implications of all this for preaching. In these comments I include suggestions concerning these adjustments and additions.

1. It should once and for all be agreed upon that not all of the OT testifies exclusively of Jesus, whether directly (With Chapell) or indirectly. The reason is simple and profound. The OT is above everything the Book of God the Father. Therefore, with occasional, be it crucial, references to Christ and the Holy Spirit, it mainly testifies of *the Father*, as he extends his covenant of love to humans in order to fellowship with them in the splendor of holiness, which is reflected in his Law. The Fall interrupted this undertaking big time. It bankrupted mankind, which ended up with rebel hearts (Gen. 6:5), guilty records (Is. 64:6), and polluted lives (John 15:5). Still, in the continuation of his love he determined to restore mankind, and did so in two phases.

2. In the first phase he focused on Israel, be it as the eventual gateway to the world. He did so in terms of the covenants with Abraham, Moses and David. He promised to be their God. But at the same time he made it crystal clear that he would not compromise on holiness. He would neither lower the bar nor be satisfied with anything less than the benchmark of perfection (Gen. 17:1). The fellowship would be on his terms and on his terms only. In fact, he (methodologically) insisted that Israel, and in Israel mankind, was 100% responsible for the spiritual mess it hauled upon itself, and therefore was equally

⁵ Chapell, "The Necessity of Preaching Grace," 51-57.

responsible for cleaning it up! It may not, and should not, go unnoticed that for this very reason he summoned Israel to justify, regenerate, as well as sanctify itself (sic!) (Ezek. 18:31a, b, c). Why would it opt for death (Ezek. 18:31d-32)? Of course, in the process its utter bankruptcy became, and was meant to become, equally crystal clear. Israel ran into the brick wall of its radical impotence and total helplessness. It came face to face with a spiritual desert situation that proved to be deadly (Is. 32:14ff), a spiritual cemetery that accommodated the dead (Ezek. 37:1ff), and a spiritual Dead Sea that caused the death of everyone and everything else (Ezek. 47:1ff). The bottom line is simple as well as profound. Israel's unquestionable responsibility (sic!) to remedy itself met more than its match in its utter inability (sic!) to do so.

3. Once this bankruptcy was established as an incontrovertible fact, God inaugurated the second phase, the phase of the New Covenant. It prompted God in his covenantal love and mercy to move "into the gap" (Is. 59:15b-19; Ezek. 22:30). He himself would clean up the mess. Not (even) for the sake of Israel, but rather for the sake of his own reputation and holiness, he made the solemn promise that he would return them to their homesteads, and give them a thorough cleansing (justification) as the legal framework, a heart transplant (regeneration) as the launching pad, and a brand-new life (sanctification) through the Holy Spirit as the crowning piece of his saving activity (Ezek. 36:22-27). It ought to be noted that the order of instruction in both Ezekiel 18:31 and 36:25-27, in which justification is mentioned before regeneration and sanctification, is not identical to the order of salvation, in which regeneration precedes justification and sanctification. Incidentally, in Romans 3:21-8:17 Paul follows the same order of instruction as Ezekiel 18 and 36, justification (Rom. 3:21-5:21), regeneration (Rom. 6:1-11), and sanctification (Rom. 6:12-8:17), while in 2 Corinthians 5:14-7:1 he presents the order of salvation, regeneration (2 Cor. 5:14-17), justification (2 Cor. 5:18-21), and sanctification (2 Cor. 6:1-7:1). Philippians 3:1-10 follows the latter pattern, regeneration (Phil. 3:3), justification (Phil. 3:9), and sanctification (Phil. 3:10). At any rate, in his saving process God would turn the spiritual desert into a fertile field (Is. 32:14f), the cemetery into a virtual maternity ward (Ezek. 37:1ff), and the Dead Sea into a fresh water lake, filled with fish (Ezek. 47:1ff). In a word, in Ezekiel God assures us of the awesome New Covenant that would encompass Israel as well as the Gentile world.

4. But how would this come about? The answer is embodied in the Person and Work of Christ. The foundation for this embodiment was laid in Moses (Gen. 3:15; Deut. 18:18-19). A rough outline of this embodiment was sketched in the Writings (Ps. 2:7; 16:10; 22:16-18; 110:1). And some of the finer points of this embodiment went on record in the Prophets (Is. 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1ff; 52:13ff; 61:1ff; Micah 6:1ff). All this culminated in the identification of this embodiment in these same Prophets as the "(New) Covenant" (Is. 42:6; 49:8; see also Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25). In short, the very New Covenant which the Father promised was to be personified in the Son. As has been observed already, but bears repetition at this time, the Son would produce the new heart, required for regeneration (Rom. 6:6, 11), the new righteousness, required for justification (2 Cor. 5:21), and the new holiness, required for sanctification (Heb. 10:10, 14). Without Jesus

nothing but bankruptcy: no new heart, no new righteousness, and no new holiness. With Jesus everything: Jesus' heart, Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' holiness! Then, against the backdrop of the various hopeless cul-de-sacs (Chapell's "dead-ends") we can add to all this the tapestry, as presented in Moses, the Writings and the Prophets, of the various hopeful foreshadowings (Chapell's "bridges") (1) of the Person of Christ in his function of (a) Prophet, (b) High priest and (c) King, and (2) of the Work of Christ in the symbolical legislation, covering (a) regeneration (circumcision), (b) justification (the sacrificial system in general, and the Passover in particular), and (c) sanctification (separation laws as well as death and life laws; see for the latter **Topical Focus #9: Symbols & Penology in the Mosaic Law**)! When we do so, we will all agree that Jesus had plenty to talk about on the Road to Emmaus. In fact, he most likely ran out of time, as he "interpreted in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk. 24:27)!

5. To mis-translate and mis-quote this passage, which is done nearly across the board in redemptive-historical circles, whether of the excessive or milder variety, as if it states that "All of the law and the prophets testify of him,"⁶ is unconscionable in sum and substance, and potentially "criminal" in its twofold effect.

First, it is bound to downplay both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and subtly to rob them of their Person-specific OT glory, and therefore unavoidably of their Person-specific NT glory as well, whether consciously or not. As the height of irony, an unbiblical emphasis upon a nearly exclusive Christocentricity, such as found in Luther and in many redemptive-historical circles, ends up robbing God the Son of much of his Person-specific OT and NT glory as well. Too often the *historia salutis*, the history of redemption, is emphasized at the neglect or expense of the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation. All this, as we shall see at the end of this section, cannot but negatively impact the preaching of both the OT and NT.

Second, by neglecting the place and function of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and thereby downgrading the place and function of the Father, the Spirit, as well as the Son, it basically facilitates, if not makes for, a man-centered Gospel to one degree or another, whether intentionally or not. In sharp reaction to the clearly unbiblical, and therefore unacceptable, notion of LAW unto sanctification the emphasis is now upon GRACE (in Christ) unto sanctification. In line with this, all texts are said to *direct to*, *prepare for*, are *reflective of*, and *result from* Christ. However true this is from the Christological perspective, too much remains unsaid from the Trinitarian perspective. It is not sufficiently full-orbed. I fear that it leaves too many biblical data unaccounted for, and allows for too many of them to fall through the cracks, at first in one's biblical and systematic theology, but in the end in one's pastoral pulpit and counseling ministry. This, of course, requires an explanation. In the Old Covenant the main, *substantive*, focus is upon HOLINESS through LAW or LAW unto HOLINESS. However, its corollary,

⁶ See once again, Chapell, "The Necessity of Preaching Grace," 48.

methodological, objective is to show the IMPOSSIBILITY of HOLINESS through Law or LAW unto Holiness (Rom. 7:18-23). This paves the way for the New Covenant teaching of HOLINESS, HOLINESS, HOLINESS (of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) through GRACE (from the Father), GRACE (in Christ), GRACE (through the Spirit), TRIPLE HOLINESS THROUGH TRIPLE GRACE. Jesus himself is of this conviction. FRUIT (John 15:2a), (more) FRUIT (John 15:2b), (much) FRUIT (John 15:8), (continuing) FRUIT (John 15:16) through the GRACE of abiding in Jesus as the source of grace (John 15:5-6) by the Word and Prayer as means of grace (John 15:7)! In other words, Scripture does not advocate HOLINESS/GRAPES through LAW, HOLINESS/GRAPES through law, LAW unto HOLINESS/GRAPES, or law unto HOLINESS/GRAPES. Neither does it advocate GRACE unto holiness/grapes, or even GRACE unto HOLINESS/GRAPES. Instead, it champions HOLINESS/GRAPES through GRACE (This, incidentally, is also suggested by the perceptive title of Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001). Only the latter is truly and fully theocentric, and cuts off any subtle, or not so subtle, anthropocentric turn. The first order of business, therefore, is to establish HOLINESS/GRAPES as the awesome benchmark and the grand objective. The second order of business is to establish GRACE as the awesome and grand means to rise to the benchmark and meet the objective! At bottom grace is “merely” the three-stage rocket that puts the payload of holiness/grapes into orbit. (The first stage is the grace of regeneration as the launching pad of holiness. The second stage is the grace of justification as the legal framework of holiness. The third stage is the grace of sanctification with (the worship in the splendor of) perfect holiness as the final objective.) This truth is substantiated by the fact that, once the Kingdom of God is fully ushered in, the need for the rocket (grace) vanishes, but the ultimate payload (holiness) will be on eternal display (2 Pet. 3:13; see also 2 Pet. 3:11, 14, for the place, and need, of holiness as its earthly corollary)!

All this is simply to say that only against the backdrop of both the awesome holiness and the awful depravity, on display as such by illuminating comparison, does the awesome nature and objective of grace stand out. In fact, the more biblically awesome the benchmark and the more biblically grand the objective are portrayed, the more the awesome nature and grand objective of grace will be recognized, and, by implication, the more awesome and grand our precious Lord and the equally precious Spirit prove to be. All this goes, further, to say that without a 20-20 vision of the benchmark and the objective for all practical purposes grace ends up hanging in the air without a well-defined content and without a well-defined target! This is the fate of any and all Christocentricity that is not defined against the twofold backdrop of the OT as the benchmark book of God the Father with his summons to holiness and the total depravity of man as its corollary.

6. The conclusion must be that in (much) redemptive-historical homiletics, in spite of its well-founded biblical aversion to a legal(istic) obedience that is bound to deteriorate into moralism, still a, be it ever so subtle, man-centeredness replaces a full-orbed God-centeredness. After all, in general the OT (and NT) text, first of all, *directs* us

to, and is *reflective* of, God the Father, even if it directly or indirectly *prepares* us for the Gospel (promises) of the Father (Rom 15:16b), and its multi-faceted content *results* only from the Son (Rom. 15:16a) *as well as* through the Spirit (Rom. 15:16c). This Trinitarian pattern is evident throughout Scripture. Paul in Ephesians starts out with the Father's election unto holiness (Eph. 1:3-6), and has this set the stage for the awesome work of the Son (Eph. 1:7-12) and the Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). Of course, in every one of these three phases the Lord Jesus Christ is present. But the Father is at the beginning and the end. After all, everything is to the praise of his glory! This is the setting in which the work of the Son (Eph. 1:6-10) as well as the work of the Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14) are positioned and fully come into their own. In his First Epistle Peter follows suit. In the opening statement of this Epistle Peter starts out by introducing his readers to the election of the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit unto the obedience and the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:2), in this order. Then he continues to enlarge on the work of God the Father (1 Pet. 1:3-7), of the Son (1 Pet. 1:8-9), and of the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Once again, in none of these phases he emphasizes one Person at the neglect, or expense, of the other two Persons in the Godhead. To the contrary, he is careful to name the Lord Christ in each phase. This is to be expected from a Trinitarian Scripture. Nevertheless, not to start from the Father (benchmark) and seek to arrive at the Father (objective) through the Spirit and by means of the Son (in the Petrine context) is to produce an anthropocentric direction or tilt that sooner or later will be spiritually damaging, if not destructive, to one degree or another. To start with the emphasis upon (soothing) grace is eventually to be “graced out,” as someone once graphically put it. To start with the emphasis upon (devastating) holiness is eventually to be “graced in.” At any rate, it is rather clear that a purely Christocentric interpretation of Ephesians 1 and 1 Peter 1 would be reductionistic by definition.

7. Frankly, consistent proponents of an all too reductionistic Christocentric, redemptive-historical, methodology may well have to ask themselves the question whether they ever could have written Ephesians 1 and 1 Peter 1 “as is.” The same applies to the vast sections in Scripture where the name of our precious Lord and Savior is not mentioned. Pointedly to transpose this same issue into the James’ context, in comparing 1 Peter, which is explicitly Christocentric at virtually every crucial juncture, with James, which on the face of it is virtually devoid of explicit Christocentricity, how would (unsuspecting) consistent proponents of an all too reductionistic Christocentricity react, were they to hear these Epistles as sermons in a present day Church setting for the first time? Would they embrace both of them wholeheartedly, or would they with Luther take a dim view of James? Furthermore, would they extol both letters as models for Christian sermons without any reservation, or would they downgrade James to an exercise in moralism and view it, apart from a few elements, as a message worthy of the Synagogue? It seems that without a Trinitarian homiletics, based upon a Trinitarian hermeneutics, they would have no other choice but to gravitate to, if not opt for, a Christ-filled 1 Peter at the expense of a seemingly Christ-less James. As we shall also see below, the bottom line is that even the slightest confusion in all this cannot but put up a barrier against a much needed Revival Status, a proper Maintenance Ministry, as well as a Recovery

Mode, when and where necessary.

8. At any rate, as I seek to substantiate both admittedly serious claims, if not charges, that an all too exclusivistic Christocentricity (1) robs the Father and the Spirit, and ironically, also Christ, of their Person-specific glory and (2) eventually will mire down into a subtle, or not so subtle, anthropocentricity, I also aim to cover the question how to relate Christ in his Person and Work to the “vast portions” of Scripture, in fact, to the majority of the Old Testament, Moses, the Prophets as well as the Writings, and to large sections of the New Testament, specifically the Epistolary parts, that “make no explicit mention of him.” This has been puzzling to many, and stands in need of a responsible solution. Frankly, the puzzlement, which gave rise to “the (agonizing) question,” mentioned above, will not only prove to be unnecessary, but also to betray an (already) partially reductionistic (errant?) Christocentricity! In any event, let me start at this point in order to end up with the formulation of some guidelines that ensure full-orbed, rather than reductionistic, biblical preaching.

9. The OT, as we saw, testifies to Christ in a rich and unmistakable manner. However, by and large the OT portrays the fullness of the Father. (Only at cardinal junctures does it refer to either the Second or the Third Person of the Godhead.) Responsible exegesis, therefore, does and must bring out this fullness by carefully laying out the multitudinous features of the OT text as a display of the Self-disclosure of God the Father in the sum total of his divine perfections, words, and actions. In this context, it must specifically call attention to his holiness, which is reflected in his Law; his love, which through this Law aims at the holiness of his people as the crowning piece of his saving activity; his grace, which through his Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenant persevered in granting them the privilege to reflect and display his glory after the Fall; his immutability, which is unswervingly committed to what was the purpose of Creation in the first place (See specifically **Topical Focus #8: The Problem of Evil**); and his wrath, which will remove everyone who is not committed to the grand Covenantal objective of both Creation and Redemption, namely the Worship of God rooted in, and intertwined with, the Exhibition of His Glory, specifically in the Splendor of Holiness. All these elements are in copious abundance in the OT, and form the antidote against the various kinds of aberrant teachings that perennially seem to creep up. Such teachings all have in common that they fail to be overwhelmed, and therefore fail to start with, the fullness of the glory of the Father in the sum total of his perfections, promises, words and actions, and all that this entails.

10. As we saw as well, specifically in the light of the glorious fullness of the Father Israel’s bankrupt condition opened up a staggering gap of depravity, in terms of its rebel heart, its guilty record, and its offensive life, that can never be bridged by humans. This prompted God the Father in his love and grace to promise, hold out the prospect of, the New Covenant, which would vindicate his Holy Name, to personify, embody, this New Covenant in his Son, which accounts for the numerous references to him in all of the OT, and, as we shall see below, to personalize this New Covenant, bring it home, through the

Spirit, which is referenced in the OT as well. This New Covenant will accomplish what Creation by virtue of the fall of all of mankind did not do, and the OT covenants by virtue of the bankruptcy of Israel could not do. This accomplishment is assured, because it is personified in Christ. As the personification of the New Covenant he is both the substance of the promised regeneration, justification and sanctification that is explicitly referenced in the OT, and the repository of those “vast portions of the Old and New Testaments that do not make an explicit mention of him.” This is to say, the fullness of God the Father, on magnificent display in the awesome sum total of his perfections, words, and actions in the OT in general, and concentrated in the spectacular New Covenant promises with holiness as the crowning piece of his saving activity in particular, I repeat, all of this fullness enters into the Person and Work of the Son, is deposited in him, and is to be derived from him.

11. This is the clear testimony of Scripture. After all, “In him all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell bodily” (Col. 1:19; 2:9). This fullness has (at least) three components. First, Christ embodies the sum total of all the perfections of God, which constitute his essence. As such he is fully God (See also John 1:1; 5:18; 20:28, etc.). Second, Christ embodies the sum total of the promises of God, culminating in the threefold prospect of regeneration, justification and sanctification (2 Cor. 1:20). As such he is fully the New Covenant (Is. 42:6; 49:8; Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25)! Third, he embodies the sum total of the words and actions of God, reflected in the History, the Law, the Wisdom literature and the Prophets of the OT, and interpreted in the NT, in person in the Gospels and through his apostles in the Epistolary and Apocalyptic literature (Deut. 18:19; John 1:18). As such he is fully the Treasury of all (the OT and NT) wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). All these elements come together in Christ as the Word (John 1:1). He is the Radiance of the Glory of God (Deity: Heb. 1:3a), the Personification of the Condescension of God (Covenant: Prov. 8:31), and the Replica of the Nature of God (Self-expression: Prov. 8:32-36; John 1:18).

12. The foregoing leads to a general conclusion with three specific entailments. The conclusion is this. Through union and communion, and only through union and communion with Christ, precisely as the fullness of God, the believer himself or herself (increasingly) experiences, enjoys, and mirrors this fullness (Eph. 3:19). The three entailments are as follows. First, through union and communion with Christ as the embodied sum total of all God’s perfections believers experience, enjoy, and mirror, the presence of, and the fellowship with, God in all his perfections. Second, through union and communion with Christ as the embodied New Covenant, believers experience, enjoy, and mirror, the substance of the New Covenant and the full complement of its promises. Third, through union and communion with Christ as the embodied sum total of all God’s words and actions, believers experience, enjoy, and mirror, the total aggregate of these words and actions. When believers experience, enjoy, and mirror, the fullness of God in terms of his perfections, the New Covenant promises of God, as well as the words and actions of God, they become (increasingly) partaker of the divine nature in the splendor

of holiness (2 Pet. 1:4)! The crucial point is that in all this the Lord Jesus does not function as a “black hole,” in which the fullness of the Father in terms of his perfections, his promises, his words and his actions, that is, the rich variety of the OT as the Book of God the Father, reductionistically disappears. This is to one extent or another the regrettable upshot and legacy of too many types of a reductionistic redemptive-historical hermeneutics which all too often confuses holiness with moralism and all too often ends up throwing out the baby with seeming bathwater. No, our Lord and Savior exhibits all the characteristics of a so-called “White Hole,” from which all of the content of the OT, minus the sections that are clearly abrogated, emerges in a glory that is indescribable and overwhelming, in order to be passed on to all those, who do, or will, experience, enjoy, and evidence, the union and communion with Christ. In short, to obtain the content of the communicable perfections of the Father, embrace Christ! To obtain the content of the promises of the Father, embrace Christ! To obtain the content of all the words and actions of the Father, embrace Christ! Concretely, to embrace Christ in his fullness is to embrace the text of Scripture in its fullness, since it contains the Self-disclosure of the Father in his fullness. This text is the delivery instrument of the perfections of the Father, of the substance of the threefold promise of the Father in Christ, of the escape in Christ from all the dead ends as well as the crossing in Christ of all the bridges, as described in the OT (as well as the NT), and the arrival at the benchmark of the perfection of God in Christ. No wonder that full and meticulous justice must be done to the text in its exegesis, its exposition and its application. An all too exclusivistic Christocentric (redemptive-historical) approach removes the fullness of the text from sight, both in principle and in practice, and with it the fullness of the Father, and the Son (!) as well as the Holy Spirit. By taking a one (short or long) look at Luther in his attempts to downgrade, if not to get rid of James, every protestation to the contrary will end up in silence.

If I may put all this as succinctly as possible, the (exclusivistic) redemptive-historical method, which incidentally in its concentrated form is not even one hundred years old, and therefore could be viewed as a Johnny-come-lately, suffers of reductionistic tunnel vision. It mistakenly assumes that Christ is present in every text, searches for him in every text, ends up putting him in texts where he cannot be found and does not belong, and in the process all too often fails to focus on the purpose of the text and to concentrate on the features of the text. As a result it equally often misses the pulsating message of the text. This is what is meant by the charge that the content of the text disappears into Christ as a “black hole.” The historic Reformed faith, on the other hand, and especially in its Puritan form, pours over the text in its context, pays painstaking attention to each and every detail, in order to mine its message and identify its fullness. When it has accomplished its hermeneutical task, it places this fullness, all its findings, in Christ, whether injunctions, prohibitions, promises, admonitions, rebukes, threats, principles, patterns, or otherwise, subsequently embraces him, and with it both absorbs and displays the message of the text in all its features, that is, in its fullness. This is meant by the tribute that the content of the text flows forth from Christ as a “White Hole.” In short, proper hermeneutics does not arbitrarily put Christ in the text when he is

not there, at the detriment of the text. But it purposefully puts the text in Christ, in order to soak up its content through union with him and display its beauty through abiding in him, to the honor of the text.

13. In all this the place and function of the Holy Spirit may never be overlooked, neglected, ignored, or downplayed. To do so is to attempt, if not commit, spiritual suicide. The reason is simple. The fullness of the Father, in terms of his perfections, promises, words and actions, makes up the fullness of the Son. However, the fullness of the Son, in these same areas, makes up, produces, the fullness of the Spirit. Just as the Father promises the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31ff; Ezek. 36:35-27), which is the concentration point, if not pinnacle, of his perfections, words and actions, and the Son personifies the New Covenant (Is. 42:6; 49:8), so the Holy Spirit personalizes the New Covenant (Is. 59:21). Without the Father there is no prospect of salvation. Without the Son there is no provision for salvation. Without the Spirit there is no presence of salvation. The latter is in line with Paul's words to the effect that "anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ" (Rom. 8:9). After all, without the Spirit there is no implanting of Christ's heart in regeneration (John 3:5). Without the Spirit there is no sealing of Christ's righteousness in justification (Eph. 1:13-14). Without the Spirit there is no implementation of Christ's holiness in sanctification (Rom. 15:16). In short, without the fullness of the Holy Spirit the fullness of the Father terminates in the fullness of the Son, and will never reach or arrive in the fullness of the believer, and consequently forever prevent anyone from reflecting the fullness of the Father in the splendor of holiness as the crowning piece of his saving activity. The golden chain of salvation is unmistakably Trinitarian and circular. From the Fullness of the Father, by means of the Fullness of the Son, through the Fullness of the Holy Spirit, via the Fullness of the believer, to the Fullness of God the Father. Take one of the links out of the chain and it is all over!

14. This puts the two claims about, if not charges against, an (all too) exclusivistic Christocentricity in perspective. Regarding the first claim, it should be clear by now that such reductionistic (errant!) Christocentricity robs the Father and the Spirit of their Person-specific glory in both the OT and the NT. Promote this kind of Christocentricity, in the footsteps of Luther and others, and this twofold glory will be missed, neglected or ignored, and with it be downgraded or go by the board. Furthermore, overlook that it is the fullness of the Father that enters into the fullness of the Son, and the Person-specific glory of the Son will be missed, neglected, or ignored, and with it be downgraded or go by the board, as well. It hardly needs to be emphasized that without a biblical vista upon the Person-specific glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the preaching will greatly suffer. But more about this below!

15. Regarding the second claim, overlook that the fullness of the Father via the fullness of the Son through the fullness of the Spirit enters into the fullness of the believer, and the latter's person-specific glory will also be missed, neglected, ignored, and with it be downgraded or go by the board. When all this plays out, an anthropocentric

Gospel to one degree or another is the inevitable outcome and the road to Revival will by implication be virtually blocked. Both conclusions stand to reason. When the fullness of the Father in terms of his perfections, promises, words, and actions, is no longer recognized as the starting benchmark as well as the concluding objective of God's saving activity, man-centeredness cannot but creep in. It must do so by definition, whether subtly or not so subtly. Regrettably, a curtailed and thereby downgraded Christocentricity, such as is found in Luther, and in evidence in too many types of redemptive-historical thinking, cannot remedy this situation. It may endeavor to do so, but it will fail, precisely because it is anemic to one extent or another. Ultimately Christ and the Holy Spirit are not first of all here from the Father for mankind (anthropocentric). But through Christ and the Spirit mankind is here first of all for the Father (theocentric)! (See in this context specifically **Topical Focus #8: The Problem of Evil.**) In fact, this is, and should be, the greatest glory, the greatest felicity, and therefore the greatest enjoyment of the believer! After all, it is nothing short of the imposing Biblical Mt. Everest kind of truth, which dwarfs anything and everything else, that it is God's glory that "of him and through him and unto him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). This even applies to Biblical Christology (1 Cor. 15:28). Miss this truth, and it is bound to have a negative effect upon the understanding, application, as well as practice of biblical truth across the board, which is theocentric by definition. A downgraded Christocentricity may pay lip service to this glory. But it cannot produce the God-centeredness Scripture depicts and demands as the grand reflection of the fullness of the Father, depicts and offers as the grand embodiment of the fullness of the Father in the Son, and depicts and conveys as the grand objective of the fullness of the Father in the Son through the Spirit.

These fifteen observations carry a number of implications for biblical preaching. In the process of enumerating them one by one, I also make some suggestions regarding the (minor) adjustments and revisions as well (substantive) expansions and additions, mentioned above and designed both to reverse the downgrade of a reductionistic Christocentricity, and to restore it to its full-orbed biblical glory, as part of the biblical, Trinitarian, Patri/Christo/Spiritucentricity!

1. Biblical preaching does, and must, shed the stricture of an all too exclusivistic and anemic Christocentricity by revisiting, rethinking, and revising the notion that Luke 24 and John 5 teach such, and must come to recognize the Trinitarian nature of both the Gospel and salvation. If this dawns on the student of preaching, he will not rest until, not just the Son, but the Father, the Son, as well as the Spirit, suffuse and fill the sermon, and a relational bonding takes place, not just with the Son, but with all three Persons of the Godhead, with the Father (as in Ps. 73:25-26; Hab. 3:17-19), the Holy Spirit (as in Rom. 14:17), as well as the Son (as in 1 Pet. 1:8). When it succeeds in doing so, the audience comes face to face with the awesome benchmark of the fullness of the Father, with the equally awesome repository of this fullness in the fullness of the Son, as well as with the just as awesome conveyor of this fullness in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, in this order! This has three aspects.

a. The vision of the benchmark of the fullness of the Father in his perfections, words, and actions, is both required for, and instrumental in, arriving at the conviction of wretched sinners as well as wretched saints. The greater the display of the fullness of the Father in its depth, height, breadth and length, the greater the conviction of sinners and saints in its depth, height, breadth, and length (Is. 6:1-5)! Against this backdrop the utter necessity as well as the awesome glory of the fullness of the Father specifically in terms of the threefold New Covenant promise is, and should now be(come), crystal clear. The pinnacle of rebellion demands the extreme measure of a radical heart transplant. The epitome of guilt demands the extreme measure of a staggering propitiation. The apex of pollution demands the extreme measure of a total overhaul. In short, to the extent biblical preaching fails to aim at a relational bonding with the biblical fullness of the Father, it fails to arrive at the biblical conviction of the existing, illegitimate, bonding with sin on the part of both (wretched) sinner and (wretched) saint. To the extent it fails to arrive at the biblical conviction of the illegitimate bonding with sin on the part, once again, of sinner and saint, it fails to convey the awesome fullness of the Father in terms of the promulgation of his threefold New Covenantal Revival promise. To grasp the need for, and the nature of this Biblical, Revival, Salvation, is never to lose the wonder of it all!

b. To embrace all this is required for, and instrumental in, opening up the vision of the fullness of the Father in the fullness of the Son. The greater the vision of the fullness of the Father, the greater the vision of the fullness of the Son! After all, he personifies the perfections, promises, as well as words and actions of the Father. As the embodied New Covenant he is the Great Exterminator and Undertaker. He exterminates the rebellion, the guilt and the pollution by virtue of the crucifixion, and inters them. Good Friday is good riddance of bad, in fact, of the worst of rubbish. He is also the Great Re-originator and Fountainhead. He replaces the rebellion, guilt, and pollution by virtue of the resurrection with his heart, his righteousness and his holiness. In all this he displays the perfections he shares with the Father. After all, to see him is to see the Father (John 14:8:1-9), and to know him is to know the Father (John 8:19). In all this he also mirrors his words and actions. He never speaks or acts by his own authority (John 8:28) or initiative (John 6:19, 30). In fact, he does not speak except what he hears the Father say (John 5:24; 8:26, 28). Nor does he do except what he sees the Father do (John 5:19; 8:29).

c. To embrace all this is also required for, and instrumental in, opening up the vision of the fullness of the Holy Spirit conveying the fullness of the Father through the fullness of the Son. The greater the vision of the fullness of the Father and the Son, the greater the vision of the fullness of the Spirit! After all, he personalizes the perfections, promises, as well as the words and actions of the Father as personified in the Son. He implants Jesus' heart, seals Jesus' righteousness, and implements Jesus' holiness. He writes the Law on hearts. In it he conveys the fullness of the Father in the Son to the believer.

2. Biblical preaching does, and must, recognize that this triple fullness is on display in the text of the Scriptures of the OT and NT, which functions as the sole instrument to bring mankind face to face with this fullness, and to produce a bonding relationship with

it. These Scriptures constitute the Self-disclosure of God in written form. The Father originates them (2 Tim. 3:16), the Son embodies them (John 1:1), while the Holy Spirit superintends their infallible formation through “holy men of God,” and so guarantees their inerrant completion (2 Pet. 1:21). This, of course, calls for a meticulous as well as solemn, impassioned, pointed, discriminating, prayerful, and Spirit-filled exposition of the Biblical text, whether this is done in a (predominantly) expository, textual or topical manner with the grand objective of an ever increasing vision of both the Trinitarian-specific glory of God, as well as the Person-specific glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This has also has three aspects.

a. Such exposition is necessary to retain or to arrive at a Revival Culture, a Maintenance ministry and a Recovery Mode, in order to lead wretched sinners as well as wretched saints to perfection (Gen. 17:1; Mt. 5:48; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; see also James 1:3-4, the exposition of this passage in my Commentary, and Sprague, *Lectures*, 95, 98, 105, 107, 110, 116-121, 130-132, 137, 158-161, 226, 246; as well as in the same volume his *Appendix*, 11-12, 19-20, 37, 47, 50-53, 59, 64-65, 69-73, 76, 81-82, 89, 100, 115-116, 119, 122, 137-138, 152, 158, 163).

b. It is rooted in a meticulous Biblical Hermeneutics, which was the subject matter of the previous section, and is evidenced in meticulous preaching, which is the topic of this section.

c. Both require the presence of the same Holy Spirit who superintended the formation and guaranteed the completion of the Biblical Text. The hermeneutist requires the illumination of the Spirit for the interpretation and understanding of the text (1 Cor. 2:10, 12-14; Col. 1:9; 2:2). The homiletician requires the empowering unction of the Spirit to bond wretched sinners with the fullness of the Triune God at the threshold of the Kingdom (1 Cor. 2:4-5), and to bond wretched saints with that fullness in the fabric of the Kingdom (2 Cor. 3:8, 17-18).

3. Biblical preaching does, and must, recognize that it must “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2) in terms of its universal truths, whether principles, patterns, practices, or otherwise, to be gleaned or mined from the text (See section **d. Biblical Hermeneutics** for further details). Incidentally, this also is, and should be, the focus of both typological and allegorical interpretation from the *biblical* perspective, if the model of Paul means anything (See for his typological interpretation, 1 Cor. 10:1-12, and for his allegorical interpretation, Gal. 5:21-31). However, the kind of typological and allegorical interpretation that usually has been practiced in the history of the Church invariably imports alien elements into the text, whether later (usually revealed) elements (typological interpretation), or extraneous (theological or philosophical) elements (allegorical interpretation). The result is that such interpretation eviscerates the text, whether the illegitimately imported elements contain truth or not. At any rate, in this context to focus on universal truths, *as the text calls for them*, is to preach the Triune God in his Trinitarian-specific glory, as well as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their

Person-specific glory. Once again this has three aspects.

a. Preaching from the OT will focus mostly upon the Father, who defines the covenantal nature and holds out the New-Covenantal prospect of salvation. The Son and the Spirit are (sparingly) mentioned, mostly to indicate the provision (the Son) and the implementation (Spirit) of salvation.

b. Preaching from the Gospels focuses mostly upon the Son, who provides the content of this salvation in his Person and work, and paves the way to its realization. The Father and the Spirit are (rather sparingly) mentioned, mostly to indicate the origin, benchmark, nature, and purpose (Father), and the implementation (Spirit) of salvation.

c. Preaching from Acts and onward focuses for the greater part upon the Holy Spirit, who secures the implementation of this salvation and ensures its completion. The Father and the Son are (rather frequently) mentioned to indicate the nature (Father) and the provision (the Son) of salvation.

These three theses are predicated upon the fact that the OT is the Book of God the Father, the Gospels the Book of God the Son, and Acts and onwards the Book of the Holy Spirit. *This, not so incidentally, is also the considered view of Herman Bavinck, II, 287; Eng. Tr., II, 320, “Just as in the ontological Trinity the Father is the first in the order of subsistence, the Son the second, the Holy Spirit the third, so also in the history of revelation the Father preceded the Son, and the Son in turn preceded the Holy Spirit. The “economy” of the Father was especially that of the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1); the “economy” of the Son started with the incarnation; and the “economy” of the Holy Spirit began on the Day of Pentecost (John 7:39; 14:16-17). The Father came without having been sent, the Son came after being sent by the Father (Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; John 3:16; 5:23, 30, 37; 6:28ff; etc.), and the Holy Spirit only came because he was sent both by the Father and the Son (John 14:26; 16:7).”*

3. However, I must hasten to add that in this context Biblical preaching is fully aware of three caveats.

a. The text never highlights the Trinitarian-specific glory of God in isolation from, at the neglect of, or at the expense of, the Person-specific glory of each of the three Persons. This implies that the preacher may not do so either.

b. The text never focuses upon the Person-specific glory of one of the Persons in the Godhead in isolation from, at the neglect of, or at expense of, the two other Persons. Scripture is always Patri/Christo/Spiritucentric, even if every section or passage does not carry the same emphasis. This implies that the preacher may not be victimized by an exclusivistic Patricentricity, Christocentricity, or Spiritucentricity, and hope to be truly and fully biblical.

c. The Biblical Covenantal and New-Covenantal interaction of the Triune God with

his people runs from Perfection (Paradise) through Bankruptcy (Fall), and Restoration (Redemption) to Perfection (New Earth). Scripture never focuses upon the glory of the Three Persons, whether Trinitarian-specific or Person-specific, in isolation of, at the neglect of, or at the expense of, humanity. This implies that the preacher may not do so either. It is and remains a biblical fact that the *historia salutis* means nothing apart from the *ordo salutis*. The latter is not only the (intermediate) objective of the former, but also the (ultimate) concentration point in which the glory of God in the subtotal of his perfections reaches its apex (See also **Topical Focus #8: The Problem of Evil**).

4. In the process of the long interactive Biblical history from Initial Perfection through Bankruptcy to Redemption with a view to ultimate Perfection biblical preaching encounters in Scripture literally myriads of situations that characterize wretched sinners as well as wretched saints. At times this occurs against the backdrop of the benchmark of the fullness of the Father in terms of his perfections, and at times in the context of his promises, whether or not presented in their anticipated (OT), foreshadowed (OT), predicted (OT), or realized (NT) embodiment in the Son, and their foreshadowed (OT), predicted (OT), or realized (NT) implementation by the Spirit. But it always occurs in the framework of his words and actions that insist on perfection, open up deplorable short falls of filth and dead end streets, disclose amazing bridges to life (Chapell!), and summon to repentance, faith, and purposeful godliness en route to perfection in the light of the anticipated (OT), foreshadowed (OT), promulgated (OT and NT), and realized (OT and NT), or still to be realized (NT) promises. This sheds light on three phenomena.

a. It explains why it is “natural” that vast portions of Scripture do not (need to) make mention of the Son, or of the Father and the Spirit, for that matter. Unless Scripture is explicitly Trinitarian-specific, it is Person-specific, even if it is always implicitly Trinitarian-specific!

b. It also explains why biblical preaching, which reflects Paul's summons to “Preach the Word,” invariably will, and should, meticulously set forth the inerrant, authoritative truth content presented by, or embedded in, the preaching unit, whether in terms of pronouncements, promises, injunctions, prohibitions, principles, patterns, etc., without curtailing or twisting it by a reductionistic Christocentricity, or Patricentricity and Spiritucentricity, for that matter.

c. It further explains why biblical preaching should always apply these pronouncements, promises, injunctions, prohibitions, principles, patterns, etc., in the framework of the purpose of the text to people, settings, circumstances, and situations that are analogous to those presented in, or envisioned by, the text.

5. Taking James as one illustration of biblical preaching in his day, and therefore as one legitimate model for biblical preaching in general throughout Church history, we come to the following conclusions.

a. James is basically Father-specific, as it holds out the benchmark of practical

godliness en route to perfection, and presents a fourfold focus, as I argue below (in **3. Systematic Composition**, section **c**, which details the Outline of James). 1. The Twofold Pathway to Practical Godliness from the Divine Perspective (Jam. 1:2-27). 2. The Twofold Principle of Practical Godliness in the Biblical Framework (Jam. 2:1-26). 3. The Threefold Implementation of Practical Godliness in the Christian Experience (Jam. 3:1-4:10). 4. The Threefold Range of Practical Godliness in the Fabric of Life (Jam. 4:11-5:18). It barely mentions the Son, and has not one reference to the Holy Spirit. But it is not Father-specific in isolation from, at the neglect of, and at the expense of, the Son and the Spirit. It opens up a vista upon both, when he emphasizes that for wretched saints all practical godliness does, must, and can, only come “from *above!*” He leaves it to Paul, more importantly, the Holy Spirit gives Paul the assignment, to footnote, and expand on, James, and so to inform the Church that practical godliness, which indeed does, must, and can, only come from above, is personified in the Son (Col. 3:1-3), and personalized by the Spirit (Rom. 15:16). Nevertheless, James’ central concern is Father-specific and as a result perfection-specific. In this he follows in the footsteps of his Older Brother who calls on his audience to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48). To repeat, just as Jesus is Father-specific in his Message on the Hillside delivered to his future apostles as the foundation of the Church, so James is equally Father-specific in his message to a worldwide audience as the membership of this Church. Consequently preachers and counselors who, in turn, walk in the footsteps of James do, and must, make their audience’s relational bonding with the Father and their hunger for perfection their first order of business, their overriding objective, and their grand obsession.

b. But why does James not beat Paul to the Christocentric and Spiritucentric punch? The answer is basically simple, once we have identified the place of James in the Biblical canon. I argue below that it is the ceiling of the OT canon and the flooring of the NT canon. From this dual perspective its sole agenda is to put the spotlight upon holiness and its sole purpose is to seek its implementation. In the OT holiness was particularized in the Law of God, presented as the benchmark condition for the fellowship with God, and promulgated as the crowning piece of the threefold saving New Covenant promise of God (Ezek. 36:25-27). In James, at the very start of the NT, both as the organic sequel of the OT and fully in line with the Sermon on the Mount, holiness is hammered home as an indispensable, non-negotiable “must” en route to perfection. To this end, and to this end only, the author starts out by identifying the two avenues God uses, and by outlining the two principles man needs in order to arrive at purposeful holiness. Further, to this end, and to this end only, he continues to complement this with the dual reminder that holiness as a human impossibility must come as a gift from above and as a human necessity covers the waterfront of life (Once again, see the Outline of James, detailed below in 3, c). Just as God calls for this in the OT, NT audiences, who are, and should be, relationally bonded with the Father, will in the words of the prophet humbly “tremble at the Word of God” (Is. 66:2) and in the words of Moses do so in the “fear of God” (Deut. 5:29) with a view to his worship in the “splendor of perfection” (Ps. 96:9).

On the whole James echoes the authoritative proclamation of his Older Brother that holiness, obedience to the Law of his Father, with all that this entails, is the “rock” on which one must stand to be assured of eternal life. Who would not tremble at this, be “blown away” (Mt. 7:28) by it, and end up with the fear of God? As defined in further detail below, in the fear of God the regenerate heart stands in awe of both the might and mercy of God, is therefore irresistibly drawn to him, and as result regards the smile of his approval at its greatest delight, to be gained at any price, and his frown of his disapproval at its greatest dread, to be avoided at all cost.

c. Both the Sermon on the Mount and its twin, the Epistle of James, are for all practical purposes topical sermons on the grand objective of the OT, the worship of God in the splendor of perfect holiness. The Sermon on the Mount, although spoken by Christ, has hardly a reference to him, while James mentions him only sparingly, and in passing. Neither one makes any mention to the Holy Spirit. Luther “gripes” about James and his lack of Christocentricity, and virtually wants it to disappear. Furthermore, even if in a more implicit fashion, he did not quite leave the Sermon on the Mount alone either. In order to safeguard the Gospel/grace nature of justification vis-à-vis any and all (remnants of) works-righteousness it is his contention that the jurisdiction of the Decalogue by virtue of its threatening and condemning power does not extend beyond the OT in the history of salvation nor in the NT beyond the old man or its remnants in the new man in the order of salvation. In principle, it has been abrogated in the NT, while in practice it has been replaced by love. To be sure, faith, working through love, breaks forth in good works. Still, the latter are not governed by the Decalogue, but rather by natural law common to all mankind (See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 70-74). The reductionism of Luther is evident. In a worst case scenario, passages in the OT, such as Ezekiel 36:25-27 do not function, a NT chapter, such as Matthew 5 cannot function, and a NT book, such as James may not function in his theology, however much they may have functioned in his personal experience!

Thankfully, proponents even of an all too reductionistic, Christocentric, redemptive-historical method leave both the Sermon on the Mount and James officially alone, and do not dare touch either one of them. But some questions remain. Why do they tend to decry messages of preachers, who in faithfulness to the content of the Biblical text bring out the fullness of the Father in Patri-specific passages, that make no, or only sparing, mention of Christ, in terms of one or more aspects of practical godliness, and as a result do not make extensive mention of Christ either? Furthermore, why do they tend to denounce as moralism the sum and substance of such messages, and disparage them as befitting a Synagogue or a Mosque rather than a Christian Church? As long as preachers (1) do not present any of their sermons in isolation of, at the neglect of, or at the expense of, any of the three Persons of the Triune God, and (2) make it crystal clear that the content of the vast portions of Scripture that are Patri-specific and make no, or only sparing, mention of Christ or the Spirit, can never be realized except through Christ as the indispensable fountain, and the Holy Spirit as the equally indispensable agent, they are in their right not to mention Christ and the Spirit extensively, or do so sparingly, in the exposition of a text

that does not mention Christ and the Spirit, or does so sparingly.

In fact, in order to be authoritative in their preaching of any given text they may not mention anything beyond its parameters as part of its exposition, for it would either ignore the text in its content, focus and purpose, or leave it behind, to one degree or another. Furthermore, to do so anyway by virtue of an exclusivistic Christocentricity or Spiritucentricity, it would also, to one degree or another, downgrade, or leave behind, the fullness of the Father. Ironically, by virtue of this very fact it would end up downgrading or leaving behind a fully biblical Christocentricity and Spiritucentricity as well. An anemic Patricentricity per force produces an anemic Christocentricity and Spiritucentricity, and therewith by definition bars the road to a Revival Culture, a Maintenance Ministry and a Recovery Mode.

Frankly, an anemic Patricentricity is unavoidable, unless we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and James. Both Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and James in his Epistle preached on the Patricentric OT a full-blooded Patricentric message. This provides us with the model for preaching throughout the history of the Christian Church. Be it invariably within a Trinitarian framework Patricentric passages or texts require Patricentric preaching, Christocentric passages and texts Christocentric preaching, and Spiritucentric passages and texts Spiritucentric preaching. Christ preached a Patricentric message in the Sermon on the Mount, a Christocentric message on all the sections in the OT that made mention of him (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; John 5:39, 46), and a Spiritucentric message on the inscripturated words of John the Baptist in regards to the Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5, 8; see also Lk. 24:49; John 7:37-39). This means that he is after relational bonding with the Father in his Sermon on the Mount, relational bonding with Himself in his Sermon on the Emmaus Road, and relational bonding with the Spirit in his Sermon on Ascension Day. All this does, and should, seal the doom of an all too exclusivistic Christocentric preaching, and authenticate the charge that such preaching downgrades the Father and the Holy Spirit, ends up with a partial, and anemic, Christocentricity to boot, spells spiritual danger for the Body of Christ by definition, and is potentially destructive. This assessment cannot be dismissed with an all too easy wave of the hand, for not to have the Father or the Spirit is not to have Christ (John 6:38; 8:42, 44, 47, 54-55; Rom. 8:9), and not to have Christ, well, that stands for a gruesome outcome (1 Cor. 16:22). In the light of all this it is hardly surprising that an exclusivistic Christocentricity tends to be contemplative in nature and not very conducive to Christianity as an experiential, energized, and activated Revival reality, with all that this entails! This makes eminent sense once it is understood that a contemplative Christocentricity removes a summoning Patricentricity as well as an overpowering Spiritucentricity from sight.

6. This leaves us with the need for a select number of illustrations further to seal the main point of this section, the need for biblical preaching that honors the text, and in its exposition does not move beyond the combination of its content, focus and purpose, whether this is Trinitarian-specific, Father-specific, Son-specific, Spirit-specific,

Covenant-specific, New-Covenant-specific, Christ-specific, audience-specific, person-specific, sinner-specific, saint-specific, announcement-specific, pronouncement-specific, promise-specific, injunction-specific, prohibition-specific, event-specific, principle-specific, pattern-specific, circumstance-specific, condition-specific, situation-specific, etc., etc., or, for that matter, a blend of two or more of these foci. The capstone of a truly biblical exposition of the text is either the application of its specific content to analogous situations or to match specific situations to the analogous content of a text. The following three samples, covering a Father-specific, a Christ-specific, and a Spirit-specific passage, are designed to make this point.

a. In terms of a Father-specific section of Scripture that is of immediate relevance to the study of James, stripped to its most basic component biblical preaching on the Law of God in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5 must meticulously define, explain, and illustrate, the content of each Commandment. In the process it may emphasize that in the immediate context of the Decalogue a negative prohibition always implies its positive counterpart, and *vice versa*. It may also show that in the larger context of Scripture the Law of God, brought to its fullest expression by Jesus (Mt. 5:17), is designated as the “Law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). But its main business is that each Commandment is understood *on its own merits* (Neh. 8:8; Acts 8:30-31). This understanding is, and should be, threefold, as explained above in the section *d. Biblical Hermeneutics*. It should be a matter of the mind, of the heart as well as of life. At this point, if, as we shall see below, James is any guide, the broad Trinitarian context of salvation ought to come into play. The audience should be emphatically reminded that Patricentricity in this prohibition/injunction-specific setting, which has universal application on the face of it, because it is not person-, circumstance-, or situation-specific, must go hand in hand with the Christocentric recognition that without our Lord Jesus there is no provision for holiness (John 15:5) and with the Spiritucentric recognition that without the Holy Spirit there will be no presence of holiness (Ezek. 36:27). Whatever God commands, man is always incapable to obedience (Rom. 7:24), and is therefore invariably in need of Christ (John 15:5) and of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:27). But at the same time this twofold reminder may not for one moment come at the neglect or expense of the 20-20 vision, and embrace, of the holiness that is required in the Law of God and without which no one can see the Lord (Heb. 10:14). All this is to say that the exposition of the Decalogue must be Trinitarian. However, the clues in the text demand that it must begin with honoring the Father by meticulously detailing HOLINESS exegetically, and (only) in its wake complement this by honoring the Son and the Holy Spirit theologically, as required by the context of all of Scripture.

b. In terms of a Christ-specific passage, which is of immediate relevance to the study of James as well, 1 Corinthians 2 is invariably quoted by proponents of the exclusivistic, Christocentric, redemptive-historical model to justify their insistence that every sermon must “be determined not to preach anything except Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). This is a sweeping, an utterly regrettable and untenable thesis. It totally overlooks, if not ignores, the audience-specific, and situation-specific setting.

Biblical preaching better follow in Paul's footsteps, that is, better preach Christ and him crucified to audiences, when it faces situations analogous to the pride of Jews and Greeks at the threshold of the Kingdom, and better remind its audience of this message when it faces situations analogous to the pride of Christians in the fabric of the Kingdom. When Paul faces wretched sinners in the pride of their self-righteousness (Jews) or their rationalism (Greeks), he preaches the cross. When he faces wretched saints in their partisan pride of partyism, he reminds them, once again, of the cross. Biblical preaching must follow suit in analogous circumstances. On the other hand, just as frequently Paul's focus is on the resurrection (Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:1ff; 1 Tim. 2:8). In this the Church must follow in his footsteps in analogous settings as well. In his dual focus (Rom. 4:24-25) Paul did not differ one iota from Peter (1 Pet. 1:2, 3, 11, 19, 21; 2:24; 3:18). Both simply honored the mandate of their Lord to preach the cross *and* the resurrection unto repentance, the forgiveness of sin (Luke 24:46-47) and an inheritance among those who are sanctified (Acts 26:18).

In short, to insist on a “uni-homiletics” of any sort in which “one size fits all,” rather than a full-orbed, perceptive, and applicable Triune-homiletics, is preposterous on the face of it and a blueprint for spiritual disaster. In the present context it would, for one, tend to tone down, sidestep, or even inauthenticate the vast number of sermonic portions in Scripture that do not mention Christ crucified. It would, for another, pull the rug out from underneath James who mentions Christ sparingly. This was explicitly attempted by Luther, and can implicitly be anticipated from any consistent, all too exclusivistic, Christocentric redemptive-historical approach, that makes Christ resemble a black hole, whether consciously and intentionally, or not.

c. In terms of a Spirit-specific passage, which is of relevance for a James' study as well, Acts 2 may complete the model that can assist us in the exposition of James, even if the latter makes no mention of the Spirit, by recognizing and embracing four facts. (1) By defining Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel's promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, Peter indicates that Acts 2 as whole is Spirit-specific. It is the Holy Spirit (and the Holy Spirit alone), who did (and can) produce the following. 1. Awesome Spirit-filled Utterances (Acts 2:4-12). 2. Awesome Spirit-filled Preachers (2:14-21). 3. Awesome Spirit-filled Messages (Acts 2:22-40). 4. Awesome Spirit-generated Conversions (Acts 2:41). 5. Awesome Spirit-filled Churches with Awesome Spirit-filled Holiness, Awesome Spirit-filled Compassion, and Awesome Spirit-generated Evangelistic Effectiveness (Acts 2:42-47). (2) Still, Acts 2 is not reductionistic. After all, Peter also indicates that the outpouring of the Spirit results from the promise of the Father through the Son (Acts 2:33). Furthermore, the specific section of Acts 2 that covers his sermon has unquestioningly a Christocentric focus within a Trinitarian framework. In it we encounter the fullness of Christ as the personified New Covenant that comes from the Father (Acts 2:23-24) through the Spirit (Acts 2:38) into the fullness of the believer (Acts 2:38).⁷ (3)

⁷ A number of years ago two preachers preached a sermon on Acts 2 in conjunction with Pentecost. The first one was a fierce, fully conscious, proponent of the so-called Christocentric,

Paul's determination "to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified" to a great extent mirrors Peter's sermon. This is hardly surprising because their audience-specificity and situation-specificity is virtually identical. (4) By the same token, James' Epistle in terms of content, focus, and purpose, reflects the last section of Acts 2 that portrays an Awesome Existing Church, which enjoyed Revival Status, and as such is God's normal (Acts 2:41-47). In fact, zealous to uphold the standard of this Awesome Revival Church, which he first joined, then experienced, and finally led, James wrote his Epistle as part of a Worldwide Maintenance Ministry, and is prepared at a drop of a hat to gear up into a Recovery Mode in order to perpetuate the Church's Revival Status!

7. All this leads to a threefold inference.

a. Any type of puzzlement about the way to handle the vast array of portions in Scripture that do not make mention of the Son already betrays an all too exclusivistic Christocentricity in isolation from, at the neglect of, or at the expense of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. In such Christocentricity our precious Lord, as has been pointed out, turns into a "black hole," into which the text simply vanishes, and with it the perfections, words, and actions of the Father and the Spirit to one extent or another. Whether consciously or not, this produces by definition an anemic Christology that is basically going nowhere!⁸

Redemptive-Historical method. Throughout his message he exulted in the fact that "The Feast of the Holy Spirit is the Feast of CHRIST," taking his cue from Acts 2:33. CHRIST poured the Holy Spirit upon the Church. This was repeated again and again. Although preached with a good deal of enthusiasm, from a textual perspective the sermon was thoroughly reductionistic and ultimately anemic. There was no step by step exposition of the text! The second preacher was a thoughtful eclectic in his methodology, and proclaimed that "The MEDIUM is the message," taking his cue from Acts 2:14-15. After all, without the Holy Spirit there would not have been a Peter. This also was repeated again and again. From a textual perspective this was reductionistic as well, even if in a different way, and to a different, slightly lesser, degree. Both preachers, ultimately, did not preach the (total) Biblical text. They did not outline Acts 2, and therefore failed to conclude from the clues of the text (Acts 2) and its context (Acts 1) that each of the two themes (1) "Pentecost as an awesome (Christian) Feast" and (2) "Peter as an awesome (human) Medium," makes up only "one course" in the multi-course FEAST meal that is served in Acts 2, as was mentioned above. Any method that fails or refuses to start from the (total) text does not and cannot do justice to the (total) text. As a result its proponents can only come up with a truncated message at best!

⁸ Recently the present writer heard a message on Ephesians 6:10-17, "The Christian Armor," from a sold-out adherent of an all too exclusivistic Christocentricity. We were blatantly told that the details of the text, the individual pieces of the armor, did not really matter. What mattered was the reality and possession of victorious might in the Lord Christ. This was repeated in a variety of keys. Frankly, this amounted to "black-hole" homiletics at its worst. The text simply vanished! What a precious opportunity wasted to spell out the various pieces of the armor supplied by God the Father, embodied in, and emerging from, the Son as a "White Hole" through

b. Quite concretely, meticulous homiletics, based upon a meticulous hermeneutics, does, and should, bring out the universal truths of any and all kinds of specificity that are set forth in the text, whether explicitly, and to be gleaned from it, or implicitly, and to be mined from it. All of Scripture originates in the Father, reflects the Father, and at times is presented in terms of the Father, subsequently flows through the Son, reflects the Son, and at times is presented in terms of the Son, and finally, flows through the agency of the Spirit, reflects the Spirit, and at times is presented in terms of the Spirit. This means that a truly biblical homiletics will not rest until in general it arrives at the *relational bonding* not just with the Son, but *with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, and in particular with the Father, *or the Son, or the Spirit as the purpose, the content and the clues of the preaching unit* require this.

c. Through bonding with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, their fullness turns into the fullness of the believer, reflecting and aiming at the glory of God! To bond with the Father is to surrender to the content of the biblical text expressive (1) of the subtotal of his perfections, culminating in his Law, which aims at the holiness of his people, (2) of the rich tapestry of his promises, culminating in the New Covenant, which seeks to restore bankrupt sinners, and to purify wretched saints, and (3) of all his words and actions, presenting the universal principles and patterns, which give direction to sinners as well as saints. To bond with the Son is to embrace the content of the biblical text embodied by him, in all its specificity. All that is earmarked as displeasing to the Father is exterminated on the Cross, and all that is said to please and mirror him is re-originated in the Resurrection. To bond with the Spirit is to appropriate the content of the biblical text personalized by him, once again in all its specificity. All that is earmarked as displeasing to the Father is eradicated in the believer, and all that is said to please the Father is instilled in the believer!

In conclusion, in contrast to much of the prevailing, reductionistic, redemptive-historical Christocentricity, full-orbed, Trinitarian, preaching, as mandated and modeled in Scripture, honors the text, has concrete, down-to-earth, relevance, and is God-centered.

the agency of the Spirit, subsequently to “polish them up” with meticulous precision, and then to see the Christian put them on and use them with vigor and conviction, one by one! Only the full training in, and use of, all these pieces, and all these pieces without exception, does, can, and will, spell victory! The delivered short-cut sermon, without any discriminating and applicatory power, was in the final analysis an anemic, short-circuiting, blueprint for defeat and disaster! It is the kind of anemic message that can only be welcomed by an anemic church that champions a type of redemptive-historical methodology which tragically does not seem to have a hunch of what a Revival culture is all about! Incidentally, William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), which covers Ephesians 6:10-17 in over a thousand pages, would be a rich and powerful antidote against this type of message. As someone said colorfully, “Every sentence in Gurnall’s *magnum opus* hits home and could function as a bumper-sticker.”

It seeks to engage in meticulous exegesis of the text, and aims at an audience that hungers to assimilate its content just as meticulously. In doing so it reflects the fullness and glory of God the Father. It does not, first of all, preach the grace of Christ, except in grace- and Christ-specific passages, in order to obtain holiness. By focusing in a virtually exclusive fashion on the grace of Christ, it encounters two problems. (1) It fails to be properly Patricentric, and therefore turns easily into an anemic and subtle, or not so subtle, man-centered presentation. (2) It routinely fails to be Spiritucentric, and therefore rarely leaves any transforming deposit of Godliness behind. No, full-orbed Trinitarian preaching preaches holiness to be obtained by grace via regeneration and justification, which, of course, are to be obtained by grace as well. It seeks to expound the text of the OT and NT Scripture in order (1) to disclose the rich and variegated features of the fullness of the Father, as this fullness resides in the Son and is applied by the indwelling Spirit, and (2) to confront sinners and saints with this fullness to the glory of God the Father through discriminating and applicatory preaching that is Word-filled, Father-filled, Christ-filled and Spirit-filled, and so (3) to produce Prayer-filled and Worship-filled believers in the splendor of holiness (For additional information about the nature and elements of prayer, see **Topical Focus #7: Prayer**, and for additional information about the nature and elements of worship, see **Topical Focus #20: Worship**). The final upshot is simply this. To the extent one champions or promotes, whether consciously or not, an exclusive Patricentricity, Christocentricity or Spiritucentricity, one ironically ends up with an anemic, if not twisted, Patricentricity, Christocentricity, or Spiritucentricity to that same extent, as well as with an anemic, if not twisted, Patricentricity, Christocentricity and Spiritucentricity in general! This makes eminent sense. When one is not fully Trinitarian, one cannot be fully Trinitarian either in general or in particular.

8. Finally, the implicit, if not explicit, underlying thesis of *Panel 7: Spotlight on the Trinity* is that only a homiletics that focuses upon the content specificity of the text and does not embellish it with alien elements that are not verifiable from it, but gleans or mines the universal truths that it is meant to convey as exhaustively as possible, can do full justice to the meaning of the text and the purpose of the Holy Spirit in it. Only such homiletics, therefore, can be trusted to communicate its message in an unadulterated and complete fashion. The Book of Esther lends itself as possibly no other book in Scripture to illustrate this.

a. There is no trace in this booklet of any Theology, Christology or Pneumatology. This has been called passing strange. But it should not really alarm anyone. Esther gets across what its author sets out to get across. This is the prerogative of any author, let alone the prerogative of, as in this case, a Divine Author. The temptation may be to approach this booklet as if there is a need somehow to detect the Father (Providence?), the Son (Typology?), and possibly, but less likely, the Holy Spirit (Fearlessness?) in it. But this would be a very fundamental error. It does not only give the impression that Esther is not really up to biblical par, consciously or not. It also violates the hermeneutical rule of *Scriptura Sui Interpres*. The meaning of a text can only be determined by its content and the purpose of a text only by the aggregate of clues in it.

Further, as the “breathed out” Word of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit the text is by definition perfect. So to declare, as Luther did with James, that a text is really below par is basically to wage war against its integrity, and must be identified as offensive to its Author and harmful to the Church.

b. The following are some of both the main and the subsidiary truths that Esther conveys. The main truths are found in the overarching realities that give rise to broad universal principles, patterns, and models, such as (1) The certainty of ever present conspiracies against the people of God of whatever sort that aim at its complete destruction as well as the equal certainty, which may prevail even among the co-conspirators, that even the fiercest of attacks will fail in its objective and eventually devour its agents, and (2) The utterly intricate providential tapestry that in the course of events has multitudinous, seemingly incongruent, unrelated, and random elements which are harmoniously and cooperatively enlisted to arrive at a destined end, and are counted on to do so by those who embrace this tapestry. The subsidiary truths are to be found in the particulars that give rise to the more concrete universal principles, patterns, and models, such as (1) a marital squabble in a palace that ends up with a search for a new wife, a sleepless man who wants to be entertained in the middle of the night, (2) an erring man who has his niece apply for marriage to an unbeliever, a possibly stubborn man who does not want to honor authority, a powerful man who with reference to providence persuasively prods to necessary action in a seemingly impossible situation as a matter of life and death, a beautiful woman who overcomes her fears, leaves her comfort zone at the risk of her death and delivers, (3) a proud man who boasts in his political position, a hostile man who wants to do everything to annihilate a personal enemy, appears to stare victory in the face, but unbeknownst signs his own death warrant and organizes his own means of execution in the process, (4) a people that enjoys a leader who aims victory, joins him in battle, conquers, and memorializes the ensuing triumph in perpetuity. While this summary does not aim to be exhaustive, it conveys that there are universal principles, patterns, and models galore, whether positive or negative, that can be passed on to the people of God throughout the ages in order to instruct as well as admonish them unto holiness, endurance, comfort and hope (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-11, esp. 6, 11).

c. Of course, it would be unconscionable to present this message of Esther without placing it in the broad context of the self-disclosure of the Triune God. The battle that rages in Esther starts in Paradise (Gen. 3:15), finds its culmination point in the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14-15), and will not cease until his return (Rev. 12:12, 15, 17). The Father’s providence that assures victory is not just a flash in the pan, but controls all of history (Eph. 1:11). The drive to stand up for the Kingdom of God and to persevere in the face of all conspiratorial odds cannot materialize apart from abiding in Christ (John 15:1ff). The power to overcome fear, renounce one’s comfort zone as idolatry, and admittedly to risk one’s life for the sake of the work of God must be rooted in the presence of the indwelling Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7). For a people to join the battle en masse and to proceed to victory, there must be “the faith in Jesus as the Son of God that overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4-5). All this should be taken into account and will be

proclaimed in the preaching of the Gospel from Esther, not as an exegetical exposition of its text, but as a reminding application of its wider context. At any rate, to denigrate the fundamental and initial “universal principlizing” as moralizing in disregard, if not defiance, of Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:1ff is unconscionable and stands condemned. Of course, any prompting to any form of conduct, however proper or exquisite, without reference to the Father who supplies the benchmark of holiness, the Son who provides the Source of holiness, and the Spirit who functions as the agent in holiness, mires down in moralism by definition. But let no one throw out the baby with the bathwater! To do so is to end up with a so-called cure that all too frequently does not only defeat the purpose of Scripture, but appears to be worse than the original problem!

All this, of course, is designed to counterweight Luther and those who follow in his footsteps in a reductionistic Christology, whether in whole or in part, and to put their flawed hermeneutics and homiletics of James squarely back on the biblical track with its focus on textual content specificity and the presentation of compelling universal principles and patterns within the parameters of a broad Trinitarian framework. When this materializes, James will once again be honored as the opening salvo of the Holy Spirit in and to the NT Church, proclaimed throughout for the precious and perfect gem that it is, and broadly circulate among God’s people as an “omnipresent” \$1 bill, rather than a \$2 bill. However much the latter is officially recognized as legal tender, it is rarely in the public eye!